

CANADA

House of Commons Debates

OFFICIAL REPORT

Saturday, May 6, 1939

The house met at eleven o'clock.

BANKING AND COMMERCE

CONCURRENCE IN SIXTH REPORT

Mr. W. H. MOORE (Ontario) moved that the sixth report of the standing committee on banking and commerce be concurred in.

Motion agreed to.

SALT FISH BOARD

PROVISION FOR INVESTIGATION OF MARKETING AND ASSISTANCE TO PRODUCERS FOR EXPORT

Hon. J. E. MICHAUD (Minister of Fisheries) moved that the house go into committee to consider the following proposed resolution:

That it is expedient to introduce a measure to establish a board to be known as the salt fish board with powers to investigate the marketing of salt fish, to establish terms and conditions under which it may give assistance to producers of salt fish for export, to enter into agreements for the exporting of the same, and generally with powers to expend and administer any sums of money which may be, for the purposes of the act, advanced as therein provided; and further to provide for the appointment of advisory committees and for their travelling and living expenses, and for the appointment of officers, clerks and employees as may be necessary.

Motion agreed to and the house went into committee, Mr. Sanderson in the chair.

Mr. MacNEIL: Will the minister explain the purpose of this resolution?

Mr. MICHAUD: The object is to help a branch of the fishing industry that has been totally depressed owing to conditions over which the Canadian parliament has had no control. The salt fish industry, particularly on the Atlantic coast, has been the mainstay of the fishermen in that part of Canada for centuries, and up to the time of the great war it had been fairly prosperous. When I speak of the Atlantic coast I mean the north shore of Quebec up to Labrador, the Magdalen islands, the Gaspé peninsula, the north shore of New Brunswick, the eastern and western coasts of Nova Scotia as well as of Cape Breton.

This industry usually produced from 50,000,000 to 70,000,000 pounds of dried salt fish, which was practically all exported to foreign countries—Spain, Italy, Portugal, South America, the West Indies and the United States—and the return from these exports was sufficient to maintain in some degree of modest comfort the population dependent upon the trade. The decline in the trade began immediately after the great war and continued until the beginning of the depression in 1930. Since 1930 the fall in the production and export of dried fish has been greatly accentuated. It reached its low level last year when it dropped to about 19,000,000 pounds, and the low level in price was also struck.

Mr. MANION: That is the lowest level in some years.

Mr. MICHAUD: Yes. In 1927-28 the average price of dried cod, the basic price, was \$6.50.

Mr. PELLETIER: Per hundred pounds?

Mr. MICHAUD: Per 112 pounds, a quintal. Last year it was \$3.75. This decline in production is due to the loss of markets, which had been almost exclusively foreign, and that restriction in markets was in turn the result of the contraction of purchasing power in the consuming countries. It was attributable also in a measure to new economic policies adopted by those countries in the way of quotas, high tariffs and restrictions in various ways against imports of Canadian fish. Another factor that has contributed more than anything else to depress the dried fish industry has been the increasingly severe competition the producers have had to meet from foreign countries. Before the great war Europe exported very little fish to South America, the West Indies and the United States, which constituted up to that time our best and almost exclusive market. After the war, some countries induced their people to enter the dried fish industry on a large scale and public funds were provided to increase production and keep down the cost of such production to individuals. Norway and Newfoundland have displaced,