

policy through ministers of the Crown in Ottawa, the port of Saint John still cannot function.

The federal government has reserved the right to exert authority over the lease and sale of land within a port. In the last instance of which I am aware—and there may be others—the National Harbours Board, as a result of federal policy, dilly-dallied for more than three years in relation to a rather urgent project in an effort to try to make a land deal with the developer concerned. We cannot wait for three years for the policy of government and the influence of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) to clear the title by lease or sale of land for a project, and as long as this remains under the authority of the minister, the situation will not improve.

Another instance of a very serious requirement is the fact that a facility was built in St. Andrews, New Brunswick, in the Champlain industrial park. That facility was built with the sole purpose of serving the tuna processing plant in that location. The plant was built on the site of the wharf—at some inconvenience to itself, I might add—but as a result of the additional application for use of that facility—by the forest industry, again, and by the agricultural industry in the province of New Brunswick—the port is now crowded.

The Government of New Brunswick, the local chambers of commerce, the local mayors and the local industrialists have been approaching the Government of Canada for about a year and a half because the tuna plant is going to expand to the point that it virtually will require the facility for itself if it is to function actively and efficiently. There is no answer to that plant yet, or to those chambers of commerce or to the province of New Brunswick as to if or when any moneys will be spent to improve that facility, which is now used in a three-pronged way. This, of course, will remain under the present structure of this act. There is no improvement as to when a decision can be made to accommodate the trade of a local community.

What have we gained? I am afraid we find ourselves in the same position outlined by the hon. member for Richmond-South Delta, inasmuch as when a contract comes up for a terminal operator, it does not go to a firm headquartered in Saint John; it goes instead to an operator in the city of Montreal. I cannot think of anything more conflicting with the best interest of the port of Halifax, the port of Saint John or the port of Prince Rupert than to have an outside base of terminal operation which cannot help but conflict with its parent structure.

● (1730)

When you take a Montreal operator and put him in Saint John, he is going to be mainly interested in his own operation, the port of Montreal. I submit that not only should tenders have been called in Prince Rupert and New Brunswick on a local basis, but they should have been assisted if necessary to become the terminal operators in Saint John, Montreal and Halifax. You cannot have people with a conflict of interest and who are subject to the policies of the government of the day.

I am afraid we have seen a very high-handed approach to transportation by the government. I do not believe this is all the fault of the present minister. I think he inherited much of

it and did not have time to give it proper consideration. He was perhaps influenced more by Treasury Board and the Minister of Finance than by the public good, as was expressed to him in terms of VIA Rail. If the same high-handed policies are to be exerted on the ports of Canada, and there is every possibility of that happening, then the ports have very little to look forward to unless there is a major change of policy.

There seems to be inflexibility when the minister rejects the concept that a provincial representative should be on any commission in which it has a vested interest. The minister does not want that. I do not accept his comparison with other situations; I only ask for it in the case where money is involved and has been put up front.

Crown corporations, Mr. Speaker, are only as effective as their mandate. They are only as independent as legislation and policy allows them to be, and there is no independence in this structure. It may appear that there is because local commissions will be appointed, but they will in fact be appointed by the minister and will be well aware of the policy under which they are appointed. Then they will be under the observation and direction of a ten-year appointee of the government who will only get his job under the direction of the minister and government of the day. It cannot be any other way. He goes in there to do a job with the policy guidelines he has been given. So instead of having a three-man or a five-man commission which the National Harbours Board has had in the past, we are going to have really a single czar of port transportation authority under this government's policy. There will be no assurance of local input in a meaningful way, other than that permitted by the policy of the day. So we have local autonomy as a selling point of this bill but in fact it does not exist.

I do not know whether the minister has given up the right to appoint the manager of the port, or whether the local commission will in fact appoint.

Mr. Pepin: The local commission will.

Mr. McCain: That is a step in the right direction. But the other aspect is that the local commission will have passed through the skimmer of political discretion and will certainly have some influence exerted on it as to who should be appointed. I think the local port has to have more authority than is given by this bill.

Let me come back to the international nature of the port structures of Canada. At one point in time we had a very substantial movement, in the early stages of the container business, through the ports of Saint John and Halifax. These movements were carried through to the central and northwestern part of the United States. It was unfortunate that the charges of the Canadian transportation system put us out of the competition for that business. This was accelerated by the United States exerting pressure on their transportation facilities to better the competition offered by Saint John or Halifax.

I think the ports have to have an element of approach to the railroads, the rate structures and the operation of their own ports. I cannot think of any example better than that of