

Vessel Construction Act

up his mind whether he is for it or against it because he has not enough information to come to a conclusion. It is his view that the bill should be sent to a committee so that it might be fully considered, fully understood and fully discussed. In answer to those two points of view let me say, first of all, that this bill deals with one thing, and one thing only, and that is assistance to the shipbuilding industry. It does not pretend or purport to deal with shipping at all. Had it pretended to deal with shipping something would have been said concerning that point. There is nothing in the bill at all, however, which deals with that problem.

Why? I believe that during the consideration of my estimates, and in answer to questions raised by some hon. members, I stated clearly that so far as the shipping industry was concerned the position was a most difficult one—and I gave a number of reasons why it was difficult. At the expense of annoying hon. members I might repeat what I said at that time, that the shipping situation was extremely difficult not only in Canada but throughout the world. Ships were being laid up, and laid up not only in Halifax. I believe someone said there were 23 ships laid up at that point. Let me say there are 1,600 ships laid up in the United States. Why? There are not the cargoes or the freights there were in the immediate post-war period. Freights are declining at a very fast rate. More than that, the announcement made some time in September in regard to devaluation has aggravated the position.

So that this bill, and anything I shall say at the moment, will not be concerned with the shipping industry. I will say, if it is of information to the house, that the position in so far as the shipping industry is concerned is still being considered by the government. Discussions have taken place with officials of the United Kingdom. The chairman of the maritime commission has been in London and has discussed the position, in so far as the shipping is concerned, with the British ministry of transport and other officials. Those discussions have continued in Ottawa. I hope it will be possible for the government to make a complete statement on that aspect of the question before the session ends. I wish I could go further than that, and I am sorry that I cannot. I think that should be enough for the house to understand that the only thing we are concerned with at the moment is assistance to the shipbuilding industry.

It is said by the opposition that the provisions will be of some help. I think they will be of great help to the shipbuilding industry, as I said in my introductory remarks, and will be of help particularly to

[Mr. Chevrier.]

coastal and inland shipbuilding, and also to the fishing industry. The hon. member for Greenwood asks how this is going to be of any use if there are no profits; there are profits in respect to inland and coastal vessels.

Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood): Will the minister permit a question?

Mr. Chevrier: I should like to complete my statement. As I said earlier, the question of assistance to shipping is still under consideration, and I hope it will be possible to make a statement before the session is over.

Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood): I appreciate that the minister has said the bill is designed to assist construction rather than the shipping industry. Nevertheless, I think he will agree that to make the act of any value there actually have to be earnings in the shipping industry in respect of those ships which will have been constructed.

Mr. Chevrier: I should like to continue by dealing with some of the statements made by the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra. He took exception to the fact that the minister did not file the report of the commission within fifteen days after the commencement of the session of parliament. In the course of his statement he said it was a deliberate omission. There was no deliberateness on the part of the commission or on the part of the minister in not filing the report within the prescribed statutory period. If there is any blame to be assumed in connection with the fact that the report was not filed within the fifteen-day period, the minister must of necessity take that blame. The only reason and the only excuse I can give is that the moment the report was completed the printing bureau was asked to print it so that it could be tabled, and the printers replied that, because of the tremendous amount of work they had, they could not possibly do so within the time required. That is not an extraordinary feature in these days when the printing bureau is laden with all sorts of work. I think I can point to the fact that the national harbours board report has not been tabled within the fifteen-day period for the very same reason. Has any objection been taken to that? Just as soon as the maritime commission report was returned from the printing bureau it was tabled, and there was no deliberateness on the part of myself or anyone else—

Mr. Green: Why not table a typed copy?

Mr. Chevrier: —in not tabling it earlier.

Mr. Green: Why could a typed copy not have been tabled?