

*Canada Shipping Act*

today. It has not changed. We still do not have qualified captains on the rigs. The Parliamentary Secretary would know that. They are still not required under law to have a qualified captain on those rigs. We still do not have an escape mechanism off those rigs that are any better than the life capsules that dangle over the side that were in place in 1982 and did not do the job at that time. We still have no clear chain of command established in the event of an emergency on those rigs, as could be qualified and outlined under the provisions of Bill C-75, the Canada Shipping Act.

The Government of Canada has failed, despite the private feelings of the Minister, despite the private feelings of his Parliamentary Secretary, despite the private feelings of this Department, despite the advice of a royal commission the not only to do what is proper, but to do what is right.

It has failed to do not only what is desirable but to do what is responsible. It has failed to do it because of a political fight between two Ministers as to who is going to have jurisdiction over oil rigs, because of the narrow and petty view of a Minister of Energy that because she is Minister of Energy she shall control oil rigs because they are looking for oil. That is so even though the Department of Energy has no expertise in transportation matters, has no expertise in shipping matters, and has no ability to deal in an intelligent manner with the people who are out operating those rigs and the companies that operate them. That is tragic. It is a sad commentary on the Parliament of Canada when we cannot put aside such petty internal bickering and partisanship in order to avoid this problem.

● (1350)

I moved a series of three amendments before the legislative committee that would have allowed Members of Parliament, if they had the courage and intestinal fortitude, to resolve the bickering between the Minister of Transport and the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. I understand the position in which the Minister of Transport finds himself. He does not want to demand unilaterally that the Minister of Energy give up her jurisdiction over rigs. The effect of the three motions which I moved in committee would have been to transfer to the Minister of Transport, through legislation, exclusive jurisdiction over rigs operating in the offshore. The Conservative Members who were present at that committee meeting simply had to follow their consciences and examine their souls. They simply had to follow their instincts and support those amendments which would have resulted in a Bill before Parliament today that would have included jurisdiction by the Minister of Transport over rigs operating in the offshore. However, even though those Members knew that the measure I proposed was indeed the correct one, they voted against it.

Let me state for the record that the New Democratic Party Members who were present at the committee meeting voted for those amendments to protect the best interests of the men and women who go 200 miles out to sea on Canada's North Atlantic to risk life and limb not only in pursuit of a salary but

in pursuit of an energy resource that will improve the lot of the whole country. Some Members voted to improve their lot and ensure that we give them the best technology available, the best training system available and the best chance of survival if and when something goes wrong with those rigs offshore.

I was disappointed that my colleagues in the Progressive Conservative Party who I know share my view privately did not take the opportunity to support my amendment. I was disappointed that they did not take the opportunity to take that petty debate out of the hands of the Minister of Transport and the Minister of Energy and resolve that dispute, not in the interests of either Minister, but in the interests of the people who work on Canada's offshore rigs. That did not happen.

I hope that during the course of this debate those Members who are present will examine whether the words of the people of Canada which I have quoted today are meaningful, irrespective of what the Minister of Transport or the Government of Canada want. I hope they will ask themselves whether the opinion of the farmers on the Prairies with respect to this Bill is worth anything; whether the opinion of the fishermen of Atlantic Canada and the British Columbia coast on this Bill is worth anything; whether the opinion of those workers in Canada's forest industry worth anything, whether the words of those people who are employed in connection with Canada's Great Lakes and the Seaway mean anything with respect to this Bill.

I am merely echoing those words on behalf of those who have spoken against this Bill and Clause 4. Members of Parliament will have an opportunity to stand up and be counted and show if those words mean anything.

It is a debate such as this which will ultimately determine whether or not the fragile seed of reform that has been planted in this place has borne any fruit. This is the type of issue that will determine the credibility of our view that the role of Members of Parliament should evolve so that they can speak their mind and exercise an independent will on matters that are important to the country.

It was a debate like this that Gordon Bradley, the first Newfoundland cabinet Minister after the 1949 referendum debate, talked about. He was addressing the Newfoundland Assembly which was called together to examine whether Newfoundland should join the Confederation or seek union with the United States. There arose on the floor a clatter, a commotion and loud noises of disagreement, personal name-calling and incoherent debate. Bradley was the Chairman of the convention in 1948. He was a large man who commanded the respect of the House. He rose to his full height and the House fell silent. He said to those delegates who were trying to decide the future of the then country of Newfoundland: "Gentlemen, I remind you, the eyes of the people of Newfoundland are upon you now. They are awaiting your every word, they are watching your every action, and sometimes I fear you try their patience too far".