

Fishing and Recreational Harbours

The Canadian fisheries industry needs to be upgraded. There is tremendous scope for leadership here by the minister. I do not think we have a bad minister at present. Last week a member from Newfoundland was almost embarrassed: he said the minister was the best ever. Then he remembered there had been quite a few Liberal ministers, and he said he was one of the best. I think the minister is capable of doing a good job because he has the basic interest and has the capacity to reorganize this long-ignored industry.

I should like, now, to say something about a situation which has developed in Prince Edward Island and which in my judgment is wrong constitutionally and in my conviction is wrong in the interests of the fishing industry. The government of Prince Edward Island and the government of the dominion of Canada have made an agreement, under the wing of the Department of Regional Economic Expansion, whereby only some of the ports of Prince Edward Island are to be maintained while the rest fall into decay and decrepitude, as was mentioned by the hon. member for Annapolis Valley.

● (1630)

As I read the British North America Act—and I read it only a few years after I learned to read the Bible—section 91 gives the government of the dominion responsibility for certain specific areas of jurisdiction, beacons, buoys, lighthouses, and Sable Island, navigation and shipping; and, under No. 12 of section 91, sea coast and inland fisheries. There is not a port in Prince Edward Island for which the government has not responsibility under the basic, written portion of our constitution. Any agreement whereby the province takes over the maintenance of only 15 or 20 harbours and ports is an affront to the constitution and dereliction of responsibility to the fishing industry. The agreement has not worked well.

One of the most important ports in Prince Edward Island is in the Prince Edward Island national park, a place so beautiful that it receives perhaps one million visitors a year, though the population of the entire province is but 112,000 persons. Sitting in the midst of that park is an active fishing port, a port from which tourists embark on deep sea fishing and have the joy of hauling in the beautiful mackerel, cod, and if they are lucky enough, haddock. But we cannot get improvements made in Cove Head because we are told, "It is not a designated port. It is just too bad. It can go hang." Its pier is crumbled. It is allowed to go neglected and its fishermen can be inhibited from fishing because "we don't care how it looks to the tourists. We are not going to jazz it up with a nice paint job because it isn't a designated port."

Another beautiful port on Prince Edward Island's south shore is Victoria, from where my late father used to sail out in sailing ships. It is the port from which he left to join the Royal Canadian Navy in the first war to join that great aggregation of fighting strength called the "Tin Port Navy". For years we have had tourists coming from all over this continent and Europe to see that beautiful place. But today no substantial ship can enter Victoria harbour, the port which has been used over 200 years, because it is not dredged. To make sure

[Mr. Macquarrie.]

nobody comes in, they turned out one of the range lights. Therefore you cannot make it in. You might make it halfway in but, as any seaman knows, half safe is not safe at all. Again, Victoria does not rate for improvement because it has not been selected as a designated port.

I would say to the minister, if he were here, and to his parliamentary secretary, if I could find him, that the department is derelict in its duty by hiding behind the agreement the province made with the dominion government. It is responsible for the maintenance of that harbour, and its responsibility is no less now than it was when the fathers of confederation laid it down. I say, further, that here we see an example of neglect, made possible by a cozy arrangement which has been deleterious to our people. This is no time for the government of Canada to be narrowing its interests in the ports of Canada. With our fisheries assailed from without and undermined from within, it is up to the dominion government to take positive steps to strengthen the ports, not to weaken them; to encourage our fishermen, not to discourage them. These people have sustained far too many reverses already.

I think in my 20 years in this House the best parliamentary question I ever heard was asked by a member from Newfoundland no longer with us, Mr. Peddle. One day he stood and asked the minister of fisheries of the day, also no longer with us, if it was the government's policy to let the Russians take one-half of our cod, and the seals eat the other. Of course, to a question like that no minister can reply satisfactorily, and Jack Davis was wise enough not to try. But the question typified the troubles through which this particular sector of society is passing. They are engaged in seasonal activity. Lobstermen on Prince Edward Island, in some parts this year worked a short season. They lost a week at the beginning owing to ice conditions. They had difficulty establishing claims for unemployment insurance because the season was so short.

How can you criticize a man for not working all year, if the government says he can only fish for a number of weeks? If the fishermen are not beset by government regulations, they are beset by problems of mercury and heaven knows what else which prevent their taking the harvest of the sea. I hope we will look carefully at this bill and determine its degree of usefulness and how much help it will give to an industry too long neglected, much overburdened but still an ancient and important sector of our community, namely, our Canadian fishery.

Mr. Fred McCain (Carleton-Charlotte): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie) portrayed in graphic terms the plight of the fishermen of Atlantic Canada. The plight of fishermen of his constituency is also the plight of fishermen all over Atlantic Canada. What he said about Atlantic fishermen and the port of Victoria could be applied with equal force to other Atlantic fishermen and other ports.

The government has made proposals to our fishermen, proposals which will not work. Let me allude, for example, to the matter of centralization raised by the hon. member for Hillsborough. It was suggested that instead of our people having one port in every village or town, there should be one port for