

Coasting Trade and Commercial Marine Activities Act

priorities are to establish an effective operation by Canadians and the ability to work and operate there, not with nuclear submarines, but with equipment that services and develops the communities.

• (1710)

Why is the Conservative Government at 24 per cent in the polls? The reason is that it has not read the wishes of the people. It has moved in a direction diametrically opposed to where the people want to go. I can appreciate the excitement, concern, and distress of some Members who have spoken today, but it is not an attack on me or the NDP; it is a closer listening to the wishes of the people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: On debate, the Hon. Member for St. John's East (Mr. Harris).

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I wish to join in the debate and it gives me pleasure to have an opportunity to speak on the Bill. I wish to commend the Government for providing the opportunity for a debate of this nature.

In looking at the Bill itself, the primary reasons, as suggested by the Minister of Transport (Mr. Crosbie), are to replace our current legislation which provides for coastal trade being reserved to British ships, and to change that to Canadian ships.

I suppose one may say that that is progress. It does sound good. As a result of this Bill, we will Canadianize our fleet and have a great upsurge in activity of Canadian ships and trading. That is not the case. In suggesting that this be changed, the Government has told us that the policies that it has been pursuing, which I presume includes its predecessors, has led to a situation where 99 per cent of the Canadian coasting trade is done by a domestic fleet.

What will this Bill do? Where is the beef? Where is the action? On this issue, if we compare ourselves to our American neighbours, we see a different approach taken by the Americans in the Jones Act of 1920. In order to protect its coastal trade, shipbuilding industry, and jobs for its seafarers, the Americans said that their coastal trade must be carried out by American registered vessels, built in the United States, owned by American interests, and crewed by American citizens. Since 1920 that Act has protected American coastal shipping and trade in a strong manner.

In Canada we have Canadian registered vessels now required to carry out the coastal trade. I am told that all but two vessels that are involved in the coastal trade in Canada are presently registered here. I am also told that we have two or three British ships involved in the coastal trade. We are forcing them to change their registration and perhaps pay a duty in order to continue to be involved in the coastal trade.

In economic terms this does not provide any real progress. It does sound good. We now say that all of our coastal trade must be carried out by Canadian registered vessels. We are throwing off the motherland and the British ship notion. We are throwing away our ties, our dependence, our connections to

Britain, and our favouritism towards British ships as opposed to Canadian ships. I say, let us do it, yes, but let us not beat our breasts and brag about what wonderful things we are doing to change the economy of Canada.

We have a desperate situation in this country, as was brought forward in the debate the other day on a motion moved by the Hon. Member for Montreal—Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart). His motion was to set up a special inquiry on the shipbuilding industry in Quebec. I spoke in that debate and reiterated the concerns about the shipbuilding industry.

When the Government was seeking a mandate from the people of Canada, it promised the Canadian people that it would put together a shipbuilding policy for Canada. We have not seen action on that. There have been piecemeal bits of legislation which are window-dressing. By requiring Canadian registered ships to engage in coastal trade when 99 per cent of the coastal trade is done by Canadian registered ships is merely window-dressing and is fooling the people of Canada, particularly those people who are in such desperate need of employment in this economically unsafe industry.

For example, the two shipyards operating in Newfoundland are in a very precarious situation. There have been lay-offs in the dockyard in St. John's, and further lay-offs are predicted. The shipyard in Marystown is experiencing more satisfactory performance in this last little while, but this industry is precarious all over the country. The Government, and the former Minister of Supply and Services have suggested that we ought to have one shipyard closed down in Atlantic Canada.

Instead of having a window-dressing policy such as changing the registration, there ought to be a vigorous policy which will lead to the development and the stability of the shipbuilding industry.

The last speaker from the government side spoke about the frigates and the procurement program of the Canadian Government. It is right and just that the procurement program of the Canadian Government ought to have ships built in Canada. That is only what we expect. It is certainly not satisfactory to have only government procurement as part of the Government's policy on shipbuilding. There is not a comprehensive policy, or a policy that ensures stability in that industry.

I hope that the committee stage of this Bill will provide an opportunity for amendments to be made to strengthen the Bill, the opportunity to discuss the exemptions, and the very problematic exemptions if some of those are removed that may have an effect and bring about some change.

As the Bill presently stands it brings about no real change in the economy and no real change in the desperate situation of shipbuilders and the shipping industry. I would also suggest that it brings about no significant improvement for the thousands of Canadian seafarers who are unemployed and desperately seeking work.