

Vessel Construction Act

the basis of national security the report says there should be maintained a Canadian merchant marine of a certain size. It points out that because Great Britain is in such a position geographically that she would probably be heavily bombed in another war, therefore it would not be wise to depend upon her shipyards; and that for defence purposes Canada must maintain a merchant marine.

The recommendation is that it should be on what is called a nucleus basis, the nucleus suggested being that there should be approximately 7,000 men employed in the ship-building yards and that the tonnage maintained by Canada should be 750,000 deadweight tons. I believe deadweight tons are not the same as gross tons—and the minister will correct me if I am wrong. My information is that a deadweight ton is approximately three-quarters of a gross ton. This would mean that the gross tonnage would be about three-quarters of 750,000 deadweight tons or 562,500 gross tons. In March of this year, as I pointed out a moment ago, the gross tonnage was 981,255. So that the commission has recommended a very drastic reduction in Canadian tonnage.

Furthermore, in recommending that there be only 7,000 men in Canadian shipyards the commissioners are recommending another very drastic reduction. At the peak period during the war there were 75,000 people engaged in Canada in shipbuilding. In 1947 the average monthly employment was 16,035 and in 1948 it was 14,596. The commissioners expect that by the end of this year that will have dropped to about 9,000 people working in Canadian shipyards, and it is their recommendation that there be a further drop to 7,000.

They also point out that Canada must get a new type of merchant ship. That is referred to at different points throughout the report. For example, at page 21 we find this statement concerning wartime shipping:

The ships were of standard types designed to meet a wartime emergency. Their high fuel consumption, slow speed, and lack of refrigerated space unfitted them to hold their own against fast, modern, more economical cargo-liners which shortly after the war began to appear in British and foreign merchant fleets. It was obvious that, once the world-wide shortage of shipping had been overcome, the ships would not be able to compete with more efficient foreign vessels.

The unfortunate feature about that is that back in 1944 several of us urged the government to begin building faster cargo vessels. However the minister of munitions and supply of that day, the present Minister of Trade and Commerce, took a strong stand against that suggestion. He said that, after all, these slow ships were the kind of ships Canada should have. He pointed out that

[Mr. Green.]

most of our cargoes are of bulk commodities such as lumber, newsprint and other products of that type, and that there was no need to have these fast modern cargo vessels. It was his opinion that Canada's fleet should be a fleet of slow ships. As a result of that stand none of these fast cargo vessels were built.

I believe the position today is that Canada has none of these fast vessels, with the exception of perhaps one or two which have been built for the Canadian National Railways. The Minister of Transport will correct me if I am wrong, but I believe it is true to say that practically all our merchant ships today are of slow-going types which cannot compete with the faster vessels built immediately after the war by Britain, Sweden, Norway and other nations. So that we are in a position now of having to start from scratch in 1950, if we are to get rid of most of the ships we do own and build faster ships which can compete.

There is one other recommendation of the commission to which I should like to refer, and that has to do with labour relations. The report points out that there have been very poor labour relations in the shipping industry in recent years, and makes the recommendation that there should be set up a national maritime board. They say:

The system whereby owners and the union make an agreement governing wages and working conditions for one year allows grievances to be built upon on both sides over that period, so that negotiations for the renewal of the annual agreement usually commence in an atmosphere of mutual hostility and distrust. In our opinion many of the difficulties could be overcome by the establishment of a national maritime board, representative of both employers and seamen, similar to the national maritime board in the United Kingdom, which provides in effect for continuous negotiation of wages and working conditions at any time and whereby grievances can be quickly dealt with through the operation of port panels.

The Minister of Labour is here and he will know whether there is any merit in that suggestion. However, I do draw it to the attention of the committee.

Mr. Mitchell: Was the hon. member asking me a question? If he was, I shall answer him quickly. There is no such thing as an agreement in Britain; it is all done by minutes. There is no written agreement.

Mr. Green: Is there a national maritime board?

Mr. Mitchell: There might be that. I was thinking in terms of an agreement.

Mr. Green: The recommendation is that there should be set up in Canada a national maritime board. This side of the picture is