

THE EFFECTS OF THE WAR ON CANADIAN FISHERIES*

Most striking of the many effects of War upon the Canadian fisheries is the swing over from a condition of over-supply to that of under-supply, the complete change from a buyer's to a seller's market, accompanied by sharp increases in prices of the raw and finished product. From a pre-war marketed value of about \$40,000,000 the return has risen to about \$80,000,000 annually. This is the more striking since there has not been a corresponding increase in output which, during the War, has fluctuated about the pre-war level of 1,100,000,000 lb., fresh basis.

The change was due to world scarcities, but it did not come about during the initial or lag periods which extended from 1939 to about the beginning of 1941. During this period fisheries labour was fairly plentiful because it had not then felt the serious drain of enlistment and of movement towards more lucrative war industries. Shipping difficulties had not yet seriously interfered with availability of materials for the maintenance of the primary or manufacturing operations such as wood containers, paper, steel, salt, rope and others which were still in fairly good supply. Inventories of goods on merchants' shelves had up to this time made rationing unnecessary, and no great shortages of other protein foods had caused the domestic demand for fish products to be more insistent.

Under this regime, prices were still at the low pre-war level, and in 1940 the Salt Fish Board once again found it necessary to make deficiency payments to salt-fish fishermen in order to enhance their livelihood.

Markets were for the most part uncontrolled, and selling and buying were matters left in the hands of private traders who faced the highly competitive conditions that marked the pre-war world trade.

By the summer of 1941, conditions began to change in an accelerated degree. The seemingly unchecked march of the enemy through Europe, the constant and alarming threat of invasion of England, the intensive and unrestricted submarine campaign, and the general threat of catastrophe had directed efforts to the reshaping of the national economy by expanding the manufacture of war munitions and materials as well as by significant increases in the forces of offence and defence.

The effect on fisheries was marked. Fishing boats were requisitioned for essential services to the Armed Forces and skilled fishing and shore labour went to the Merchant Marine, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Army, as well as to the munitions industries. The turnover in labour was great and the efficiency of the manpower hour decreased to a marked degree. In addition to this, the diversion of materials to the expanding program of armaments brought about acute shortages which interrupted maintenance of factories and boats and prevented the expansion of mechanical facilities to offset the inefficiencies of hand labour.

Under these handicaps, fisheries production threatened to fall off. But it was becoming increasingly necessary and important that it be maintained. The Norwegian, British and other European fisheries, upon which not only the United Kingdom but countries in the Caribbean and Mediterranean depended, had disappeared and the indispensability of this staple food, coupled with heightened domestic and United States demand, threw great strains upon the industry, which, together with the Newfoundland industry, assumed the position of being the United Nations' chief source of supply of many fish products.

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