

Seaway and Canal Tolls

held by the authority. These public hearings have been going on for some time and are not yet complete. After they have been completed the procedure is for the authority to make its report. To attempt to debate the subject now, before there has been any opportunity for the report to be made, would constitute an unrealistic approach to this important matter.

I do not understand the proposal that this matter should be debated before the facts are known, or before the information obtained at the public hearings is made available to members of the House of Commons. I am at a loss to understand the argument that this house should set aside the business appointed for today in order to debate this matter without the information given at the public hearings being available to hon. members.

The procedure being followed is set out in section 15 of the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority Act and in section 53 of the Railway Act, where provision is made for the authority to take action in the manner I have indicated. Then the legislation provides that the matter shall go before the governor in council. Surely the governor in council cannot consider this question before the information has been made available, and surely we cannot debate the subject in this house in the absence of this information.

The Leader of the Opposition has suggested that, because the act sets out the procedure I have indicated, the act is a poor piece of legislation and should not be followed—

• (3:00 p.m.)

Mr. Diefenbaker: I never made any such suggestion.

Mr. McIlraith:—and that this house should have the governor in council bound by the wishes of the house in advance of any information coming before the governor in council on the subject.

In addition, there is another reason the subject matter is not proper for an adjournment motion under this standing order, namely that the opportunity for debate is adequately and fully provided in the proper forum on the estimates of the Department of Transport. The estimates of the department were referred to the standing committee on transport and communications on March 22. They are now before that committee, and when the evidence taken at the public hearing is available to hon. members I am quite sure they will wish to discuss the matter rather fully in that committee, and subsequently in the house when the minister is here to deal with his estimates.

[Mr. McIlraith.]

There being adequate opportunity for debate on the matter the proposed motion fails on that ground as well as the others.

Hon. Gordon Churchill (Winnipeg South Centre): Mr. Speaker, there are two points which the Minister of Public Works has overlooked. The first is that he has not given us the assurance that this matter will be up for debate in the house before an order in council is passed by the government approving whatever recommendation comes from the seaway authority. A discussion on estimates after the matter has been decided is not satisfactory. The other, more important, point is that the seaway authority has publicly issued a summary of future traffic estimates and toll requirements, which is in our hands. It is in answer to that summary that representations are now being made and have been made to the seaway authority.

Our suggestion is that the opinion of the House of Commons should be made known to the seaway authority at this stage of its proceedings, so that when the members of that body come to make their final decision and presentation to the Board of Transport Commissioners and to the government, they will have the benefit not only of the submissions made to them by private firms throughout this country but of the opinion expressed by parliament itself. That is why we want to discuss the matter today.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I had thought the case was so clear that this would be one of those occasions when the government house leader would stand up and say he agreed with the points of view expressed from the opposition side of the house. Since he likes to save time, this would have been a good way to save it.

The Minister of Public Works argues that because this matter is being considered by the authority, therefore the house should wait until the authority has expressed its views. I submit, knowing this government, that if we waited until such time as we knew what the recommendations of the seaway authority were, and if we then tried to raise this matter in the house we would be told that we should wait until the government acted by order in council.

What is involved in this motion today is the right of parliament, through its members speaking for the whole country, to be heard on these issues that are under consideration. I submit that the arguments of the Minister of Public Works as to why parliament should