

St. Lawrence Seaway Authority Act

Mr. McGregor: Who let the contracts?

had been originally estimated and this without being advised of any change in specifications. I say for parliament now to ignore these facts would be an open invitation, indeed almost an injunction for parliaments in the future to say, "Go thou and do likewise".

The present minister and the present government, who have no responsibility for this matter, nonetheless do have an obligation to the house to assure the house that precautions have been and are being taken to prevent a repetition of these incidents. Before the house and before the public the two former ministers of transport must accept the responsibility. That is our constitutional system. They cannot evade responsibility by suggesting that it is to be invested in the engineers. True, back of them there are engineers, and I do not like to see these engineers escape responsibility. Indeed, I have heard it suggested that the engineers miscalculated the minimum water level of lake Erie. If that was the degree of study given to this great enterprise, if that was the efficiency displayed, then we must watch to stave off a repetition of these problems of which I have spoken.

What interests me is just that, to stave off this type of thing in the future. That is why I have put the record before the house in detail, for I believe there is at stake a great principle of parliamentary government. I repeat what I said at the outset, that without accuracy in estimating costs of projects parliamentary control of capital and other expenditures is no more than a snare and a delusion. Canadians everywhere are proud of this great enterprise, this great inland waterway, but if it is built at the expense of a relaxation of the control by the people's representatives over the public purse, then it will have been but an incident on the road to tyranny.

Mr. Chevrier: May I ask the hon. member a question?

Mr. Bell (Carleton): Surely.

Mr. Chevrier: Does he give his consent?

Mr. Bell (Carleton): Surely.

Mr. Chevrier: The question I should like to ask is this. Is he aware that the 1957 budget showed an expenditure for the Welland canal of \$23 million and that the 1958 budget showed an expenditure for the Welland canal of slightly more than that amount? For the latter part of 1957 as well as for all of 1958 his friends were in office, and I ask this question. Did they question these amounts which were placed before the house?

Mr. Bell (Carleton): What the government may have done is not something of which I may speak but this I do know, that when my hon. friend left the seaway authority he left it without the summit reaches of the Welland ship canal being excavated to a level that it was possible for ships to travel and this government had no option, if any part of that canal was to be made use of, but to go ahead and make the eventual expenditures. The responsibility rests entirely with the hon. gentleman as minister of transport at that time and then president of the seaway authority.

Mr. Chevrier: My hon. friend has made a charge and he questioned these two items which were in the budget—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Chevrier: Have I the hon. member's permission to ask a supplementary question? If I have, then I say to the hon. gentleman that he questioned these two amounts. I say to him now that they were in the budgets for 1957 and 1958. Did my hon. friend question them when he sat in the house?

Mr. Bell (Carleton): I think I have answered that fully. The situation is clear that there was no option on the part of the government other than to proceed to excavation on the summit levels. If the hon. gentleman had come to the house at the time as he should have and made a frank confession, as I would have expected him to do, of the errors of which he was guilty, then we would not have found ourselves faced with the problem confronting us today. The hon. gentleman is the most voluble member of the House of Commons but certainly he was something less than voluble when it came to confession on this score.

Mr. Pearson: Why don't you answer the question? You were silent for two years.

Mr. Campbell (Stormont): Mr. Chairman, I should like to bring to the attention of the house the assassination of a city by the St. Lawrence seaway authority and its betrayal by the then head of that authority. For over 100 years in my home city of Cornwall ships have sailed by our doors through the Cornwall canal. Today that canal is blocked. Three miles east of the city ships turn and pass by on the United States side. Today the city of Cornwall, where I was born and where the hon. member for Laurier was born, is stranded high and dry and is one of the most depressed areas in Canada.

I want to ask who was responsible for the seaway being on the United States side. The people of Cornwall want to ask that question.