

(Mr. Knowles) put more frankly into words in his usual way—that it was not a matter of opposing the individual items under discussion but, rather, it was a question of principle—whether they should be there as \$1 items or not.

An hon. Member: Does the minister have no principles, then?

Mr. Lang: They avoid the question of substance. At a time when the country expects parliament to be discussing issues of importance to the nation, as my hon. friend from Eglinton pointed out earlier in the debate, they prefer instead to deal with a question of principle—and one with respect to which a ruling has already been made. It would seem, therefore, as though they cannot find a matter of substances upon which to attack the government.

I should like you to understand, Mr. Speaker, that I do not suggest the opposition or their leader are completely beyond addressing themselves to matters of substance or making statements of policy. Only a week or ten days ago I heard the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) make two fairly clear statements of policy. The House will recall he was cross-examining the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan). While he did not say so plainly, it seemed to me rather clear that he came down in favour of rain.

● (2010)

However, having observed the Minister of Agriculture, who is a man who takes religion and matters of life and death seriously, having observed what man should do about the situation, and having observed that it was also right to pray, the Leader of the Opposition in his second policy pronouncement of the day, and so far as I know the second of his career as Leader of the Opposition, came clearly down against prayer. Rather, I should not say clearly because he would not like to be clear on any such matter.

The opposition did not single out items and say that they should not have been in the estimates because they had no merit. They were talking about the principle. For instance, the Seaway item was one which they opposed. I would ask you to consider, Mr. Speaker, how that item might have been treated by the the opposition if it were in fact legislation. When it was an item, as it was in this particular situation, they could not say flatly that they were against what the government was doing with this item in the estimates. But what would they have done if it had appeared as legislation? I ask Your Honour to consider that.

Some members opposite, such as the hon. member from Calgary, talked in this House about principle. It is worth noting that the way that the opposition has dealt with the rules and the conduct of business in this House is a tragedy and a serious question for the country. In the case of the Seaway, we have been indicating broad policy in relation to several steps that we believe we ought to take.

Mr. Lawrence: But what you are doing is wrong.

Dollar Items

Mr. Lang: The hon. member for Northumberland-Durham (Mr. Lawrence) says that what we are doing with the Seaway is wrong. He has colleagues around him who will agree that it is wrong. Some of them said they agreed it is wrong because we are doubling the tolls in our broad plan. He has another set of colleagues who believe we are quadrupling those tolls. So he has good Tory company.

The important thing to note, Mr. Speaker, is that if this item contained in the estimates, simple but really making straightforward what has been done for years, had appeared in legislation, we would have had speech after speech after speech on the subject from the opposition members, all opposing what we were doing for both sets of reasons, and continuing week after week after week. We all know that.

Even today, Mr. Speaker, there are Tories who go to the Atlantic provinces and not only oppose what we are doing about the Seaway but actually raise issues having to do with our democratic processes and national unity by suggesting we are not being fair to the Atlantic region. They say that we are writing off the debt of the Seaway. It is an interesting debt, Mr. Speaker. It has been standing at \$620 million odd all these years since 1959. There is now \$217 million interest owing on that debt. Some debt!

What we are doing, Mr. Speaker, is plain, straightforward and honest. We are saying that the interest which has accumulated on goods which have passed through the Seaway cannot be charged against future goods. This interest was not paid because when the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) was prime minister he made arrangements regarding the Seaway such that it would never be in an economic position either to pay the interest or return any capital from its operations. So in one sense what we are doing is recognizing that in the future we will not charge the uncollected interest of the past against goods which pass through the Seaway in the future.

In addition, we thought it well to transfer that debt, so-called, with an apparent interest rate to what it should more accurately be seen to be in fact, namely, investment equity, on which some amount—and we are saying one per cent—should be charged, and that the tolls should be set accordingly.

What you must observe, Mr. Speaker, as rather strange conduct on the part of that party opposite is that in the Atlantic provinces its members are damning what we are doing by saying we are writing off the Seaway debt, that we are preferring the Seaway to alternative ways of transporting goods in this country. In the Atlantic area they are damning us for writing off this debt when the pattern for that action was set by the leader of their party when they were in power.

The Tories in the west and also in Ontario will be in agreement with the Tories in the Atlantic provinces. In the west the Tories are saying that we may be doing serious damage to the economy by this move we are making. I suggest that paying one per cent on equity investment and saying that operating and maintenance charges should be paid is a bit of sensible management, which clearly the opposition in the west would not recognize. They are arguing against an increase in