

*Seaway and Canal Tolls*

recommendations to the government the latter would provide an opportunity for debate in this house before any decision was made by the cabinet with respect to increasing tolls. I was told by the minister that this was a hypothetical question. Of course, it is not a hypothetical question at all. Unless we receive some assurances from the government today or within the next few days, the following will be the course of events. The seaway authority completed its hearings this afternoon. It has already stated publicly that its increased costs make a 10 per cent increase in tolls mandatory. Therefore there can be little doubt about what it is going to recommend to the cabinet; and if one may judge from the statement made by the Acting Minister of Transport (Mr. Turner) this afternoon, the cabinet, looking at section 16 of the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority Act, is going to approve the increase. Then we will have an announcement some day on motions or on the orders of the day that the tolls on the St. Lawrence seaway have been increased.

This is not good enough, because these increases will be made by order in council and not by act of parliament, and there will be no opportunity for members of parliament to express their opinion or suggest any alternative course of action. The Acting Minister of Transport this afternoon said that this question can be discussed in the transport committee. That is a ridiculous proposal. In the first place, as my colleague the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) pointed out, the chairman of the committee can, quite properly, say that the only items which appear in the estimates of the Department of Transport have to do with the servicing of certain loans and payment for the maintenance of certain canals, that these matters are not concerned with tolls and the committee has no authority to deal with tolls. In any event, the government has a majority on the committee. Even if the committee is permitted to discuss this question of increased tolls, and that is doubtful, can anyone assure this house that the discussion will take place in the transport committee before the order in council is passed increasing the tolls?

I think most members here would be willing to take a wager that the order in council will be passed long before the committee on transportation ever gets around to discussing estimates. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, this is not a matter just for a committee of the house; this is a matter for parliament itself. It is a

[Mr. Douglas.]

matter of such vital importance to the economic well-being of Canada that the whole house should have an opportunity to discuss it, and discuss it from every conceivable angle.

● (7:30 p.m.)

Therefore I want again to ask the government the two questions which I asked the ministers this afternoon: First, will they assure the house, before the debate is finished, that when the seaway authority makes its report to the government, that report and its recommendations will be published. This would make it possible for us to know what the recommendations are. Most of us have a pretty good idea what the recommendations are likely to be, but I think we have a right to know definitely what those recommendations are and what arguments are advanced by the seaway authority for proposing an increase in the tolls. That report should be made public before the government reaches any definite conclusion. I think we have the right to ask the government for that assurance.

The second thing we have the right to ask is that, having had access to the report, the government will not act on it until this house has been given an opportunity to debate the report fully, and the effect which those recommendations would have on the welfare of the people of Canada and the economy of this country.

Mr. Speaker, I do not think I am making unreasonable requests. I think this is the very least the government can do. If it is not prepared to stand up at this time, as I had hoped it would be, and say to the house that because of the rapidly rising cost of living, because of the necessity of getting our goods to the world markets it can assure the house that it will find ways and means by which it can prevent an increase in tolls at this time, surely the very least it can do is, first, to let us have a copy of that report as soon as they receive it and before they make a decision and, second, to give the members of the house an opportunity to debate the whole question. We would rather see that done than have the cabinet make a decision in secret affecting the economy of this nation, and then tell the people of Canada what they have done.

I think it is not enough to use parliament merely as a place where we make protests. If democracy means anything, it means an opportunity to participate in the making of decisions. If parliament means anything at