

St. Lawrence Waterway System

undoubtedly losses in money and working hours, but unfortunately we can only take note thereof.

Not later than today, I read a press release dated May 15, 1964 on the effects of winter navigation on the St. Lawrence river and in the gulf of St. Lawrence on the Atlantic ports. Mr. MacKeigan, chairman of the Atlantic Development Board, said:

The Atlantic Development Board has been entrusted with investigating the impact of winter navigation on the St. Lawrence river and in the gulf of St. Lawrence on Atlantic ports. That study was made by J. Kates and Associates and Gibbs, Underwood and McLellan; it was completed, as far as certain aspects are concerned, by the board's staff.

This report tells us in black and white that the ports of Saint John and Halifax have suffered, as a result of winter navigation on the St. Lawrence river, significant financial losses estimated, in 1963, I think, at 200,000 tons of freight corresponding to approximately \$3 million in direct revenues for the ports and a loss of seasonal employment of about 3,600 men-months.

It is a very great loss. It is—as stated by the hon. member for Saint John-Albert (Mr. Bell) who spoke before me—a catastrophic situation. And, unless I am mistaken, that loss is increasing and would be due mainly to the fact that winter navigation on the St. Lawrence river is increasing. I do not believe, however, that the hon. member for Saint John-Albert can find statistics which enable us to believe that winter navigation has increased in the St. Lawrence seaway. As a matter of fact, everyone knows that during that period the seaway is closed for an average of two months. That is why I feel it would be advisable to put aside that matter of the repercussions of winter navigation on the St. Lawrence river and in the gulf of St. Lawrence, as far as the St. Lawrence seaway is concerned.

Mr. Speaker, I shall return to the seaway problem later on. With regard to winter navigation, up to now, ice-breakers, according to my information, have only protected the water level, especially by preventing ice jams and floods and not facilitated navigation directly. Of course, breaking up ice-jams and making a channel to let the ice flow more freely indirectly facilitates navigation on the St. Lawrence up to Montreal, although that navigation is rather limited in winter, especially in January and February.

As I have said before, the movement is irreversible. I cannot see very well how a

[Mr. Lachance.]

gate at the entrance of the gulf of St. Lawrence could be put up to prevent ships from going up the river to Montreal.

It seems to me that the two questions should be taken up separately, first, to see whether or not navigation facilities should be increased on the St. Lawrence and how this could be done depending on circumstances, and secondly what steps could be taken to make up for the losses in income incurred by the Atlantic provinces because of this state of affairs, that cannot be altered.

• (6:30 p.m.)

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I said before, a thorough survey has been made of the effects of river navigation on the Atlantic ports. I do not know whether a house committee would find other solutions or reach other conclusions, but perhaps recommendations could be made to the house. The government should certainly consider such recommendations seriously in order to take the necessary steps to solve those problems.

Now if we take the various items mentioned by the hon. member for Saint John-Albert in his notice of motion, we note that the first item deals with:

—the present debt structure of the St. Lawrence seaway authority and the adequacy of the tolls charged under the terms of the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority Act including the question whether there have been breaches of the said act in the method of fixing such tolls.

Mr. Speaker, I think that hon. members are perfectly aware that some public hearings were held in Ottawa in 1966, I believe, concerning the review of the tolls on the seaway. The United States seaway authority also held similar meetings in Chicago around the same date.

On June 30, the seaway authority submitted to the government its report on tolls. We know that the government did not see fit to increase them, which is questionable perhaps, Mr. Speaker, since it is a field related to economics or the financial structure. Unfortunately, I am no expert in either field, but I must say that I have never felt that those great waterways, those great works were designed to yield a profit to the country. In my opinion, those are public services that should be self-supporting as far as possible, at least as far as their administration is concerned. And I suggest that a serious study should be carried out in this field.

As for the amortization of the cost of developing the seaway, I have still greater doubts about the possibility that we may derive from