

Seaway and Canal Tolls

because the government can introduce these changes by order in council without giving the house an opportunity to debate the matter.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, in so far as the question of urgency is concerned, the hon. member has referred to the fact that the hearings have taken place, and these hearings are a prerequisite to any decision being made in respect of a matter that is of great importance to all Canadians, particularly those who are engaged in the export trade. If any addition is granted to the present rates this would be a further interference with our export markets.

Mention was made of the fact that representations have been made; but the decision is a decision of the government, not of the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority. If you will turn to *Hansard* for May 9, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transport as reported at page 4866 stated:

It is not a matter for decision by the authority at all; it is a matter for decision by the government, and the government is going to await the hearings.

Then the minister made reference to a statement by Mr. Delmer E. Taylor, a member of the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority, to the following effect:

There has already been considerable support for the toll increases proposed by the authority.

To this the minister replied:

But it does not seem to me that is any reason why a member of the authority should not point out what the law now is.

This is a matter, Mr. Speaker, that can be simply decided by the government without regard to parliament. The western provinces have already been struck a body blow by the reduction in the price of wheat during the last year of some 17 cents. As already pointed out Mr. Gibbings, president of the Saskatchewan wheat pool, has stated that over a period of time an increase in tolls of this size will mean 1½ cents per bushel. In other words, Mr. Speaker, in spite of objections taken to this increase by various organizations another body blow will be struck at the western farmer who is producing wheat, in addition to the effect on all other industries.

This question is urgent, Mr. Speaker. If the matter is not pursued by the house it can be determined by the government behind closed doors, and a determination will be made on an economic matter that is of first consequence. We should have been given the assurance that there would not be any increases

[Mr. Cantelon.]

without parliament being given an opportunity to discuss the question. That we have not had. Under the circumstances I suggest the matter is urgent, for any moment now the government can act.

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Burnaby-Coquitlam): Mr. Speaker, the members of this party believe that the question submitted by the hon. member for Kindersley is of the utmost urgency. As a matter of fact, if this matter is not of the utmost urgency I cannot conceive of any matter which is.

The situation briefly is that the seaway authority is today completing its hearings. Members of that authority have publicly advocated an increase in tolls, and in addition, the introduction of a lockage fee for that part of the Welland canal which is operated by the seaway authority. The effect of this has very serious economic implications for many sections of the Canadian people.

Mention has already been made of what it will do to the farmers by increasing their costs by something in the neighbourhood of 1¼ cents per bushel on wheat shipped through the seaway. This will mean a loss in income of very considerable proportion to the wheat growers of western Canada.

● (2:50 p.m.)

For the industries in central Canada it will also have serious implications. I am told it will mean a transfer of iron ore shipments in the neighbourhood of one million tons per year to United States seaports on the Atlantic coast, with a consequent reduction in employment opportunities for Canadians in central Canada. Inevitably, because of the increased cost of shipping goods, it will mean an increase in the price of goods to Canadian consumers and an increase in the cost of our exports which will have a harmful effect upon the growth of the export industry.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. It seems to me that the hon. member is now debating the substance of the motion which the hon. member for Kindersley proposes to advance. I ask him to limit his remarks to the question of urgency of debate.

Mr. Douglas: Mr. Speaker, I simply endeavoured to point out that this matter is urgent because it affects such a large segment of the Canadian people. It affects the people in western Canada as well as those in central Canada. It will affect the industrial life of Canada, and will have very harmful effects upon the consumer.