

St. Lawrence Waterway System

mystery to me and I should like it to be cleared up in a plain and simple fashion in the committee.

Lastly I would like to know the effects, economic and otherwise, of the present or any projected development of the St. Lawrence waterway system with relation to the promises that were made to the maritimes at the time of confederation. I have spoken about this before and I will not go over it now. All hon. members know that when the maritimes entered confederation—perhaps this is an appropriate year in which to consider this matter—promises were made that the ports of Halifax and Saint John would be used as the access ports to Canada.

A review was prepared by the Atlantic Development Board which suggested that \$3 million should be paid in compensation. We have heard no more about it. The consultants' report on transportation in the maritimes has just been released but very little mention of the ports of Halifax and Saint John is made in it. The reason given for the fact that nothing is being done to help the ports of Halifax and Saint John is that it would be detrimental to the business which has been built up on the St. Lawrence. The whole purpose of the report has been lost. Consideration is being given now to the St. Lawrence instead of to the ports of Halifax and Saint John.

We want these problems recognized and we think a committee should be set up the same as is done every year in the United States. There have been no hearings on the St. Lawrence waterway system. I think this is owing to parliament and we have a duty to see that it is done. I ask that these willy-nilly \$50 million expenditures be stopped. Legislation for the establishment of the seaway system was unanimously passed by parliament but so far as I am concerned it has been a \$1 billion financial failure. Surely all hon. members will support me in this request.

● (6:20 p.m.)

I appreciate that there will be others who will want to participate in this debate, and I will listen to them. But, Mr. Speaker, being as fair-minded as possible, I do not understand how anybody can stand up in this house and oppose the very reasonable request for this committee which will give us the answers to these problems and help to justify this great undertaking to the Canadian people which, so far as I am concerned, is a billion dollar fiasco.

27053—125

[Translation]

Mr. Georges C. Lachance (Lafontaine): Mr. Speaker, we readily understand the reasons which prompted the hon. member for Saint John-Albert (Mr. Bell) to introduce this notice of motion to the house, and I believe that we should congratulate him, because the problem is very important and serious for the Atlantic region as well as for navigation on the whole St. Lawrence river, in the seaway and on the great lakes.

However, it must not be felt, as might be deducted from the observations of the hon. member for Saint John-Albert that, for this reason, the waterway system should be neglected, the requirements of progress be ignored or the use of shipping on the great St. Lawrence waterway be reduced, only to look after the Atlantic ports, for instance those of Saint John and Halifax. These are two specific problems requiring different solutions and, in the light of the figures and the studies that have been made, I think, Mr. Speaker, there is no reason to neglect one in favour of the other.

I have studied carefully the motion introduced by the hon. member for Saint John-Albert. He deals particularly with the financial structure of the St. Lawrence seaway authority, its debts and the adequacy or inadequacy of its tolls. He raises the question of water levels of the entire system, including the effect of shipping in the port of Montreal in particular. Furthermore, he suggests that an investigation be made on accidents and changes in insurance rates. In his opinion, the danger of flooding in the St. Lawrence region—he should have added also the danger of flooding in the port of Montreal—and its relation to ice-breaking should also be studied, as well as the economic effects of the development of the St. Lawrence seaway as tending to destroy the transportation role of the Atlantic provinces in the unity of confederation.

At the end, the hon. member adds a constitutional and political element to some very technical problems. As I said at the beginning, there is no reason why one of the problems should be neglected. These are two absolutely essential problems, neither of which should be neglected or overshadowed by the other. In my opinion the trend is irreversible and since the St. Lawrence seaway is becoming increasingly important, I do not see why steps could not be taken to help the ports of Halifax and Saint John and other ports in this region of the Atlantic provinces and to compensate for whatever losses may be incurred. There are