

St. Lawrence Seaway Authority Act

With regard to expenditures on the Welland canal, and the question whether they were or were not justified, I will answer that in this way. There can be no question in the mind of the hon. member for Laurier—he agreed very clearly this afternoon, as I think we would all agree—that for one reason or another there was sloppy estimating on the part of the Department of Transport and whoever was concerned at that time. I do not think the hon. member for Laurier would disagree with that statement; as I said, he said so himself this afternoon. There was a serious miscalculation, and I think he would agree that it is obvious there was a miscalculation. There is no question about it: the facts are there. However, to bring the Welland canal to the specifications which are necessary to make it a successful operating part of the St. Lawrence seaway, I believe that the expenditures which have now been authorized and have been made, and are being made, are necessary.

Mr. Pearson: Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the hon. minister for his very fair and frank answers.

The Chairman: Shall the resolution carry?

Mr. Hees: Mr. Chairman, before the resolution passes could I answer a question asked me this afternoon by the hon. member for Welland? He asked me if the present announced estimated expenditure of \$335 million would have any effect on seaway tolls. My answer to him is simply that the provisional toll structure which I announced last June was based on a total cost approximating the present estimated cost.

Mr. Argue: Mr. Chairman, I do not wish to enter into the controversy which has been raging here today, but in light of the accusations that have been hurled from the government side of the house toward the hon. member for Laurier, and in light of the very large expenditure which may yet have to be made, I wonder if the Minister of Transport would answer the question put to him by the hon. member for Vancouver East as to whether this whole question will be referred at this session to the public accounts committee for thorough examination, in the interests of the taxpayers of Canada?

Mr. Hees: Mr. Chairman, that question is very easy to answer. As the hon. member knows, having been a member of this house for quite some time, the matters which are brought before the public accounts committee are decided by the members of the public accounts committee.

[Mr. Hees.]

Mr. Argue: Mr. Chairman, can I take it from the minister's answer that the government has no objection to having a thorough inquiry into the whole question of seaway expenditures by the public accounts committee? Before the hon. minister answers my question, what he said is technically correct. He has been here long enough to know what the rest of us know, that the committees of this house usually examine those things which the government wish them to examine.

Mr. Hees: I do not know how the hon. member and his followers would run things, if they ever happened to form a government, if they were to dictate to committees what they were to examine and study and what they were not. I assume that if the hon. member and his party ever did form a government they would tell the committees what they are to do and what they are not to do. That is not our idea of how to run the business of this house.

I would say to the hon. member that the hon. member for Vancouver East very kindly complimented me and my department and the seaway authority on the rapidity with which we have answered order paper questions, a great many of which have been placed on the order paper this session. There have been some very lengthy and complicated questions, and we have answered them very rapidly, and he was very kind to say that he appreciated it. That is an example of our attitude toward this whole matter. If there is any question which any member of this house wants to ask about any of the dealings, past or present, that have been carried out by the St. Lawrence seaway authority, all he has to do is place a question on the order paper and that question will be answered quickly and to the best of our ability. I have answered every question which has been put to me this afternoon in a free and wide open debate. I will try at all times to answer questions which are put to me. We have nothing to hide whatsoever regarding the operations of the St. Lawrence seaway. If the hon. member knows of some nefarious dealings, if he knows of some crookedness, if he knows of some skulduggery going on behind the scenes, I would appreciate it if he would bring it immediately to my attention and I will have it investigated. If he wants to make a speech about it I will welcome it. As I say, we have nothing to hide. The operations of the St. Lawrence seaway authority are open to inspection by him or any other member of this house.

Mr. Argue: Mr. Chairman, the statement of the hon. minister that questions can be