

*St. Lawrence Seaway Authority Act*

trying to ask logical questions so that I will get a reasonable answer; or I am asking reasonable questions hoping to get logical answers.

I just want to conclude in this way. We are being asked for an additional \$35 million. I think that in view of all the talk of inflation and in view of all the criticism which has come from some sources—banks, corporations, trust companies and newspapers—urging efficiency and economy in government spending, this is the time and place when we should be asking questions such as I have been asking and when the government should give us a very clear picture of the situation. I do not know whether it is possible in such a committee as this to discuss a matter of this kind back and forth. I do not think it is. I want to tell the minister, through you, Mr. Chairman, that from what little knowledge I have acquired through reading the newspapers and from the answers given here it is my personal opinion that it may be advisable to have at least a preliminary examination of this matter by the public accounts committee. Let that committee, on the basis of an investigation at which it is able to talk directly to the people in charge, decide whether or not there should be a recommendation to the government for any further action or inquiry. I submit this is a suggestion which is worthy of serious consideration. Now that I am about to sit down I look forward to hearing the minister take the opportunity to answer all the questions he has said he is so anxious to answer for us.

**Mr. Bell (Carleton):** Mr. Chairman, this resolution grants authority to loan an additional \$35 million to the St. Lawrence seaway authority to bring the total expenditure of that authority to \$335 million as opposed to the 1955 estimate of \$205 million. The aspect of that upon which I wish to dwell this afternoon is the extent to which this House of Commons has been kept informed about the changes in the estimates and the changes in the specifications which have occurred from time to time and the extent to which this house has had the opportunity to exercise parliamentary control over this great enterprise.

My theme this afternoon will be a very simple but a very fundamental one. Basic to parliamentary control over public expenditure I submit is accuracy in estimating the cost of projects for which parliament is asked to vote money. Without reasonable accuracy of estimating and without immediate and full disclosure of unavoidable mistakes which inevitably will occur, this house can exercise no real or effective control upon the public purse.

[Mr. Winch.]

Especially is this true when parliament is asked to vote large capital sums en bloc which sums may be diverted from one aspect of the project to another without returning to the house for approval. This has been the situation with respect to the St. Lawrence seaway authority from the very outset.

In some detail I wish to examine and analyse the issue as to whether the St. Lawrence seaway authority and the department of transport under previous ministers have presented to parliament that accuracy of estimate and that complete disclosure of essential facts which form the bedrock of control by parliament over the expenditures of the executive and over the agencies of the executive.

For that purpose I wish to examine especially the situation with respect to the Welland ship canal. I preface my comments by saying that everyone, of course, wishes to assure that this great waterway—one of the great canals of the world—has the most up to date construction and the most modern facilities possible to ensure its efficient operation as an integral part of the seaway and, as well, its complete safety. On that point let us have no misunderstanding. But what of the estimates of the cost of deepening this canal as compared to actual expenditures to date?

The hon. member for Laurier this afternoon endeavoured to excuse the fabulous discrepancies by unloading the blame on the engineers. His words, as I took them down were to the effect that "obviously there was substantial error". That is the understatement of the year. The hon. gentleman went on to say that these errors were made by the engineer who prepared the estimate. That is not our constitutional system of doing things. The hon. member cannot avoid the responsibility by investing it in the engineers who were at all times responsible to him either in his capacity as minister or in his capacity as president of the seaway authority. I say to the hon. gentleman that the committee would have admired him more if he had stood up to his responsibility and not sought to evade it. He said the errors were discovered in 1956. At that date he had been minister of transport for six or seven years and president of the seaway authority for at least two years. How long did it take him to learn the facts of life? It took the award of contracts amounting to over \$19 million to awaken the hon. member for Laurier to the egregious errors which he now seeks to invest in his subordinates. But let us examine the whole sordid story consecutively.

The first estimate of the cost of which I have been able to find record appears in a congressional document. I refer to the hearings of the committee on public works of the