

St. Lawrence Waterway System

months ago the Canadian press uncovered a secret plan which would ensure winter access to Montreal through the St. Lawrence. To be fair, the minister brushed off in the house questions concerning it. However, all this make us in the maritimes wonder just where we are going with respect to the whole St. Lawrence waterway system in view of the fact that, according to my calculations, the expenditures now total \$1 billion.

I have referred to this matter many times before. It has been brought up in the house in private members' resolutions such as this. I prepared a brief for the Atlantic Development Board and, along with other hon. members, have asked questions about this matter from time to time. This motion is an effort to be positive. In it we recognize a certain amount of progress. The situation in the port of Saint John and in the port of Halifax is desperate. It is true that we are now in the summer season. Our unemployment figures are higher than before. There is no construction work. I hope the house will take this as a serious plea for attention. I do not see how anyone can stand up and speak against what I am asking for in this motion. I am only requesting that the matter be referred to a committee.

I have dealt with five points. The first is to examine in committee the present debt structure of the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority and the adequacy of the tolls. We have been over this matter before. The minister indicated that it might have been considered in committee during the past year. New toll arrangements were worked out with the United States government and were announced in the house in the proper way, but the whole matter of the inadequacy of tolls deserves some attention. The minister himself has admitted many times that there is authority under the act and even an obligation to recover from shippers as far as possible all the costs of operation of the seaway, as in other forms of transport. We all know that Mr. Henderson, the Auditor General, has commented many times on the inadequacy of our method of collecting tolls and discharging the responsibility which parliament has under the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority Act. I quote the Auditor General's words in his 1966 report at page 175:

The extent by which revenues again fell short of meeting operating expenses, interest charges and provision for replacement of machinery and equipment in the Montreal-Lake Ontario section of the seaway is shown in the following summary—

[Mr. Bell (Saint John-Albert).]

I do not think the summary need be put on the record.

—of the operating results for the year compared with the preceding year together with the cumulative operating results from the opening of the seaway in 1950. It should be noted that the figures include no provision for repayment of the capital indebtedness of \$326,700,000 in respect of the Montreal-Lake Ontario section which the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority Act requires to be paid out of earnings by December 31, 2009. If this obligation is to be met, revenues over the 44 years from 1966 to 2009 must average over \$22 million annually on the basis of 1965 costs. The revenues for 1965 were \$6 million short of meeting this requirement.

Then he went on to say:

Revenues on the Montreal-Lake Ontario section for the seven full navigation seasons the section has been open have amounted to \$74 million compared to the \$95 million which the tolls committees in 1958 anticipated would be earned during that period.

I want a full investigation by the committee of the ridiculous method of financing which we are using with respect to the St. Lawrence seaway tolls. If changes are necessary, let us make them in the proper way as intended by parliament.

Second, I want to know about the water levels of the entire system including the effect of shipping in the port of Montreal. Water is low and this is a hazard to navigation. What is the sense of continuing to spend money without knowing for sure what the water levels are going to be in the port of Montreal? They are down drastically which means that the big cargo ships cannot enter the port and we may be spending a lot of money for nothing.

The third point concerns the serious navigational accidents on the St. Lawrence. The minister keeps saying the matter is under consideration and the former acting minister of transport, who is now the Registrar General (Mr. Turner), has held meetings once or twice to try to deal with this problem. We have had our share of accidents. What is the reason for them? Perhaps the pilots are not as capable as they should be. If these problems are insurmountable, let us use the ports of Halifax and Saint John which have the proper facilities and good, experienced pilots who can do the job.

The fourth point deals with flooding in the St. Lawrence region. Every year that ice is broken the excuse is used that it is done to prevent flooding. If water levels are so low, how can flooding occur? When the ships break the ice in the fall we are told that it is done because of flooding, but the flooding does not start until the spring. It is all a