

[Translation]

Mr. J.-A. Mongrain (Trois-Rivières): Mr. Speaker, I am interested in the matter of tolls on the seaway, because I represent a municipality where grain elevators are located and which is involved in extensive shipping, even in winter, in spite of the objections of our colleagues from the Maritimes.

By the way, I must say that our winter shipping does not deprive them of anything; on the contrary, I think it helps to speed up the handling of goods in riverports and seaports. But the matter is not being discussed this evening.

After listening to earlier remarks, Mr. Speaker, I ask myself two questions, and I must say that I do not feel capable of settling the matter. If I take part in the debate, it is precisely because my district is involved and, as its representative in the House of Commons, I am interested in knowing what might be the effects of an increase in tolls on the Canadian economy.

I was amazed to note how strongly some members objected to increased tolls, especially the great number of government members who spoke freely, in a way which should be stressed and encouraged in this house as often as possible.

Today's papers report numerous protests against increased tolls on the seaway, protests which, according to a French language paper this afternoon, "submerged the public hearing". This means there were many.

I wonder where those protests come from. First of all, were they all made by people intent on protecting their business or by some who consider primarily the consequences of increased tolls on the Canadian economy, because, after all, this should be the main concern, in my opinion.

I have nevertheless observed that most insisted that they felt the Canadian economy was at stake and that tariff barriers should be brought down.

I was struck, Mr. Speaker, as doubtless all Canadians interested in this question are, by the fact that last year, the debt of the St. Lawrence seaway was about \$24,700,000 and that the Canadian share was \$18 million. I wondered: Who will be paying this debt, because someone will have to pay.

Some claim the ships using the seaway should not have to pay. I have no objection, mind you, Mr. Speaker, but I should nevertheless want this position to be demonstrated to me. Such are questions that I should like

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to put to those in a position to answer and I should like to be shown that it would be beneficial to have this paid by the Canadian people.

Is it true that rate increases will reduce traffic? Is that not a slight exaggeration? I wonder. Is it true that the rate increase will cause considerable loss of jobs here in Canada? Can anyone anywhere imagine that the full investments in the St. Lawrence seaway should not be reimbursed?

A colleague suggested a while ago that the refund of the debt should be extended over a period of 75 to 100 years. I am aghast at the thought of the interest that Canadians would have to pay, at current rates, if such amortization of capital were to be spread over a period extending from 75 to 100 years. There is obviously something out of kilter in that.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, someone will have to pay. Who will that be? That is the question.

While we were discussing these things just now, I read the editorial of a newspaper which, I believe, came out this afternoon, whose author seemed to be well-versed in maritime matters. I shall quote this article from the *Canadian Sailor*, which reads as follows:

What irritates us—and should irritate any thoughtful Canadian—

And I quote:

—is that almost 28 per cent of cargo on the seaway is carried by ships bearing flags other than Canadian or American, and almost all these foreign ships are subsidized by their respective governments.

We have no such subsidies—

Mr. Speaker, if tariffs are to be kept low so as to allow ships operating under foreign flags to compete with our own, something is obviously wrong somewhere.

Therefore, I should like to ask the following questions. Who will pay this interest and this amortization of capital? Is it right to ask all Canadian taxpayers to do so? If so, it will have to be proved that this is an incentive or an encouragement for the Canadian economy. Otherwise, this would be unfair, and the cost should rather be borne by all those who use the seaway. It would have to be proved beyond doubt that these tariffs which we are going to impose on the national budget, which all Canadians will in fact have to reimburse, will stimulate the whole Canadian economy, not just a sector or an industry.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I would like to stress the fact that I lack the necessary competence to settle the debate, but I might