

Supply—External Affairs

there could be action taken by the corresponding governing bodies.

Mr. Nasserden: Am I right, then, in assuming the minister, as Secretary of State for External Affairs, has not taken up this matter with the particular states involved?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): No; as Secretary of State for External Affairs, I take this up with my opposite number in the government of the United States who, in turn, communicates with the appropriate person in the state body.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ricard: Mr. Chairman, since we are considering the estimates of the Department of External Affairs, I would like to take this opportunity to say a few words on the deepening of the Richelieu river.

We all remember that, when the previous government was in office, some hon. members of the province of Quebec, particularly the hon. member for St. Jean-Iberville-Napierville (Mr. Dupuis) who was assigned very important diplomatic duties in Africa—which duties are keeping him away from the house today—as well as the Associate Minister of National Defence (Mr. Cardin), took a very active part in the debates and made every effort to try and convince the government that it was not only urgent but essential to go ahead with the deepening of the Richelieu river, so that an inland water route could be established between the harbour of Montreal and New York city.

However, since the Liberal government took office, we have noticed that those two hon. members have not said one word on this matter. At that time they were clamouring in order to convince the Canadian people that the deepening of the Richelieu river was essential.

I would like the hon. minister to comment on this project. I would like to know where the surveys stand and if the hon. minister is still receiving representations from the two ministers I mentioned more particularly and from those in that electoral district who are interested in that canal project.

Would the hon. minister inform us on the progress of the negotiations, and tell us if the project is practicable, or if this was just a balloon sent up by the people in opposition, when the Conservatives were in power—those who are now in a position to implement this project—so as to play on the emotions of the people?

I would like to know the intentions of the minister on this matter.

[Mr. Martin (Essex East).]

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Mr. Chairman, as the hon. member very well knows, many members on all sides of the house became interested in this matter. The Associate Minister of National Defence, in particular, was highly interested.

This is the situation: The investigation is completed, but we have not yet received the report of the commission. As soon as we receive that report, we will be in a position to study the facts; and I am referring not only to the Canadian government, but also to the government of the United States.

Mr. Ricard: Mr. Chairman, I thank the minister for the rather vague information he has just given us, but I would like to know when we can expect to get the commission's report?

Mr. Graffey: That is a good question.

Mr. Ricard: When does the minister expect the commission to report on that matter and how long is it since the technical survey has been completed?

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Mr. Chairman, I do not know; I am not a member of the commission. It is never easy to ask a judge when he will give his decision. That is a matter which comes under the exclusive jurisdiction of the commission, but I will inquire.

[*Text*]

Mr. Nasserden: The reason I raised this question today is because it is one of the most important problems with which Canada must deal, not only the government but all of us. I well recall the many statements which have been made by the minister on the importance of this problem. Today he has indicated that he was advised by hon. members representing areas in close proximity to the constituency he represents in parliament. I would have thought that one so well versed in this problem and so aware of its detrimental effects would have taken action before 18 months had gone by, since this government came to office. Consider the length of time which has elapsed between the date this government came to power and the date action was taken, that is, on October 7 and 8. It is evident that the government has been most lax in discharging its responsibilities in connection with this increasingly serious problem.

We have been told there has been no intensification of the studies which have taken place with regard to this matter. The minister has shown by his answers today that no