

Adjournment Debate

I am alarmed when I read statements such as the following which is contained in *Canadian Transportation and Distribution Management*, March, 1975:

A vessel with 20,000 tons of general cargo would have to pay \$18,000 to get from the St. Lambert Lock near Montreal to Lake Ontario, under present Seaway tolls. Should these be raised 27 per cent, as the Carr Report suggested in 1971, this would add another \$5,000 to the charge: no small change in anyone's money.

As the accompanying table indicates, Seaway tonnage in 1974 was down 25 per cent over 1973 and, ominously, bulk cargos declined as much as general merchandise shipments.

The following are the statistics quoted in this magazine: Bulk cargo in 1973 was 48.50 million tons. In 1974 it was 36.14 million tons, a reduction of 25 per cent. Iron ore in terms of tonnage slumped 13 per cent. Grain slumped 33 per cent; oil and petroleum products slumped 49 per cent. There are fractions involved here but they are small. Other items slumped 16 per cent. General cargo in total tonnage was down 23 per cent. Manufactured iron and steel was down 20 per cent. Containers were down 51 per cent and others were down 22 per cent. The total cargo loss from 1973 to 1974 through the Seaway was 25 per cent. This magazine article states further:

Whatever his proposals, Ottawa has three basic options in reaching a decision about them.

It can raise Seaway tolls, as suggested in the 1971 report by D. W. Carr.

It can retire the Seaway debt and accumulated interest as a federal obligation, and hope the Seaway profits will continue to at least balance the Welland Canal losses.

It can retire the Seaway debt and accumulated interest as a federal obligation, and raise Seaway tolls, as Normandeau has suggested.

Or, it can subsidize the operation of the whole Authority, allowing free, or nearly free, passage along the Seaway and into Lake Erie for all vessels.

Now, Madam Speaker, I recommend to you and the House a meld of the last two recommendations; that is, that the people of Canada retire the Seaway debt and accumulated interest as a federal obligation, and subsidize the operation of the whole authority in the same way we subsidize the railways, and allow free or nearly free passage along the whole of the Seaway. In doing so we would in a short time correct and cure many of our economic ills in this country. We could create here in the heartland of Canada an economy which would grow and prosper. Such measures would fight and defeat unemployment in our area. If we did this, our economy and our creative activity could become the envy of the world.

The Seaway serves directly an area of about 1,200,000 square miles, with a population of about 65 million. The area produces about 78 per cent of North American steel, as well as one-half in value of North American manufacturing. From it comes 40 per cent of the continent's food for both human and animal consumption. It generates about 34 per cent of the capital investment used in both Canada and the United States respectively, and receives about 40 per cent of the total freight traffic moved in each country.

These impressive but wholly factual statistics indicate clearly the immensity of the asset which the seaway is to the Canadian economy as a whole. But it must always be remembered that this immensity is economic. Therefore it is vulnerable to such economic forces as inflation, unemployment, and rising competitive costs, and among the

[Mr. Alkenbrack.]

rising costs which have to be considered no item is more important than transportation. This is the basic truth which the bureaucrats in Ottawa are forgetting.

I plead with the government not to yield to the demands and recommendations of the Ottawa bureaucrats to increase tolls and lock charges on the St. Lawrence Seaway, and to make its decision for a freer and thus more prosperous Seaway and a freer and more prosperous Canadian nation.

Mr. Joseph-Philippe Guay (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Madam Speaker, I am sure that the hon. member will admit that the government has always considered the St. Lawrence Seaway as an important cog in the maintenance of the economic health of the country. Since 1959 this fact has become more and more obvious to both Canada and the United States. The Seaway is essential not only for the goods we import from other countries, but it is critical for our exports of wheat and other raw material and finished products.

Since 1959 the debt of the Seaway has consistently increased because revenues often do not permit the authority to pay off even the interest on the original capital expenditures. In 1970 the United States took measures to rationalize the debt structure of their portion of the seaway, thus helping them maintain and improve facilities where necessary.

As the hon. member is aware, we are revising the whole transportation policy. It is obvious that the St. Lawrence Seaway is an integral part of Canada's transportation system, and it is obvious that there is a problem of re-financing with regard to the Seaway.

The Ministry of Transport has been studying this matter for several months now, and it is hoped that a submission to Cabinet will go forward in the near future. However, I do not think it is possible to anticipate what Cabinet will decide when it addresses itself to this question. I can assure the hon. member that whatever decision is taken, if indeed Cabinet decides that changes are in order, will be in the best interests of the country.

TRANSPORT—REQUEST FOR ASSURANCE PROPOSED PORT OF GROS CACOUNA WILL NOT SUPPLANT GABARUS BAY

Mr. Andy Hogan (Cape Breton-East Richmond): Madam Speaker, before making my comments I would like to inform the House that I was called out of the Chamber tonight and told that the brother of my friend of long standing, the Secretary of State for External Affairs (Mr. MacEachen), was suddenly killed tonight, and I would like to express my sympathy to the minister.

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): What was his name?

Mr. Hogan: John MacEachen, Allan's brother. He was killed in a car accident.

This afternoon the hon. member for Rivière-du-Loup-Témiscouata (Mr. Gendron) asked the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) a question relative to the development of the super port at Gros Cacouna on the St. Lawrence near Rivière-du-Loup. My supplementary question