

Seaway and Canal Tolls

● (5:10 p.m.)

This, Mr. Speaker, has been a worth-while debate. It has enabled the House of Commons, in respect of one board which seems to operate in a vacuum and has the idea that nothing is going to be said about it by parliament, to let it know where we stand. The government did everything it could to prevent any discussion of this matter. The various ministers have refused since February to give any undertaking that the house would have any opportunity of discussing the matter before this decision was made.

Today, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Works (Mr. McIlraith) opposed this motion on behalf of the government and produced such a specious argument that I think he must have laughed at it himself. It was so convincing that it convinced nobody. I am glad we are having this debate and I am pleased to see that sporadic participation by Liberal members is taking place. The hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Macaluso) spoke with the authority of knowledge and was able to quote what he said in April, 1965. It is apparent, Mr. Speaker, that what he said in 1965 has had no influence on the government. I hope some change is made as a result of the debate we have had today.

Hon. John N. Turner (Acting Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the absence of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pickersgill) who is unavoidably out of the country representing Canada at the independence celebrations of the new member of the commonwealth, Guyana. I must say, in answer to a charge twice raised by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Diefenbaker) about attendance on this side of the house, that I observed when he made the charge how lonely he was in having so few companions on his own front bench in the house to hear a rather impassioned oration from this own lips.

Mr. Winkler: You look kind of lonely yourself.

Mr. Turner: I know how much comfort he would have derived had he been attended upon at the time he made his remarks by the opposition critic on matters of transportation, and how much better his argument as to the attendance of members in this house would have been had he been able to come to parliament with, as we used to say in court, clean hands.

Mr. Muir (Lisgar): Have you anything to say about the seaway?

Mr. Turner: I listened with great interest to the various representations made by members on all sides of the house, and it was no surprise to me to find a non-partisan view with regard to certain arguments. After all, transport is one of the crucial factors in the economic development of Canada and the subject provokes certain regional conflicts of interest. Certain parts of the country, no matter which political party may represent them at a particular time, may have certain views on a particular aspect of transportation or on the subsidies granted to a particular mode of transportation which may differ from views held in other regions of the country; and it is quite natural that representatives of political parties of whatever stripe they may be would tend to agree on those regional interests.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it struck me as somewhat surprising that the hon. member for Halifax (Mr. McCleave), to use his own term, had the foolhardy courage to speak on the question of tolls on the St. Lawrence seaway. I know, as do other members who were in the house when the question of the St. Lawrence seaway was first broached and negotiated, that the traditional attitude of the maritime provinces toward the original negotiation of the treaty and toward the imposition of tolls was adequately set out at the time by the late and highly esteemed member for Digby-Annapolis-Kings who was a member in 1951 and whose son we are now glad to see taking his place in the house.

That speech, Mr. Speaker, is fully set out in *Hansard* for the second session of 1951, page 1653 and following. I think his view at that time was one which was widely held in the maritime provinces, namely, that the institution of the seaway which would allow ships and sea commerce to penetrate into the interior of the continent might have a certain harmful effect on the commerce of the maritime provinces. As I say, that was the view taken then and, as I understand it, it is a view which is still widely held.

I have no quarrel with that, Mr. Speaker, because on matters of transportation members are entitled to represent the interests of their own localities and to reflect any conflict of interest in transportation rates across the country.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I should like to say that despite the importance of the subject I regret that this debate was launched this afternoon by the hon. member for Kindersley