

Bridges

The motion I submit is somewhat different from those which were placed on the order paper in the past. It merely asks the government to consider the advisability of entering into negotiations with the government of the province of Quebec for the purpose of reaching an agreement for the abolition of tolls on these two bridges, and in particular on the Jacques Cartier bridge, the province of Quebec being party to a contract signed by the national harbours board, the province of Quebec and the city of Montreal.

Such an agreement would not establish a precedent since, a few years ago—in 1928, if I am not mistaken—the province of Quebec was authorized, through a separate agreement, to use the Quebec bridge and build on it a vehicular road. At any event, before 1948 the province of Quebec had abolished all bridge tolls. Well, the new contract provided that the province was authorized to build a second vehicular road but that no tolls would be collected. After negotiations between the two governments the Quebec bridge ceased to be a toll bridge.

One might say that it would be difficult to negotiate with the Quebec government when the latter refuses to honour its obligations in connection with the Jacques Cartier bridge.

We know that by virtue of a tripartite contract between the national harbours board, the government of the province of Quebec and the city of Montreal the two latter are supposed to pay part of the deficit resulting from the operating costs of the bridge, interest on the debentures issued at the time the bridge was built, as well as other expenses.

That share was not to exceed the sum of \$150,000 per year for each of the two parties. They have acquitted themselves of their obligations until around 1944 when they stopped paying the amounts due. Legal proceedings were brought against the city of Montreal, to recover the money owing, by the national harbours board which won the case. Judgment was passed against the city and it has paid since an amount approximating one million dollars, representing the arrears owing. Will the national harbours board have to proceed in the same way against the province of Quebec for the same purpose? I do not know.

I should like to express the hope, however, that a friendly settlement may be effected out of court. I should think the provincial gov-

ernment would seek to meet its obligations like every other government. To my mind it would be possible to arrive at some generally acceptable understanding through a meeting between the federal and provincial authorities, at which the city of Montreal would be represented. It should be possible to achieve once more the result obtained in the case of the Quebec bridge, as long as every interested party is willing to show the understanding necessary to the solution of this matter, at least in the case of the Jacques Cartier bridge.

Now, as far as Victoria bridge is concerned, I am of the opinion that the federal government alone can do away with the toll charges, since the province of Quebec and the city of Montreal are under no contractual obligation in this regard.

As far as the settlement of this matter is concerned, that is with regard to the abolition of toll charges on the Jacques Cartier bridge, it must be remembered that the city of Montreal alone has paid nearly \$3 million to cover the deficit incurred and that the province of Quebec will have disbursed as much once it has paid the million or so dollars still owing according to the terms of the contract I have mentioned.

I would not like to be harsh in my remarks, but I believe it is time to put a stop to this unfair treatment which is being inflicted upon the people of Montreal and of neighbouring municipalities. I do not know of any other place in Canada where people are required to pay toll charges for the use of federal bridges or of those of the Canadian National or again of those of the national harbours board.

As I have already pointed out during previous debates on this matter, the development which has taken place, in the course of the last ten years, along the south shore of the St. Lawrence, has been tremendous. It is sufficient to recall, to mention one place in particular, that the town of Jacques Cartier, which is 5 or 6 miles from Montreal and which, in 1940, had a population of only 700 to 800 has now a population of nearly 35,000. The majority of them are workers who have left Montreal and who have built themselves small houses in this locality.

They work for the most part in Montreal, so that they have to cross over one of the two bridges, which means heavy expenses for them, as they cross over at least twice a day. Those who own cars—perhaps I should say jalopies—give rides to other workers who

[Mr. Dupuis.]