

*Blue Water Bridge Authority Bill*

financial statement would emerge from this semi-public body.

I myself believe the commission was operating quite responsibly, but in 1970 rumours started to fly concerning expense account living, trips abroad, and so on, on behalf of bridge commissioners. These were probably triggered by announcements of new tariffs. I felt some moral responsibility when the city of Sarnia, in a letter dated October 8, 1970, requested that certain financial data be supplied to them and asked why public notice had not been given of a hearing by the transport commission relative to the imposition of increased tolls. The answer to this request by the council is interesting, Mr. Speaker. I should like to quote the following excerpt from this letter dated October 14 and sent by Mr. John Blunt, the chairman, to Mr. Given, the city manager of Sarnia:

As you know, the Blue Water Bridge Authority was set up by act of Parliament as a private authority to manage and operate the bridge. As such, we are not in a true sense a public body nor are we agents of the Crown. We therefore are not required to publish our financial figures, although we do file statutory annual statements with the Auditor General.

In a later paragraph the letter reads:

I would be pleased to meet with you and your council at any convenient time to give you more background information, including financial statistics, but such discussions must be on an off the record basis.

Having regard to this attitude I placed a series of questions on the order paper in an effort to clear the air. This was on November 12, 1970. I also set down a notice of motion for the production of papers. Six months later I received what I might call non-answers to my questions. The following replies were received on May 26, 1971, and I append them to the question to which they relate.

QUESTION: On what date or dates did the governor in council, or any authority delegated by the governor in council order the Blue Water Bridge authorities to make its cost records and its cash receipts and disbursements records available, pursuant to section 19(1) of the Blue Water Bridge Authority Act?

ANSWER: In accordance with the requirements and responsibilities of the Canadian government, certain financial information, mainly with respect to tolls, has been submitted to the government by the Blue Water Bridge Authority under the provision of the Railway Act. No additional request for financial information has been made to date under the enabling authority contained in the Blue Water Bridge Authority Act, section 19(1)(a).

QUESTION: On what date or dates did the Blue Water Bridge Authority provide the governor in council or his designee with itemized, detailed and verified reports of the authority's receipts and disbursements under section 19(2)(a) of the act?

ANSWER: Not applicable.

QUESTION: Commencing with 1964, in what year or years were the accounts of the Blue Water Bridge Authority audited by persons designated by the governor in council or his designee under section 19(2)(b) of the act?

ANSWER: No persons have been so designated.

QUESTION: Has the Auditor General recently required from the appropriate department, information, reports and explanations concerning the operations of the Blue Water Bridge Authority?

ANSWER: No.

Compare these statements, which I received in answer to my questions, with the statement made by Mr. Blunt, chairman of the bridge authority, to the Sarnia city council. Take my question about the Auditor General and the reply: nobody has requested any information nor has any information been received. Compare this with the state-

ment of Mr. Blunt in his letter to the city of Sarnia in which he said "We file statutory annual statements with the Auditor General."

I shall be charitable and say I believe that Mr. Blunt honestly does not know the difference. Not many individuals know all the technicalities surrounding the huge government we have here. So, as I say, I do not believe Mr. Blunt was being dishonest; I just do not think he knows the difference. The fact remains there is no real accounting by this body that members of the House can lay their hands on. Against this background, I commend this simple bill for passage. It provides that the affairs of this body be reported in the form prescribed for most public bodies, Crown corporations, and so on. The explanatory note to the bill reads in part:

The purpose of this bill is to require the Blue Water Bridge Authority to submit its annual accounts to the Auditor General of Canada and to make an annual report to the public through Parliament.

If there are any technicalities in this measure which the government feels should be corrected, I would welcome someone from the other side of the House proposing amendments. I invite suggestions. Following my abortive attempt to get meaningful information about the bridge commission, I received a letter from the authority dated June 15, 1971. The first paragraph reads:

• (1610)

During a regular business meeting of the authority commissioners held this week, several members expressed concern about reports in the press that you were not satisfied with answers you received to questions asked by you in the House regarding the operation of the Blue Water Bridge.

May I suggest that this paragraph is the understatement of the year. Of course I was not satisfied. Nor was the hon. member for Sarnia-Lambton (Mr. Cullen), though I am not going to quote him out of context; I suspect that he may speak later today. When we both appeared on TV and radio he agreed that the answer that I had received—I think I quote him correctly—was, in effect, a non-answer. Let me continue to read the letter:

As co-sponsor of the bill that created the authority, you no doubt know that one of the provisions of that bill stipulates that we are to give out financial statements only to those designated by the governor in council and this we are prepared to do if, as and when we receive the necessary authority to do so.

This next paragraph is extremely interesting:

In your particular case, however, the members of the authority feel, rightly or wrongly, that you as co-sponsor of the bill have more than an ordinary right to know what is going on and what has gone on in the operation of the authority you helped create.

I do not accept that logic at all. I do not accept that due to my position I can have access to information from a public body that other Canadian citizens cannot have. There is no reason that I should have the information any more than any other citizen in the Sarnia area. But this paragraph gives a clue to the way out; it suggests, and quite properly so, that the authority is ready, willing and able to give out their financial audit when directed and where designated by the governor in council. The closing paragraph of this letter is also quite revealing and reads as follows:

[Mr. McCutcheon.]