

Seaway and Canal Tolls

this increase in tolls represents a lack of faith in our country. It is a 50-year write-off. If you think this country is going to stand still, you have less faith in it than I have; because it is not standing still and we are going to move forward. I had a speech written out, Mr. Speaker, but if I read it I would just be reiterating everything that has been said in the debate so far. So in conclusion I say, let us have faith in this country.

Mr. J. E. Pascoe (Moose Jaw-Lake Centre):

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that we have an opportunity to express our views on the proposed 10 per cent increase in tolls on the St. Lawrence seaway. I consider it the duty of as many members as possible to participate in this debate. The vital importance of the question is demonstrated by the fact that the regular business of the house has been adjourned so that the problem can be thoroughly discussed. I think we have had a very full discussion today, although there are probably enough speakers to continue the debate for another day.

Reference has been made to the public hearings in Ottawa in the past two days. As I understand it, the purpose of these hearings was to test the public attitude and public reaction to any toll increases. I believe the public attitude has been very clearly demonstrated in the two-day hearings, and it certainly has been demonstrated very clearly in the debate we have had today.

Earlier speakers expressed very clearly the viewpoint of western Canada. I do not believe it is necessary to repeat the arguments they have presented, but I should like to refer to the brief presented by the Canadian Co-operative Wheat Producers Limited at the hearing yesterday. Canadian Co-operative Wheat Producers Limited represent the farmer-owned wheat pools of the three prairie provinces and certainly this organization speaks for the majority of western farmers, particularly wheat farmers. Mr. Gordon L. Harrold, president of the Alberta Wheat Pool presented the brief, which recommended that the tolls cover operating costs only. In this regard he expressed the opinion that the present tolls were more than sufficient to cover the operating costs. The government of Saskatchewan also presented a brief which was placed before the hearing by the minister of highways and transportation of that province, Mr. Grant. It endorsed the stand put forward in the brief presented by the wheat pools.

I just want to re-emphasize the vital position of the prairies as the inland portion of Canada. I will not present the map to the house, but it shows how we are dependent on the seaway for a great deal of our traffic. I was happy to be on the first ship that passed through the seaway after the official opening on April 25, 1959. I should like to read what I reported to my constituents at that time:

The seaway will bring huge freighters more than 2,500 miles inland to the lakehead.

That was at the beginning of my speech, and later on I said:

It is not too clear, as yet, just how great will be the benefit to western Canada in having freighters calling almost at the west's doorstep. The saving in shipping costs for prairie wheat will be at least 5½ cents a bushel because this much has already been announced by the Canadian Wheat Board and has been added to the lakehead wheat price. This means extra cash to prairie wheat growers on wheat shipped from the lakehead.

It was encouraging to hear very strong views expressed by speakers on the government side of the house in support of our arguments against any increase in seaway tolls. I trust that these comments from his own colleagues will be drawn to the attention of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pickersgill). In fact, the Minister of Transport himself made a statement in the house that I consider to be in support of our arguments against any increase in the cost of exporting wheat such as would result from higher seaway tolls. On September 14, 1964, the Minister of Transport made this statement as reported in *Hansard*:

We consider, as every government has considered—at least for a generation—that one of the national interests of this country is to maintain the tremendous grain export business that has been one of the main sources of income for the Canadian people in the whole of the twentieth century.

● (8:50 p.m.)

It is true, Mr. Speaker, that he was referring at that time to the Crowsnest pass rate, and he stated that the government had no intention of removing these rates which helped the export of our wheat. However, I think that the argument is just as convincing for the seaway tolls.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I am speaking in particular for wheat exports and the movement of wheat. Other speakers have spoken for other exports and other movements through the seaway. I should like to refer to the annual report of the Canadian Wheat Board which states the following:

The sales policy of the board was directed to obtaining the largest possible share of the reduced world import requirements.