

Seaway and Canal Tolls

December 4, 1951, was that if the United States was reluctant in the last analysis to join with Canada in the construction of the seaway Canada would then be prepared to "go it alone". Words to that effect were used in the debate of 1951 by the then minister of transport.

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Bow River): Mr. Speaker, in rising to speak on this matter I should say at the outset that hon. members representing constituencies in western Canada, particularly farming constituencies, must take a strong stand in opposing increases in tolls on the St. Lawrence seaway. It was refreshing to hear the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Macaluso) setting out clearly the position that has been reached by most of us on this side of the house. I hope that when the hon. member, either in confidence or in caucus or elsewhere, has the opportunity to speak to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Greene), who by the way is not here today, he will be able to influence him and thereby the cabinet in the very near future to adopt the hon. member's position.

It is true that the cabinet is an independent body and it is within its jurisdiction to make a ruling on this matter. That, however, should not prevent the cabinet from following the lead of the hon. member at the proper time because the executive has the power to say yes or no with respect to this matter. When the hon. member who has just spoken and others in the Liberal party who take the same position are required to vote on this question, I hope that if they are so required they will support their views with their votes instead of just with their voices.

This whole question is of particular importance to the economy of western Canada as well as to the economy of the whole country. I hope to put some facts before the house. In discussing this matter two questions arise: First, the question of increased costs of production and, second, the increased cost of living. Both these problems, and I say this with great sincerity, have not been solved by the present government. I see one hon. member shaking his head. I shall deal with the facts.

I want to deal with the increased costs of production especially as they affect producers in western Canada in their relationship to the export market. Only yesterday I asked the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) a question in reference to the high cost of farm machinery. Hon. members may remember that shortly

[Mr. Macaluso.]

after the Minister of Agriculture was appointed he made his first trip out west and on his return made favourable statements respecting western farmers. At the present time those statements have remained mere statements, because he said there would be an investigation into the high cost of farm machinery and such an investigation has not been undertaken.

When I asked the Prime Minister about this subject yesterday he said there would be a decision in a day or two. I brought to the attention of the Prime Minister the fact that the profits of the Massey-Ferguson Industries Limited have risen in the last six months from \$8 million to \$21 million and that the profit per share has risen from 54 cents to \$1.34. I asked the Prime Minister whether there would be an investigation into these matters and he said there would be a decision in the very near future.

The high cost of machinery and the high cost of transportation make it very difficult for western farmers to compete successfully in the export market. Canada is probably the only big producer of wheat in the world which does not subsidize its wheat farmers in any way. They are on their own when it comes to competition and any increase in the cost of production threatens the success of our exports and makes the cost squeeze greater. That is why the present debate is necessary.

• (4:10 p.m.)

The hon. member for Hamilton West said there had not been a debate on the subject for 15 years. I agree. If hon. members will look at the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority Act they will find that section 15 contains the authority which parliament gave in 1951 for the imposition of tolls. Section 15(2) reads as follows:

The tolls that may be charged by the authority pursuant to this section may be for the use of the canals and works administered by it as a whole or for the use of any particular part thereof—

In other words, in 1951 parliament gave authority for tolls to be charged for the use of the seaway.

When we are talking about grain it is well to remember that it is the port of Vancouver through which most of the grain from Alberta has found its way in the deals with China and other communist nations. Then we have the port of Churchill and the facilities along the St. Lawrence. In winter, when these are not in use, grain is moved by rail to other ports in Canada. There is a large difference between the sale price of wheat and