

Seaway and Canal Tolls

• (3:10 p.m.)

However, they now feel that hope is imperiled by the suggestion that the waterway rates should be raised now and possibly raised again in the future. If they are raised on the grounds that we need the increase to meet rising costs, then we can be sure this will happen again some time in the future. So Canada's long held principle, when the waterway first went into operation, that it should be toll free will be gone by the board forever.

It is possible too that this imposition of tolls would lead to some restriction of traffic along the seaway. If it did it might force traffic into other methods of movement and this again would lead to an increase in the cost of living; not only in western Canada—let us not suffer from that delusion—but also it would lead to an increase in the cost of living in eastern and central Canada. Because the articles which you ship could not be sold as readily in western Canada, it would lead to a decrease in the quantity of business that would be done. Therefore the business that is left would have to charge more for its products, and the cost of living would be bound to rise.

People in all parts of Canada should view with suspicion any attempt to raise the tolls on the waterway. For a long time, while the seaway was being built, it was our traditional policy to have toll free waterways. Sixty-three years ago Canada abolished all tolls on the waterways. In 1909 the International Boundary Waters Treaty Act declared:

All navigable boundary waters shall forever continue free and open for the purposes of commerce to the inhabitants, ships and vessels of both Canada and the United States.

But what do we find has happened? In 1959 we find that the seaway had tolls imposed, by the agreement of 1951. I know, and everyone knows, there were very powerful forces operating to see that these tolls should be charged, and those powerful forces still are in operation today. I do not need to name them; I would hesitate to do so, but I am sure those who are familiar with the situation—and I think everyone in this house is familiar with it—knows what areas and what types of persons would like to see these tolls increased.

If the tolls are increased these persons know it will help their business; but it will not help western Canada, and it will not help central Canada. I should like to say right here that I do not think it will help any part of Canada. It will not help the Atlantic

[Mr. Cantelon.]

provinces. The danger to the Atlantic provinces does not lie in seaway tolls or in a lack of tolls; the danger to the Atlantic provinces lies in the period during which this seaway operates, and in particular the time the port of Montreal operates. I do not think there is any loss to the maritime provinces through seaway tolls.

In 1959 these tolls were imposed in an attempt to do two things. First of all they wanted to recover the cost of operation of the seaway and, second, they hoped that in a period of 50 years they would be able to recover the cost of building the seaway. Forecasts seemed to indicate that this could be done, but they were much too optimistic. We find that the traffic has not been sufficiently heavy to do this. Nevertheless, whether or not this actually was successful, it avoids the main point. The main point is that there should be no tolls at all, and that so far as this nation is concerned it is greatly to our advantage to have a toll free waterway. As I hope I have to some extent indicated, it is to the advantage of all Canada that this should be so.

On more than one occasion in this house it has been pointed out what the cost of this will be to the farmer. Mr. Charles Gibbings has suggested it will be 1½ cents a bushel. If this is true—and I do not see any reason that his figures would be very far out—then we can expect that the cost to the farmer will be something in the order of \$5 million a year. The individual farmer who, after all costs are taken off, has been getting, about \$1.40 will find he is not getting \$1.40 but rather \$1.39. He will be losing 1 per cent of his gross income in grain; and 1 per cent is a very serious matter, because actually when you take the net income that 1 per cent is magnified greatly.

These I think, Mr. Speaker, are some of the reasons it is so important that this matter should be debated and that the importance of this proposal should be emphasized for all to hear. Definite detailed arguments have been presented to the Board of Transport Commissioners, and I do not intend to reiterate those arguments. I am sure, however, that you will hear some of them as this debate continues this afternoon.

Mr. Frank Howard (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, I think this is one of the first occasions on which members of parliament will have an opportunity to express their views about some proposed action by an agency or commission which is responsible to or reports