

Seaway and Canal Tolls

things off over a long period of time in order to reduce the annual outflow of capital funds. Why could the government not amend this statute and any other agreement, international or otherwise, consequent upon it in order to extend the amortization period to 75 years and thus reduce the outgo of funds? Possibly the period might have to be 100 years. Why should one or two generations of Canadians bear the cost of something which is going to last in all likelihood for 1,000 years? I see nothing intrinsically wrong with spreading it over four or five generations. As I mentioned earlier, I am not at all convinced we will ever retire the debt. So wrong were the experts at the outset in their estimate of the volume of the traffic which would use the seaway that I now doubt anyone who would suggest that it is possible to retire the debt.

• (5:50 p.m.)

I do not know whether this would work but it seems to me, if there is a real case to be made against increased tolls on the St. Lawrence seaway, that notwithstanding the debatable question of whether or not the seaway must be self-sufficient the effect of extending the period would be such that it would resolve the present controversy. I believe the western point of view is a very valid one which cannot be overlooked at the expense of the entire region of Canada lying west of the system. It would be a procedure which would not necessarily be warmly welcomed by those people in the maritimes who must derive their livelihood from the ports, but on the other hand I am sure it would be a procedure which would not be vigorously opposed.

In the maritimes, particularly in Halifax, we rapidly are coming to the point of view that we no longer are apt to rise with a cudgel in our hands every time someone suggests some proposition which might reflect on the well-being of Halifax and Saint John. If an icebreaker goes to work on the St. Lawrence we protest, and I think with some justification, but what concerns us is whether the government is doing this to keep the river open or to open up channels for shipping. What we question is the sincerity of the government sometimes in paying lip service to the ports of Halifax and Saint John. If the government means to keep the river open, let them keep it open and tell us they are going to do it. I am sure they will then find us co-operative.

I know that the western members will appreciate that we are not out to belittle

their position. Again I say that I recognize the impact of substantial increases in the tolls on the movement of their grain, but on the other hand I would remind them and the government that such a proposal would provide a wonderful opportunity for us to stand up and say: By all means go ahead and do it. However, this would be taking away from one sector of the economy and one region of the country at the expense of another area. This we are not about to do.

Times have changed. We are prepared to accept our role in Halifax and Saint John as east coast ports. In Halifax we now are coming to a point of view where we recognize that our great potential and our great future lie in the depth of our water. In ten years time I suggest it will matter not whether there are any tolls on the seaway. With the new thinking and new concept in respect of boats for the movement of our products and goods, today we are talking in terms of 150,000-ton ships or 300,000-ton ships. Indeed, I understand that some of the oil companies and other concerns in the world are now thinking seriously in terms of 500,000-ton ships. It is only a matter of time before general cargo will be carried around the world in vessels which not only will present no problem to us in Halifax in relation to the seaway but which indeed will not be able to get above Quebec.

If you want to know what our argument will be for the next 300 years, it will not be whether the seaway is doing anything to contribute to the well-being of Halifax and Saint John but rather it will be against any substantial dredging program and opening up of the seaway to accommodate the deep sea shipping that we hope to service in the future.

I should like to leave the one suggestion with the acting minister that perhaps he should have his colleagues look into the possibility and feasibility of extending the period of amortization from 50 to either 75 or 100 years.

Mr. Jim McNulty (Lincoln): Mr. Speaker, I shall be very brief. As most members are quite aware the Welland canal is in the riding of Lincoln and naturally is of great economic importance to our area. I should like to add my voice in opposition to the recommendation of the seaway authority for higher tolls on the St. Lawrence seaway from Montreal to lake Ontario and the imposition of new lockage charges on the Welland ship canal. In fact, I feel that the lower the