

*Supply—Transport*

**Mr. Chevrier:** I should like to make an inquiry here. I am sorry the Minister of Transport is not in his seat. I presume he is unavoidably absent. I think he should be here during the consideration of these estimates. After all, when I look at the list of them, I find that they are practically one-fifth of the estimates of the whole department. I consider that as being something fairly substantial. The question that comes to my mind is this. Does the government intend to open the St. Lawrence ship channel from Quebec to Montreal during the winter season?

**Mr. Fleming (Eglinton):** That is a matter for the future. I am afraid I cannot give my hon. friend that information. However, I shall be glad to communicate his question to the Minister of Transport when he returns to Ottawa and the reply will be communicated to my hon. friend.

**Mr. Chevrier:** I have a few remarks to make on this matter. I had hoped to make them when the Minister of Transport was in his seat because I consider them to be of fairly serious import.

**Mr. Fleming (Eglinton):** Do they arise on this particular item?

**Mr. Chevrier:** Yes.

**Mr. Fleming (Eglinton):** After all, this is just a clean-up to March 31.

**Mr. Chevrier:** They arise out of consideration of the St. Lawrence ship channel which is a channel 35 feet in depth extending from Montreal to 30 miles below Quebec and which I know very well. I make these remarks now because there will be no other opportunity to make them until the general estimates are up for consideration or until the matters concerning the Department of Transport are up for discussion. I have reference to the situation which obtained when all of these foreign ships, because of the freeze-up, were caught in the Lachine canal and then were taken down the St. Lawrence ship channel. While the officers who were responsible for operating the icebreakers deserve commendation—and I am thinking now of the captain of the *D'Iberville*, the captain of the *Ernest Lapointe* and the captain of a third vessel, which vessels were responsible for keeping open the ship channel—I think that Canada received quite a black eye from the manner in which this operation was performed. I would be the last one to lay any blame on former officers of a department over which I presided for some nine years. I do not intend to do that. What I intend to say here is this. While those who operated the icebreakers deserve

[Mr. Speaker.]

a great deal of commendation, there was on this occasion a tremendous lack of co-ordination as between the various divisions of the Department of Transport. I have reference to the St. Lawrence ship channel service, the canal services and other divisions of the Department of Transport and the national harbours board. My purpose in saying this is that because of the long time it took to get these ships through the St. Lawrence ship channel—the item that is under discussion now—Canada has received much bad publicity. It has received this black eye in foreign countries that will be operating ships into the St. Lawrence and the great lakes through the St. Lawrence seaway which will be open to navigation soon.

The question uppermost in the minds of those people is this. Why is it that this incident had to happen and what assurance have we that in the future it will not happen again? I have a suggestion to make. It is not a new one. It has been made before but I think it should be given careful consideration. The first suggestion I make is that the St. Lawrence ship channel which we are discussing now should be widened. Engineers who have had it under their responsibility for years have been recommending to the government and to the Department of Transport the widening of this channel. That is the first suggestion that I am prompted to make under this item.

The next suggestion that comes to my mind is that there should be additional icebreakers in order to protect from flooding the areas surrounding metropolitan Montreal. When the water in the Montreal harbour reaches elevation 40, that is the elevation at which flooding in the Montreal area begins to cause a great deal of anxiety. This danger occurs only during the period when the discharge capacity of the river has been reduced by reason of the peculiar ice and temperature conditions which obtain in that area from December to April of each year. The experience in the Department of Transport has been that the earlier icebreakers get to work, the better it is for prevention of these flooding conditions.

There are studies which have been made in the department. There is a study which was made in 1947 by a board of engineers which was established for the purpose of considering power and navigation development in the Lachine section, and also studies were made as to ice conditions in the Montreal harbour and in the St. Lawrence ship channel. A study of those conditions was made to ascertain whether or not in the operation of the ship channel, which as the house knows is a separate division of the Department of