

Seaway and Canal Tolls

● (8:30 p.m.)

The subject matter is important not only to the population of western Canada but to the whole Canadian economy. I wish to join with those who have gone on record in this debate as being opposed to the imposition of tolls and the general increase of 10 per cent on lockage fees, as well as the increase in tolls. In speaking this afternoon the right hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Diefenbaker) pointed out something which is very important in respect of this debate. I refer to the fact that he pointed out to the house that it was necessary to have this debate at this time, and that the matter of urgency revolves around the fact that the present government, in its wisdom and if it so desired, could have agreed to these tolls by order in council. In this way the matter could have been dragged under the table without anyone taking due notice of it. He was supported in this contention by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles).

I think we have done a service by discussing this very important matter this afternoon. My main concern is the fact that any increase in seaway tolls would directly and seriously affect the economy of all the farmers in eastern Saskatchewan and Manitoba. I should emphasize, as has been pointed out previously, that the people in western Saskatchewan and Alberta do have access to the Pacific port facilities, which is a help in relieving the congestion, but we in eastern Saskatchewan and Manitoba are affected very seriously by any proposed increases. This proposed increase would amount to approximately 1¼ cents per bushel on grain or, calculated on the basis of total grain movement, would cost the farmers of this country between \$4 million and \$6 million per year, depending on the total annual yield. Add this \$4 million to \$6 million to the loss incurred in the last crop year by reason of the 12 to 20 cent per bushel loss in the price of wheat, which amounted to some \$75 million, and one can understand the concern expressed by our Canadian farmers in this government's indifference to their economic welfare.

Compare the farmers' position, in respect of the increased tolls, to the position of private industry. Industry is able to add this extra cost to the retail, wholesale or the manufacturing price, and pass its on to the consumer. The farmer however has to stand by helplessly and absorb the decrease in his income due to the seaway toll increase, and

then absorb a double wallop through having to pay the increased consumer price on the products he purchases which are shipped through the seaway.

The hon. member for St. Lawrence-St. George (Mr. Turner), the Minister without Portfolio, referred to the right hon. Leader of the Opposition as having advanced a specious argument when he referred to possible United States influence in respect of the decision of the seaway authority to recommend the increase in tolls. The minister seemed to be the only speaker in the house today who threw sort of a storm cloud over this debate. I do not think he convinced any member that the right hon. Leader of the Opposition was making a specious argument. Rather the minister would be better advised if he and his cabinet colleagues, who have the responsibility for building a greater Canada, would pay more attention to Canada's interests in those areas of common economic development between our two great countries.

In view of what has been said in this debate so far, I cannot say I agree with the pessimistic outlook of the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam (Mr. Douglas) to the effect it is a foregone conclusion that the government will accept the recommendation of the seaway authority to increase the seaway tolls by 10 per cent. After the strong argument made by members on this side of the house, plus the strong opposition in government ranks spearheaded by the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Macaluso), I feel the government has no alternative but to hold in abeyance any decision on this matter until it can be brought before parliament for further consideration, and finally be decided by a vote of this House of Commons.

Mr. Norman Fawcett (Nickel Belt): After what has been said today, Mr. Speaker, I do not think there is a great deal left for me to say except to enlarge on a couple of points. One is the point my leader, the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam (Mr. Douglas), raised with regard to the handling of iron ore. Since I come from a riding in northern Ontario which already is affected adversely by high transportation costs, naturally I am very much interested in anything which might increase transportation costs, even though this may be very minimal. I believe the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam mentioned the fact that iron ore mines which could be considered marginal operations might find