

Chicago Diversion

While we are dealing with questions of water, I would like to say a word or two about the Chicago Diversion problem and also the Columbia River problem. Members will recall that a bill known as H.R.1 was introduced into the United States House of Representatives in January 1959. That bill sought to obtain authority for the sanitary district of Chicago to increase, for an experimental period, the amount of water to be diverted from Lake Michigan into the Mississippi drainage basin; in other words, take water out of the St. Lawrence system, use it for sanitation purposes in Chicago and put it into the Mississippi. Canada objected to these proposals and made its objections known in a number of communications to the United States Government. The bill, however, was approved in the House of Representatives and sent to the Senate, where it was eventually referred to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. The chairman of that Committee, Senator Fulbright, asked the State Department to secure Canada's views on a number of matters connected with the bill. This was the direction given to the State Department by the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Before discussing the subject again with the representatives of the United States we called in representatives of the Province of Ontario and the Province of Quebec and had a very helpful discussion with them about this whole situation. Then in due course we met the representatives of the United States and again the whole question was discussed.

The situation is this: the St. Lawrence river system looms much larger in Canadian affairs than it does in the United States picture. As most of you know — even those of us who come from the West coast and from the Maritimes — the whole history of Canada originates in the St. Lawrence river system. This has been the heartland of Canada from the start, and whatever is done to that system is of vital importance to our nation. Down through the years there have been very extensive power installations on the river and many harbours built on the Lakes.

The problems that would be raised by a lowering of the level of the Lakes are tremendous. I know from my experience as Minister of Public Works that many of these harbours have rock on the bottom. They have not just sand bottoms that you can scoop up; it is rock that has to be blasted, and to lower the waters of the Great Lakes would constitute a very serious problem for Canada. The Americans have suggested that perhaps Ontario could divert some of its rivers which flow into Hudson Bay or James Bay to the St. Lawrence basin. I understand that that is practically impossible. It certainly is not feasible, is no answer to the request by Chicago and would not meet the difficulties raised by Chicago taking additional water from Lake Michigan. The Americans themselves are divided on this question: Milwaukee, for example, is very much opposed to Chicago, although it is also on Lake Michigan; and I think all the states from Lake Michigan down to the sea are against the Chicago plan.