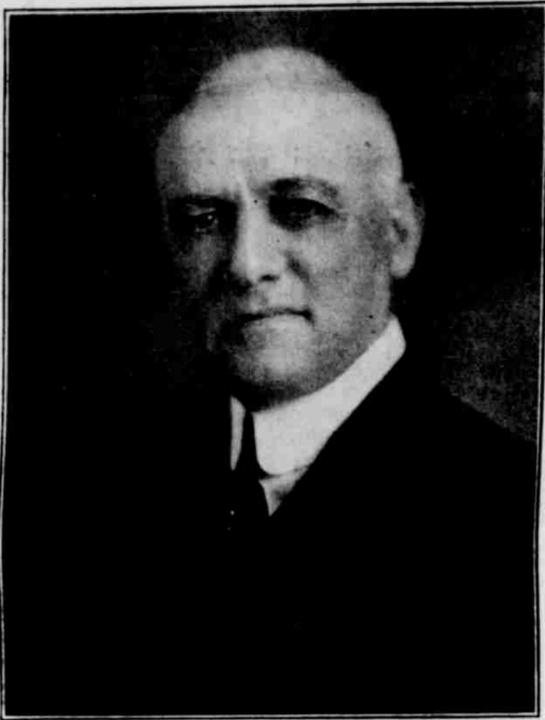


# Would Give Steamers of Great Lakes Direct Passage to Ocean

By **ARNOLD D. PRINCE**



**SENATOR CHARLES E. TOWNSEND**

About 10 years ago he took action in the Senate to give the Great Lakes cities direct communication with Liverpool and other ocean ports. An international commission is now at work at it.

FOR a project of such vast importance, it must be admitted that the proposal to open a direct route for ocean carriers from the Atlantic to the Great Lakes by way of the St. Lawrence River won very little recognition from New York City when the International Joint Commission having the matter in charge met there recently to decide on a plan of hearings and procedure.

Why was this?

Was it, many people are asking, because the great Eastern interests involved, the railroads, members of the New York State Barge Canal Conference, and others alleged to be facing losses of billions if the St. Lawrence undertaking goes through, had agreed on a policy of silence as the most effective method of smothering it?

Of course anyone who knows the Great Lakes country recognizes at once the difficulty of "smothering with silence" any project upon which its aggressive folk have set their hearts, but I am merely reporting the facts as I found them.

Certainly one would have expected a great hullabaloo to have been made about it, especially in New York City which, it is predicted, will suffer heavily in prestige and purse if the water haul from the ocean to the "heart of the continent" is provided. For, it is contended, if the "Lakes to Liverpool" route is established, millions of tons of freight which now goes to New York for trans-shipment will go calmly out to sea without contributing a cent toward the financial prosperity of Gotham.

The great barge canal, built at such enormous expense from Buffalo to the Hudson River and New York will become a placid, tranquil course untroubled by the busy traffic of bottoms so hopefully predicted for it.

Powerful trunk lines hauling vast tonnages of grain, ore, general merchandise and other products to the Atlantic seaboard, will suffer drastic curtailments in revenue because of the deflection of traffic from the rich productive areas tributary to the "inland seas."

Why then the heavy and almost oppressive silence on the part of New York? That vigorous and enterprising city is not generally so absent-minded in matters affecting its prerogatives and its purse.

## A Commission With Authority

OF COURSE, if the meeting to consider the St. Lawrence project had been one called by a body of private citizens, say like the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Tidewater Association, that enterprising aggregation of westerners who have sworn a mighty oath to put the "ocean to lakes" scheme through, the thing might not have caused so much astonishment.

But here was a commission duly appointed by the Canadian and American governments under the Root-Bryce Treaty which, by the terms of that important document, has final and exclusive jurisdiction. What it decides as regards the all-water route from the Atlantic to the interior will be binding upon both governments.

It was, in effect, the first formal sitting in New York, at least since the ending of the war, of a body likened in many respects to The Hague tribunal for adjusting international problems. Upon the outcome of the deliberations entrusted to it rests the disposition of a project to which the building of the Panama Canal alone is comparable, and the rearrangement of trade routes of incalculable value.

It was the first sitting of a great international court, and yet not a peep out of New York. Not even so much as the tiniest little yip to let the people of the great Empire State know that the members of the august body were in session duly assembled; no gathering of important representatives of railroads and civic bodies to make formal or informal protest, and no fuss or

noise of any kind whatsoever. A convention of druggists from states in the Far West to consider the advisability of changing the method of labeling bottles would have gained more publicity.

Of course it was pointed out that the session of the International Commission was entirely executive, and that the first preliminary hearing as to the merits of the St. Lawrence project was to be held in Buffalo on March 1—the same date, by the way, as that fixed for the return of the railroads to private control—but the reply of the sophisticated to this was that even when confronted by executive sessions powerful interests have a way of making their views known.

"What did the Commission come to New York for anyway?" the wise ones asked. "For the rail trip? Here they are in the very heart of the enemy country, so to speak. They must have come here for something. If they merely wanted to fix a meeting place they could have done that behind closed doors at home, couldn't they? And yet not a murmur from any of the people interested. Why?"

Why indeed! Certainly it was not because the interests in New York didn't understand what was being considered, because, after all, the proposal has long been before the public. As long back as 1910 Senator Townsend, of Michigan, introduced a resolution at Washington requesting the President of the United States to enter into relations with Canada and Great Britain looking to the development of the St. Lawrence as an ocean waterway from the lakes to the Atlantic.

Senator Lenroot, of Wisconsin, had expressed himself in favor of the project. So had Alexander T. Vogelsang, first assistant secretary of the interior, Julius H. Barnes, president of the United States Grain Corporation, and, of course, the very vigorous and active C. P. Craig, of Duluth, executive director of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Tidewater Association. The matter had been discussed at length at conferences held by chambers of commerce in Canada, by the legislatures of several American states, and, only recently, it was announced, no less than fourteen of these states, not to speak of the mayors of various cities bordering on the Great Lakes, had pledged themselves to support the undertaking.

So New York had a pretty clear notion as to why the International Joint Commission had come to that city, but there was still another reason why, it was naturally supposed, it would show some interest in the presence of its distinguished visitors. This was the very nature of the St. Lawrence project itself.

## A Wonderful Dream of the Great Lakes Region

THE people of the Great Lakes region had been dreaming a wonderful dream for many years. This was to find some way of sending their richly laden freighters past the stretch of tumbling rapids which barred egress from the landlocked waters to the sea, thereby opening up new avenues to trade and ridding themselves of dependence on railroads and cities along the Atlantic seaboard which added heavily to the expense of shipping.

The big problem, of course, was to get around the necessity of breaking cargo bulk at Buffalo, which is the eastern terminus of lake shipping and where freight intended for points farther east must be transferred to trains for the long haul overland. In the old days when lake shipping was a comparatively small item, the old system was good enough, but with undreamed of development and prosperity came new needs and ambitions. With Canadian wheat coming in ever greater volume through the twin cities of Port Arthur and Fort William; with Duluth at the head of navigation pouring forth an ever richer stream of grain, iron ore, and general merchandise from the country back of it; with Detroit suddenly doubling and then tripling its population, and contributing its almost bewildering quota of automobiles, stoves, drugs and what not; with Cleveland, Toledo, Chicago and Milwaukee advancing in leaps and bounds not only in population but in exports, the expense of unloading and reloading freight at Buffalo, and then unloading and loading it again at the ports along the Atlantic seaboard became a staggering item, and the enterprising souls who had conceived the dream of making the inland lakes a "new Mediterranean" renewed their efforts toward circumventing the barriers between the lakes and the sea.

The first step toward the fulfillment of this magnificent dream was, of course, the deepening of the narrow channels between the lakes themselves, a task which had been undertaken by pioneers who had no thought that the giant scheme now in contemplation would be the fruition of their efforts.

At Sault Ste. Marie, between Lake Superior and Lake Huron, crude locks were built permitting the pas-

sage of vessels of light draught, and as time went on and trade increased, the passageway was improved until the present system of chambers, which are set for 24 feet, was installed to accommodate the biggest of lake carriers. Farther to the south were the dangerous shoals between Lake Huron and Lake Erie, and here too improvements were made clearing the way through the Detroit and the St. Clair rivers. These betterments cost in the neighborhood of \$50,000,000, but the Great Lakes tribes were only getting well into their stride.

Inspiring them to fresh, and then again to still fresher endeavors was that ever increasing tide of traffic pressing steadily behind them, the result being the locks at the Niagara barrier known as the Welland Canal. At first only a fourteen foot channel was provided, but this was replaced by a deeper passageway, until, finally, the Canadian Government undertook the construction of the magnificent, modern sets of chambers now building which, when completed, will cost at least \$65,000,000, and consist of a series of seven locks capable of accommodating vessels 800 feet long with a draught of 30 feet.

## The Final Step

FINALLY, with the ending of the war, has come the demand for a completion of the route to the sea, which requires joint efforts on the part of the American and Canadian governments and contemplates an expenditure of about \$250,000,000. To make the passage safe for ocean vessels the St. Lawrence will have to be cleared of shoals, or canalized for a part of the distance of 180 miles from Lake Ontario to Montreal.

This, then, was the giant undertaking which the members of the International Joint Commission assembled to consider in New York, and which that city so politely and so studiously ignored.

As for myself, I must confess that I found the mission of the members of the international court peculiarly absorbing. About ten years ago I had written a series of articles about the Great Lakes region, and it had seemed to me then that the "Empire of the Inland Seas" had reached the apex of its possibilities and prosperity.

Detroit, the phenomenal, had been transformed over night, so it seemed, from a quaint, easy-going city of tree-lined streets into a bewildering, roaring hive of industry with huge machine shops and towering skyscrapers which resembled nothing so much as downtown New York. Automobiles and millionaires dotted the streets, and there were daring souls who predicted that soon, very soon, the city would have a population of 600,000 at least.

The hardy breed of pioneers having cleared the vast forests of white pine in Michigan had pushed on to other fields and assisted in the discovery of the Mesaba iron ore range near Duluth, and soon that city added its clangor of industry to the general tumult of ever increasing endeavor. The reaches of the lakes, so recently dotted by ancient stubby craft and antiquated sailing ships, were thronged with solemn looking freighters, transporting on the average of \$1,000,000,000 worth of commodities produced in the teeming cities ringing the waters.

Standing in the presence of that important group of men at one of the big hotels in New York, and listening to them gravely discussing the proposal to convert Detroit, Duluth, Chicago, Cleveland and other lake cities into "seaports," my mind went back to the enthusiasm of a certain editor who, in those other years of what seemed incredible prosperity, sought to epitomize for me the extraordinary character of the Great Lakes country.

"Do you realize," he demanded, "that the richest man in the world, Rockefeller, laid the foundation of his wealth in the Great Lakes country?"

"Do you know that the second richest man of this country, Carnegie, drew his wealth from the same region?"

"Do you realize that other vast fortunes are in the making right here?"

"Do you appreciate the fact that the greatest shipping—the greatest tonnage in the world—is in these waters, and that the traffic of London and Liverpool combined cannot equal it?"

"Have you any appreciation of what a place it is in which to make money, and what opportunities it affords to get the most out of life, out of the money earned?"

"Don't you know that in all the world the two cities that are freest from tuberculosis are in this region—Detroit and Milwaukee?"

"Has it occurred to you that not only is this district the center of industry of the United States, but that it must be reckoned with, and very seriously too, in statecraft, art, literature, and all that makes up life?"

**A PROJECT is on to give Buffalo, Erie, Cleveland, Toledo, Detroit, Duluth, Milwaukee, Chicago, and other Great Lakes cities direct shipping to European ports, making them ports for ocean steamers. Clearing the shoals of the St. Lawrence River is the necessary step. A joint commission representing Canada and the United States is at work on the project. This article tells of the plan and its probable widespread effect on traffic—also of the feeling in New York toward it.**