

*The Address—Mr. Fulton*

(Mr. Bradette), which has stood on the order paper for three years with respect to a particular road.

I first tried to discuss the matter three years ago when the estimates of the Department of Transport were under consideration. I mention this only to show what a reversal there has been in government policy on this point. When I sought to bring it up in the discussion of those estimates the suggestion was made by the minister that such discussion was entirely out of order. He said there was nothing in his department which provided for trans-Canada roads, and that therefore nothing could be discussed. I pointed out that what I wanted to discuss was not what might or might not be in the estimates, but the fact that there should be a provision for the construction of a trans-Canada road. However, as suggested by the minister at that time, the discussion was ruled out of order.

So, for the next two years, I placed the subject matter before the house by way of a substantive resolution on the order paper. It will be recalled, however, that for the last three years the government has felt that it has been so much better qualified than the people themselves, not only to spend the people's money, but to direct every phase of the national life, that no time has been provided for the discussion of private members' resolutions. For the last two years debates on private members' resolutions have not been allowed in the house. For that reason it has not been possible to discuss this matter as a separate problem.

Last year, however, another attempt was made to discuss it when the estimates of the Department of Reconstruction and Supply were before the committee. That discussion was reported at page 5497 of *Hansard* for June 19, 1948. The minister, who is now the Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Howe), was questioned by the hon. member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Miller), the hon. member for Vancouver South (Mr. Green), and other hon. members on this side of the house, including myself. In answer to our questions, he took this position:

There is no policy which provides for contributions from the federal government toward the building of any highway at the present time—except by special arrangement; and that is usually confined to the opening up of new areas.

That was the position he took then. In reply to a further question he said:

If we see any sign of widespread unemployment we will proceed to make a blueprint. But at the present time we have not a blueprint and we do not think one is necessary.

If those words are taken at their face value it must be assumed that last June the federal

government had no plan for a trans-Canada highway or indeed any sort of federal road system. Then, as a result of further questioning, the minister became somewhat more definite in his replies and somewhat more disinclined to give any countenance to the discussion, and he ended by saying:

I can give no commitment about any highway, and I do not intend to answer any questions.

From that time onward he remained silent until the matter of the trans-Canada highway was no longer under discussion, at which time he became alive again and answered questions dealing with other matters. That was the government policy up to June, 1948. Bear in mind that hon. members on this side, and the public generally across Canada, were expressing an increasing demand for the construction of a trans-Canada road and the development of a system of federal aid for highways.

The suggestions which we made, which I believe were sound then and are still sound, were in effect that there should be established a system of federal aid along the line of that prevailing in the United States of America. Under that system the federal government, in co-operation with the provinces, would work out a system of roads to be constructed and maintained by the provinces, with the dominion bearing part of the cost.

Then we find that in December the Minister of Mines and Resources (Mr. MacKinnon) called a conference of public works officials from the provinces to discuss a trans-Canada road. One might ask the reason for this change in policy. Are they opening up new areas? There is no sign that this is what they have in contemplation. Is it because they see signs of widespread unemployment? Those were the criteria laid down last year by the Minister of Trade and Commerce. Is it merely to serve these two purposes that they have now decided to build a trans-Canada road? I doubt if any minister who is present or who heard that statement last year would make that answer at the present time.

I suggest that the change in policy has come about as a result of the pressure which has developed owing to the lack of action on the part of the government. It has come about as a result of a widespread demand which even they can no longer ignore. The government has finally realized that it is time to proceed with this program. This is just another example of the time lag which occurs when the government is dealing with national need and the demands of the people.

Even here we find that they are only going about it in a half-hearted manner. What did they do? They called the provincial authorities here last winter, and as far as we can