

Trans-Canada Highway Act

in more local roads. That is precisely the problem that exists in an acute form in Newfoundland.

I said last year, and I think it should be repeated, that I assume that the federal government, particularly with the Minister of Finance in his present embarrassment, is prepared to spend only so much money each year on highway co-operation with the provinces. I do not want anyone to suggest that I am opposing the construction of highways anywhere else in Canada when I say that I believe—and I am sure the minister agrees with this—that first priority should be given to completing the original trans-Canada highway and that the duplication of highways, which undoubtedly will be a highly desirable development in the future, should be a second priority.

Members of the government have complained over and over again since the beginning of this session that we on this side of the chamber have not told them how to run the country. Apparently they have no ideas of their own and they want us to tell them how to govern the nation. There is one thing I will do right away. I intend to make a most constructive suggestion to the minister about getting the trans-Canada highway completed in the four Atlantic provinces at about the same time it could be completed in the six provinces west of Quebec. If the minister would adopt the Liberal policy enunciated by our leader a year ago of paying 90 per cent of the cost of building the trans-Canada highway in the four Atlantic provinces I am sure there would be no further obstacle in the way of having the road completed by December 31, 1960. Having had this constructive suggestion I hope the minister will rise in his place as soon as I sit down and tell us that he accepts it at once.

I may say that if the minister does accept that suggestion of mine it would bring much closer the day when the minister could do what I know he is extremely eager to do and that is to carry out the policy enunciated by the present Minister of Transport and the present Minister of Justice when they sat on this side of the chamber, the policy of having the federal government take over the whole cost of the trans-Canada highway and adopting a much wider highways policy. I hope the minister will apply himself with even more vigour than he has in the past and with even more money, and a larger share for the Atlantic provinces, to the completion of this road.

Mr. Green: Mr. Chairman, all hon. members of the committee who have spoken to this resolution have spoken in favour of it.

[Mr. Pickersgill.]

Some have endorsed it at greater length than others. However, I am grateful for this unanimous support.

In considering the trans-Canada highway at this time it should be borne in mind that all of the nine provinces which have entered into the partnership arrangement with the federal government started out on an even basis. They were all having difficulty getting the work completed by the earlier deadline of 1956. Therefore, a new deal was made. All nine provinces were in a similar position. That was not the situation when we took over in 1957. Within a few months of the change in government the one province of Saskatchewan finished the job. They complied with the terms of the agreement and finished the job more than three years ahead of the deadline. In the intervening period since the fall of 1957, three more provinces have practically completed, namely Alberta, Manitoba and Prince Edward Island.

I suggest to hon. members that had any one of them been in my position he would have hesitated to recommend to the government that a change be made under those conditions in the terms of the agreement. It was only fair to those four provinces that the agreement stand in so far as the other five provinces are concerned. Those other five provinces have more difficulties, I agree, than the four who are either finished or practically finished. Those five provinces are doing their best to comply with the terms of the agreement. I am hoping that they will all be able to do so. Certainly, there is good faith on their part. Therefore, to suggest now that we should vary the agreement is not a sound suggestion.

Then, another fact which must be remembered is that the fundamental plan is that the provinces will select the route and will actually do the work. We inspect it and we pay 50 per cent of the cost, except on 10 per cent of the mileage we pay 90 per cent of the cost, but we are very much in the hands of the provinces. They have actually selected the route, although perhaps some of them have not selected the route that the federal government would have selected, and they are actually doing the work. They are letting the contracts; we are checking to see that the work is properly carried out and that the payments are all in order.

In so far as one province is concerned, namely Quebec, the government of that province has not seen fit to enter into an agreement at all. There was some criticism of that fact the other day and this afternoon