

A. & L. S. Ry. Bill's Second Reading. History of the Road. Cross Point Wharf Vote.

(Special to Events.)
Ottawa, April 23.—When I last wrote you it had been announced here that the bill of the Atlantic & Lake Superior Railway would be withdrawn owing to the opposition of Mr. Marcell. The promoters of the bill subsequently changed their minds and last evening Mr. Ball M. P. of Nicolet moved the second reading and invoked the precedent that since 1868 no private bill had been given the six months hoist but all had been sent to committee to be discussed. He asked for that privilege for his bill.

Mr. Marcell, Bonaventure thereupon addressed the House as follows:—

Before this motion is put, I beg permission to say a few words. The hon. member for Nicolet (Mr. Ball) has certainly made out what appears to be a very strong case regarding the precedent in the second reading of private bills. There is not the least doubt that it is in the interest of the House and of parties applying to the House that private bills should be sent, as a matter of course, to committee to be discussed. But, in this case, we are dealing with a most extraordinary set of people; and I feel it to be in the interest of my country and the people I represent and only just to myself to bring the matter before the House, so that I may explain the peculiar position in which we stand. This application of the Atlantic and Lake Superior Railway—the name is not unfamiliar to the old members of the House—is connected with the old Baie des Chaleurs Railway, which, as most members are aware, has been before this House on several occasions during the last ten or fifteen years. The Atlantic and Lake Superior Railway Company was originally incorporated in 1893, for the building and operation of a line of railway from Gaspé Basin in the county of Gaspé, to Sault Ste. Marie. It was made up of eight different sections of road, including the Baie des Chaleurs, the Great Eastern, the Montreal and Sorel, the Montreal Bridge, the Ottawa Valley, the Pontiac and Pacific Junction, the Ontario Pacific and the Intercolonial section. The year following this incorporation, an Act was passed in this parliament authorizing the transfer of the Baie des Chaleurs and the Great Eastern to this company and the system was operated under the name of the Atlantic and Lake Superior. For some years the promoter of this company, Mr. C. N. Armstrong, who is well known to the members of this House, attempted in various ways to bring about the successful completion

of the undertaking. The charter of the Montreal Bridge Company was discussed last session in this House, and on that occasion, I believe, the House gained an insight into the methods that were employed. But for the moment I wish to limit myself more particularly to what happened in the county of Bonaventure. This new company, the Atlantic and Lake Superior Railway, took over the Baie des Chaleurs Railway, and constructed some eighteen miles from Caplan down to New Carlisle. In 1900, when I had the honor of being elected to this House, the powers of the company were lapsed and the subsidies which had been voted were also lapsed. But today we find this company coming again before parliament and asking for a renewal of its powers, and asking that we should extend for five years the time during which this undertaking may be completed, not only from Gaspé Basin to Sault Ste. Marie, but to enable this company to be incorporated and purchase the roads which are mentioned in the bill, which would enable it to reach as far as the Pacific coast over the uncompleted Grand Trunk Pacific.

I desire, Mr. Speaker, before they are given these powers that the House should be made acquainted with the manner in which they have dealt with the people of Bonaventure. The Minister of Railways, in December last at my request, and to give effect to the law which had been adopted here in 1900 reviving the subsidy, issued a circular calling upon the people of Bonaventure county more especially, and the public at large, who had claims on the Atlantic and Lake Superior Railway for the last section of thirty miles thereof, to send in their claims to the Department of Railways to enable him to distribute pro rata the \$16,000 which had been reserved from the subsidy for the payment of labour, board bills and material. What was the result? The Minister of Railways received during five or six weeks, claims amounting to \$245,000 a tabulated list of which has been prepared. These claims were sworn to, and were produced for that amount on thirty miles of the road. The claims that remain on the other seventy miles of road, not coming within the purview of the subsidy bill, were not filed. We have the cause reasonable cause, to believe that this company owes \$300,000 in the county of Bonaventure, to Liberals and Conservatives, poor men for the most part, labourers, local merchants, widows keeping boarding houses, and so forth. In spite of the fact that the

company owes to-day \$300,000, they have the audacity to come before this parliament and to ask for what practically amounts to a transcontinental charter. This company, Mr. Speaker, is practically out of business. In 1900 it transferred its charter to the trustees for the bondholders who are now operating the road. These trustees are represented in Montreal by Senator J. B. Casgrain, and the chief of these trustees is Mr. Joquin Gaudet, of London. These people do not make the application themselves, but it is the old company which has gone out of business, which has transferred its road, and which owes \$300,000 in my country alone, and who wish to comprise in this scheme the Montreal bridge, the charter of which has expired, and a portion of the Montreal and South Shore Railway, which has been transferred to other hands. All these are comprised under the general name of the Atlantic and Lake Superior Railway.

I therefore feel it my duty, in justice to my constituents and to inform the House of this state of affairs. Last year I had no opportunity of doing so, because the Bill was killed in committee without being discussed, since the very mention of the name was sufficient to cause the Bill to be thrown out. The year before, the trustees of the road rather than take advantage of the two years' extension of time which we had given them in which they could complete two or three miles of road. To day the Private Bill Committee of Quebec was called upon to consider another Bill introduced by these same people under the name of the Quebec and Oriental Railway Company. These people ask for power from the legislature of Quebec to build a railway from Rivière du Loup to Matapédia parallel to the Intercolonial Railway. They ask for power under a simple resolution of their board of directors to transfer to the Atlantic and Lake Superior and the Baie des Chaleurs Railway over to the new concern. If that should happen, Mr. Speaker, I wish to know in what position the unfortunate people of Bonaventure will be if this road is so transferred. Under all these circumstances I thought it my duty to call particular attention to this Bill. My country is not the only one interested, all the counties to the south of the St. Lawrence in the province of Quebec are interested in fact almost every county up to the real, and thence across the river, and from Montreal up the Ottawa valley, onto Sault Ste. Marie, and by their connections out to the Pacific coast. I think that before these people are allowed to leave Bonaventure they should settle with their debtors there. At the request of the government I will willingly consent not to move the six months hoist, because I know it is somewhat contrary to precedent. Now that I have laid down the lines upon which I oppose the Bill, I am satisfied to leave it to the Railway Committee, confident that ample justice will be done in the matter. For these reasons I will consent to the second reading of the Bill.

The MINISTER OF FINANCE (Hon. W. S. Fielding.) We had better be careful not to limit ourselves by establishing a precedent. There can be no question whatever as to the right of the House to reject a Bill, even a private Bill, on the second reading, if special and urgent reasons of a general public character be urged against it. It is quite conceivable that even a private Bill might be of such a character that the House would desire to reject it, and we should do nothing that would seem to imply that we are under any restriction in that respect. As a rule, these private Bills involve no principle, and I think it is only just to the hon. gentleman that this Bill should go to the committee. But we should not limit in any way by a precedent the right of the House to reject even a private Bill on the second reading.

The MINISTER OF RAILWAYS AND CANALS (Hon. A. G. Blair.) I think it is well for the House to reserve to itself the unrestricted right of disposing of a Bill on the second reading, and more especially so if the House is in possession already of sufficient knowledge with respect to the undertaking itself asking to be reinvested with further powers, to deal with it at this stage. I have no objection at all to the committee, but I may say to my hon. friend that I am sufficiently acquainted with the transactions of this Company and with the condition to which their affairs have fallen to make it impossible for me to consent that this Bill become law. I am of the opinion that not only the Bill in some portions should be rejected but that the Bill as a whole should be refused passage by this House. I think that would be the sense of the committee which will have to deal with the

matter if it should go to the Committee on Railways and Canals, but if the House feels that it knows enough about the transaction to say that it is useless to send it to the committee because there can only be one result of the reference, then, I think, my hon. friend will at once yield to the reasonableness of the position which is taken in regard to it and we can dispose of the matter now. We have a great deal of business to go before the Railway Committee and sending it unnecessary work is a thing, which, I think we ought to avoid doing. I am quite sure the committee cannot look with favour upon the passage of this Bill. The company is in an absolutely demoralized condition and it has left things in such a shape that great difficulty is experienced in unravelling its affairs for the purpose, not of trying to save something for the company, but of trying to get some small percentage of the wages which the labouring people who have worked on the road have earned paid to them. This is the condition in which this company stands. I do not think anything like it has been known in the history of railway construction in this country. Certainly there is no company that has ever approached parliament with less claim for consideration at the hands of parliament than the present company. It may seem to be a little ungracious to say that the hon. gentleman's Bill should not proceed further, but I think he must realize that it is useless to go further even if the House should be willing to accede to his request.

Mr. A. B. INGRAM (East Elgin.) Mr. Speaker, I am sorry to hear the hon. Minister of Railways and Canals (Hon. Mr. Blair) speak as he has done

in respect to this Bill. This is the first time since I have been a member of this House that I have ever heard anything of this kind in connection with the second reading of a Bill. The hon. member for Bonaventure (Mr. Marcell) is to be congratulated on the position he has taken. There are many hon. members of the House who would like to know something of this legislation and I think it is not too much to ask that the matter should be left to the Railway Committee. I am sure the Railway Committee will go thoroughly into the matter and if the statements made by the hon. minister are found to be correct, I am sure the Railway Committee is composed of men who will deal sunnily with the Bill if it is of the character described. If the statements made by the Hon. Minister are correct it will take a very short time for the Railway Committee to deal with it. I think it would be unfair to many of us here to kill a private Bill when the motion for its second reading is made.

The MINISTER OF RAILWAYS AND CANALS. I do not wish to press any objection to the Bill going to the committee. I merely stated what will be the probable result in view of the knowledge I have in a case of this kind. I would not press my objection to the Bill being referred to

the committee if it is the desire of hon. members that it should be. Mr. INGRAM. We have not all the knowledge that the hon. gentleman has in connection with this Bill, and for that reason we desire to have it sent to the Railway Committee. The MINISTER OF RAILWAYS AND CANALS. Very good. Motion agreed to, and Bill read the second time.

On the item for \$10,000 for the wharf at Cross Point which was voted without opposition by the House in Committee of supply Mr. Marcell made the following remarks:—

Cross Point is in Bonaventure County, opposite the town of Campbellton, N. B. the Restigouche river dividing the two. Campbellton is an enterprising and progressing town, and is the market centre for a large section of the country. The Restigouche is a tidal river. At low tide the steam ferry is unable to go beyond the middle of the river and for many years Mr. McAlister, who represented Restigouche together with the then member for Bonaventure, urged that a pier should be built here so as to enable teams to reach the middle of the river to connect with the ferry. I am glad to say that we have succeeded in getting this done. The word "isolated" was put in a couple of years ago because it was thought the wharf would be erected in

the centre of the river, but it has been found that this would not be practicable, and a wharf will be built from the shore to extend to the middle of the river. This expenditure of public money will be of great public utility and will give great satisfaction to the people in that district.

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