

Trans-Canada Highway Act

This brought the federal government share to \$250 million. Then the date-line for completion was set for the end of December 1960. Finally, under the third amendment, the federal government provided the provinces with additional help, agreeing to pay 90 per cent of construction costs on 10 per cent of the total highway mileage in each of the provinces.

Results proved that that offer, particularly under the third amendment I just mentioned, that is the 90 per cent formula, was welcomed by all provinces. And that is why the federal government expenditure increased considerably during the last two fiscal years.

Besides, on the minister's own admission and according to figures he gave us on introducing this resolution, construction work on the highway was stepped up from 1956 on. In fact, he said that from March 31, 1956 to this day, that is, in the last three years, \$236.5 million worth of works were approved, compared to \$225.8 million during the six-year period from 1950 to 1956.

I think it is only fair to say that the progress which has been achieved to date is largely due to the former Liberal administration, which had devised this new formula to help the provinces complete this highway as fast as possible.

When those amendments were introduced in March 1956—I remember it quite well for it was in a way, my maiden effort, having been entrusted by the minister on that occasion to introduce the resolution to the house—we ran into bitter criticism and blame by many members who are now on the government side. I do not intend, Mr. Chairman, to quote all the remarks made at the time, nor refer to the nice promises of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Fulton), of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Hees) and of the member who might become the parliamentary assistant to the present Minister of Public Works. However, on that occasion, they made no bones about charging the government of the day with doing too little and too late. They criticized us for not paying 90 per cent of the highway cost; some of them possibly went too far, even suggesting that the government should pay the whole cost.

We were accused of leaving the whole responsibility to the provinces, of refusing to take charge of the maintenance of the highway after its completion, and many other things that would be too long to mention at

[Mr. Batten.]

this time. In short, they claimed that the federal government contribution at the time was practically non-existent.

Even the present Minister of Public Works (Mr. Green), though a cautious man, felt obliged to join in the discussion and to berate the former government rather sternly. He might go over, with much interest indeed, the recommendations or proposals he made to the house on April 16, 1956. He might reread his own remarks to great advantage, not only to himself, but to the whole population of Canada if he decided, now that the matter is under his responsibility, to translate into fact the suggestions he made at that time.

Well, Mr. Chairman, that is why I was so disappointed, in reading this resolution, to find that the hon. minister and his government have so soon forgotten the great things they promised when they sat in the opposition. However, this comes as no surprise, because this is not the first time this government has forgotten its promises. There have been several cases since the government took office.

The act passed by the former government was not so bad, because not a single comma of the old act has been changed, and you have followed exactly the same procedure as we followed when we were sitting on that side of the house.

Moreover, Mr. Chairman, I feel that the members of the committee expected that when the minister would introduce this resolution, he would tell us what action the government has in mind in the way of assistance to the provinces for the improvement and modernization of our national highway system. Indeed, according to forecasts, the present trans-Canada highway will probably be completed by the end of next year. It seems to me then that we should know a year in advance what the government is planning for the future. I hope that the minister also will tell us if he intends to call a conference this year and bring together the provincial ministers of highways to discuss that matter with them—as was done in 1955 under the previous administration—so that they know of government plans for the future.

As the committee knows, one province only, the province of Quebec, did not join that program. It is certainly not because there is no need for it in our province as well as in the others, but because of the stubborn