

Trans-Canada Highway Act

were in the opposition and, had failed to carry out the suggestions they put forward when they were sitting on this side of the house. It seems to me that, after the many criticisms they expressed at the time, we might have expected that the federal government's contribution would be increased in proportion to the building cost of the highway.

I have no intention of mentioning the promises made by the key men of this government, nor all the commitments they made when they were sitting on our side of the house, because my leader, when dealing with the resolution yesterday afternoon, reminded the house of those promises made by the members of the Conservative party.

Mr. Chairman, I also thought that the minister would take this opportunity to tell us that the government intends to call a federal-provincial conference, as the previous government had done in 1955, as a result of which the federal government increased its contribution, with consequent greater activity in the construction of that highway.

The minister has no doubt been informed of the statement made by the president of the Canadian Construction Association who, speaking before members of that association at Calgary, in early January, suggested that a federal-provincial conference should be held this year to consider the national highways problem. He also added that, in his opinion, members present at this important meeting must work in close co-operation with Ottawa and the provinces.

On the other hand, according to the answer given by the Prime Minister (Mr. Diefenbaker) to the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Argue), some time ago, no official talks, so far, have been opened with the provinces in connection with that project. In my view, it is high time such a meeting were called, because two or three western provinces have already completed their highway, and it is desirable that plans be made for the construction of highways that would be in the national interest.

Mr. Chairman, I hope that in replying to the various questions that were put to him the minister will be able to give us more detailed information in this regard.

Mr. Chairman, the trans-Canada highway project, which is of major interest to all provinces of Canada, was launched 11 years ago. All provinces, except Quebec, shared in that project, through which millions of

dollars were made available to them by the government of this country.

Now, despite the many representations made by both the former federal government and the present one, the province of Quebec, under the specious pretext of autonomy, invariably refuses to participate, thus causing Quebec people to lose millions of dollars that the province could have spent on the construction of this highway.

Mr. Chairman, I am not a lawyer and furthermore, I do not pretend to be an expert on constitutional law. However, I have consulted a few of my colleagues who are lawyers and they told me that section 92 of the British North America Act, which sets out the powers of the provinces in different fields—

Mr. Asselin: It is section 10—

Mr. Bourget: Well, in subsection 10 of section 92 of the act, we find this:

Local works and undertakings other than such as are of the following classes:

Paragraph (a) reads as follows:

Lines of steam or other ships, railways, canals, telegraphs and other works and undertakings connecting the province with any other or others of the provinces, or extending beyond the limits of the province.

And now, I read paragraph (c):

Such works as, although wholly situate within the province, are before or after their execution declared by the parliament of Canada to be for the general advantage of Canada or for the advantage of two or more of the provinces.

Now, not being a lawyer, I can hardly interpret the law, but I do not know of a single member who objected to that section. Moreover, I stated reasons why that section did not prejudice the right of our country's government to build a national highway through the provinces. Besides, my hon. friends from the province of Quebec know that on various occasions the most autonomist papers in the province have blamed the Quebec government for its failure to participate in the trans-Canada highway project, one which, they pointed out, in no way affects our rights.

I now ask my friends from the province of Quebec, and more particularly those who are cabinet members this question: "If the Trans-Canada Highway Act is in conflict with the provincial autonomy, why do they not protest to the cabinet, and why do they not tell their fellow members that this legislation is a violation of Quebec's rights as a province?" I ask them to rise today and tell