

Our Ottawa Letter

Parliament Closed for Summer—Bought Rodolphe Forget's Railway and Put Thru Loans to G.T.P. and C.N.R.

Ottawa, May 20.—It has always been the practice at the capital to refer to the closing week of the parliamentary session as "the last awful week," but the week which brought to a close the session which terminated on Thursday was "the worst ever." The week was a repetition of the old, old story of railway legislation brought down in the dying days of the house, when everybody was anxious to get home, but in every way in which the matter can be looked at the record made was the worst yet achieved by parliament. As one parliamentary correspondent aptly put it: "The railways got everything and the people the rest."

For the vote of fifteen millions to the C.N.R. and eight millions to the G.T.P. parliament was pretty well prepared, but when this was followed by a proposition to purchase three railway job lots down in Quebec which Sir Rodolphe Forget has been trying to unload on the government for years, at a cost which will ultimately run from \$8,000,000 to \$10,000,000, altho the estimate introduced is for \$4,000,000 only, the disposition of the members of the house was to throw up their hands in despair and let the government have its way. Some comment was caused by the fact that while Sir Thomas White, minister of finance, piloted the C.N.R. and G.T.P. bills thru the house, he retired from the scene when this legislation was introduced, and Hon. Arthur Meighen with the acting minister of railways, Hon. J. D. Reid, assumed the chief responsibility for defending it. Later, however, he defended the estimate for \$4,000,000 that followed the bill.

The railways which the government is to purchase are three in number, the Quebec and Montmorency, running from Quebec to Ste. Anne de Beaupre, which has net earnings amounting to about one-half of its fixed charges; the Quebec and Saguenay, which runs from Ste. Anne de Beaupre to Murray Bay, which is not complete and never can pay, and the Lethbridge and Megantic, which was a lumber road till the timber along it was cut and which is now of little value. For this bunch of "lame ducks" the government is willing to pay the actual cost, not exceeding \$4,465,000, as valued by the Exchequer Court, and also to assume \$2,500,000 worth of bonds. It is estimated that it will cost \$1,000,000 or more to complete the Quebec and Saguenay line, and that when rolling stock is provided the government will have spent \$10,000,000 and assumed an interest liability of \$500,000. The problem has been briefly described as "paying nearly five millions in cash for the privilege of carrying \$2,500,000 worth of bonds."

Absolutely Indefensible

Hon. Geo. P. Graham said that he was not going to spend any time discussing the matter, but that it would not be defensible even in times of peace and prosperity. At the present time the proposal was a monstrous one for which no defence could be made. He had been asked by friends to take over the Lethbridge and Megantic when he was minister of railways, but had declined to do so. They wanted him to make it a branch line of the I.C.R., but it was of no value.

Hon. Arthur Meighen strove hard to justify the act of the government on national grounds. He said that the road would serve a country which had been at least sparsely settled for 150 years, and that they were entitled to some consideration. He expressed the hope that the roads would pay in the end and that they would form a valuable branch line of the N.T.R.

Hon. Frank Oliver was severe in his criticism of the government's plan. The 30,000 people to be served, he said, were better off than thousands of farmers in the West who are without railway facilities, because they have a water transportation service for six months of the year. The money could be spent to better advantage in completing some branch lines in the West and putting them in a position to earn

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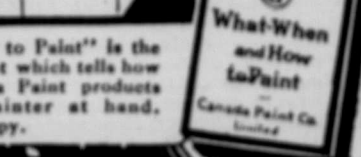
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