

*Canada Highways Act*

emphasize, which was that this proposition may take a burden off the government, but it does not take any burden off the people. It may make the estimates of this government that much less, but it is not by economizing that the government brings it about. It is merely by shifting to the provinces the load that, for general purposes and in the public interests, the federal government assumed in 1919.

This policy has resulted undoubtedly in a stimulus being given to road building in this country. We were very far behind the United States, and I do not doubt for a moment but that this country is suffering now, in comparison with the United States, in the retention of its population, in the attraction of new population, in business activities, from many reasons, one of which is the superiority of transit on the roads in that country. In Canada we are far behind them indeed, and the object of the legislation was to give such an impetus to them, and to have such a momentum aroused, that the provinces would go on and continue the work of roadmaking on a permanent interprovincial and lasting basis. It has had that effect to a degree. It has had it to a very considerable degree. I apprehend that the breaking of it off will result in the patch-work character of roads in Canada. I knew the time would likely come sooner or later when the matter would be again left to the provinces, but I fear the high cost of road-making of recent years—that is the extent to which that high cost was unexpected and was unprovided for—will all be reflected in a broken patch-work system of roads. We shall find the country with pieces of road here and pieces there, but nothing linked up. That will likely be one of the results; but whether or not it is justified, I want only to emphasize that it is not brought about by any economy of administration, it is simply shoving back on the provinces a load that in other days we undertook to carry.

Mr. FORKE: It seems to me, on this question of road building, after all the people pay. It does not matter whether it is the Dominion government or the provincial government, the money comes from the people. In connection with municipal affairs, I have had some little experience in building roads, and I do not know that government aid is just the best thing in some circumstances. I believe Manitoba would to-day be in a better position if it had a good many roads yet to build that it has already built, and built at a time when wages were high and expenses of every kind

[Mr. Meighen.]

enormous. With the filip that it got from advances from the Dominion government and advances from the provincial government, the idea was: Go on and build the roads; go after all those grants, and, of course, in that way the province ran into pretty large expenses and debts. I am a believer in good roads. The measure of a country's civilization is known by the way in which it goes about road building. At the same time I want to point out the fact that nearly all the big road building that has been done in the Dominion of Canada has been done at the most expensive time when it could possibly have been done, when help was scarce and when it cost an enormous amount of money to get the work done. In the municipality in which I was interested, we used to get the work done for 20 to 25 cents a yard; whereas during the time the great bulk of the road building was done, this cost 40 to 45 cents a yard. This shows the enormous cost of carrying on road building. The government in this case is neither to be praised nor to be blamed. I think about the right thing to do is to drop this policy in the meantime.

Mr. McMASTER: I think the government is to be congratulated on bringing to an end on fair terms a system whereby one power supplies the money and another power spends it. That system is essentially unwise. The leader of the Opposition (Mr. Meighen) seems in a half-hearted sort of way to blame the government for its declared intention of bringing this system to an end. In this country we have more or less gone transportation mad. We have applied to transportation systems, whether railway, canal or otherwise, far more of the public revenue than it was wise to do. I am thoroughly of opinion that we shall put the finances of this country on a sound basis if we adhere, more largely in the future than we have done in the past, to the principle which forces the government that is spending the money to the unpleasant task of raising the money. I cannot help congratulating the government on its declared intention, as I understand it, of bringing this system to an end. This legislation of 1919 may have had a good effect. It may, however, have had the effect of encouraging provinces to embark in schemes of expenditure which they did not want, and which it was unwise for them to embark upon. The question of roads is, in its primary aspect, the question of a good road to market, to church and to the station, and a great deal of our expenditure on great trunk highways which serve largely as plea-