

THE EVENING TIMES AND STAR, ST. JOHN, N. B., THURSDAY, JULY 28, 1921

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GIVING AWAY THE HARBOR.

With a fine but misguided benevolence Mr. M. E. Agar would make the federal government a present of St. John harbor if that were necessary to get the harbor commission act approved at Ottawa.

Mr. Agar admits he is a "hide-bound commission man." He wants the harbor developed and wants the government to do it.

Very well. But why does he not demand an act that would compel the government to do it?

The Times challenges Mr. Agar or any other supporter of the act to find in it even a hint that the government intends to spend one dollar of public money to develop the harbor. Mr. Elkin, M. P., admits that the act does not bind the government to do so. What it does is simply to provide for a commission of three men who will expend on the harbor just what the harbor revenue will bear. We can do that ourselves and still own the harbor.

Moreover, the commission cannot spend any money until it has got the consent of the government. Mr. Ballantyne told parliament that any borrowing of money by the commission must be "subject to the approval of the minister of marine and fisheries and subject as well to the approval of the governor-in-council."

Mr. Agar believes the harbor commission act binds the government to do anything in the way of harbor development, he is reading into it something it does not contain.

Mr. Agar believes the act binds the government to pay off the harbor bonds of \$1,340,000 as well as the \$650,000. But the city solicitor admits that the act does not say so, and suggests an amendment in the agreement to cover it. Such clause would have to go back to the parliament which passed the original bill. And if the advocates of commission do not agree among themselves as to what the act says, why ask the people to go to it blind? Why adopt an act that is not perfectly clear to everybody? Why take a chance? Safety first.

Mr. McLellan had no difficulty in disposing of the assumptions of Mr. Agar and the other advocates of the commission act by referring to the act itself.

But he did more. He pointed out that so far as the west side is concerned the tri-partite agreement is regarded by the C. P. R. as quite good enough to ensure the provision of all needed harbor facilities there; and that with respect to the east side the C. N. R. has had plans for extensive improvements made and they are only held up, as is the erection of the new railway station, by lack of funds. The defeat of the harbor commission act will not alter those plans, but the work of development will go on when funds are available. Everybody knows that at present the burden of national debt and expenditure makes it necessary to keep down public expenditure to the limit. Mr. Elkin is extremely pessimistic in this regard. Could a harbor commission find the money—especially when every dollar it spends must be recouped out of harbor revenue? For the act completely frees the government from any obligation to expend public money here. And it also puts on the harbor a burden of three and a half per cent. interest per year on the cost of the grain elevator and the government wharves, including the marine wharf. And Mr. Ballantyne more than once in the course of debate told parliament that the government policy hereafter will be that harbor commission ports must provide out of harbor revenues for all interest and sinking funds on new expenditure.

In making these statements the Times challenges contradiction. The suggestion or insinuation of selfish interests and selfish motives will not go down. There is the act, which speaks for itself, and it is upon the act, as Mr. Ballantyne told parliament, and not upon the principle of harbor commission, the people will vote next Monday. Bury the act and let the tri-partite agreement and the C. N. R. plans for the east side of the harbor be carried out.

Watch for a last minute scare about filling wharves and heavy taxation to keep them up. It is part of the campaign to frighten the taxpayers into voting for commission.

WHAT WE HAVE WE HOLD

Where are the legitimate successors of the men whose faith in St. John prompted them to tax themselves to build wharves and demonstrate the capacity of this port for national traffic? Where are the successors to men like Hon. William Pugsley and Sir Douglas Hazen, who as representatives of St. John prevailed upon the government at Ottawa to spend millions in harbor development in St. John without charging one cent of the expenditure against the city or harbor revenue?

Would either of these men have consented to come back to their constituents with a proposal to charge up against the traffic of the port three and a half per cent. on the cost of the elevator and wharves built by the government, as is enacted in the harbor commission act the people are now asked to accept? Their whole course in regard to the harbor of St. John proves that they wanted to see the port nationalized, but the harbor commission act throws the whole burden of maintenance and of future development, as well as that three and a half per cent. on past expenditure, upon the revenue of the harbor.

It is quite useless for the advocates of the commission act to assert that the burden is not thrown on harbor revenue. Any man who can read and understand English knows (if he has read the act) that it puts a full stop to government expenditure in this harbor along the lines pursued by Hon. William Pugsley and Sir Douglas Hazen when they in turn were St. John's representative in the government.

Let no citizen be persuaded for one moment to believe that the adoption of the harbor commission act would be a step toward nationalization of the port of St. John. It would be a step in the opposite direction. It would undo what the Laurier and Borden governments did, for it would throw on harbor revenue what has hitherto been borne by the country at large.

The suggestion that the government is to take over the harbor and develop it is utterly untrue. The government would appoint a harbor commission which would expend money to the extent the harbor traffic would bear. That is what the commission act provides—and that alone. We can do that ourselves and retain the ownership of the harbor.

What is it that we are asked to do? Simply to give a dying government the opportunity to provide for some of its friends, and leave the port to the mercy of whatever government may follow—the city having absolutely no power to do anything but ask that the terms of an act which the people accepted be carried out; and those terms throw the whole burden of future development upon the harbor revenue instead of upon the people of Canada.

The front door of Canada? Yes—and it is ours. What we have we hold until the port is nationalized. That is the spirit which should actuate the people. It is the spirit that animated St. John people in the past.

We are on the eve of fuller recognition of the national importance of St. John harbor. The C. N. R. has plans for new facilities. Why give up what the people have cherished so long? Why put a full stop to the work begun by the Laurier government and continued by the Borden government? Why tell the government we will hereafter be content with such development as the harbor revenues will pay for? That is exactly what the act provides—that and nothing more. Not a single advocate of the commission act can have the hardihood to deny it. All they can do is to assert that the government does not mean what it says.

The city council has not been discussing the principle of harbor commission since 1919—but the harbor commission act. The council finally committed the act to the people for their opinion. Finding that the act is most unjust to the city, an attempt is now being made to persuade the people they are only asked to vote on the principle. Let no one be deceived. The act is the issue.

Are you for the harbor commission act because somebody else is against it? Read the act and vote on the act. You owe that to your city.

WARM JOINT DEBATE ON HARBOR QUESTION

Miles E. Agar and H. R. McLellan in Lively Discussion on Merits and Iniquities of the Act at Last Night's Meeting in St. Vincent's Auditorium.

All the Money Must Come Out of Harbor Traffic—The Government Sets an Impossible Task for the Proposed Harbor Commission—The Mayor Presided—Audience Warmly Applauds as the Bargain Is Well Hammered.

The arguments of those in favor of harbor commission under the present act were badly shattered again last evening by H. R. McLellan who, in a strong and vigorous speech before 200 persons in St. Vincent's auditorium, related the perils and pitfalls for the city if the vote on Monday should be in favor of the act. Mr. McLellan, presided, and every chance was afforded those who wished to speak in the debate. The only one to accept the opportunity of voicing his views was Miles E. Agar, who went over the ground and made the previous speakers in favor of the measure.

Mr. McLellan, in his address, made a marked impression on the meeting and several salient points brought out by him were greeted by vigorous applause from time to time, and when he concluded he was again heartily applauded. Mayor Schofield explained that the meeting would be open for forty-five minutes to those who wished to speak in favor of the act and he called on Mr. Agar, who was applauded on taking the platform.

Mr. Agar commenced by saying that he was a "hide-bound" commission man. He spoke of various schemes that had failed in the past and said that the question of ownership was the question of the harbor. He said the government could do anything for the port as by the regular sale of the port was the result was that for a stipulated sum the city would transfer all right and title in the harbor to the King. He was satisfied that \$2,000,000 was a reasonable sum, and he would not believe that the government would not be able to raise the money. He said that the harbor was not to get one dollar for it, but the city was to get the benefit of the extension of boundaries, he said. The territory, the more chance to expand and improve, he claimed.

Mr. Agar continued by saying that he was a "hide-bound" commission man. He spoke of various schemes that had failed in the past and said that the question of ownership was the question of the harbor. He said the government could do anything for the port as by the regular sale of the port was the result was that for a stipulated sum the city would transfer all right and title in the harbor to the King. He was satisfied that \$2,000,000 was a reasonable sum, and he would not believe that the government would not be able to raise the money. He said that the harbor was not to get one dollar for it, but the city was to get the benefit of the extension of boundaries, he said. The territory, the more chance to expand and improve, he claimed.

Reads From Act.

He then read various sections of the act and explained the duties of the commissioners. He took the word "debentures" in the act to mean the \$657,000, and argued that the crown assumed all liability to the extent of \$657,000. He maintained that the government would not be able to raise the money. He said that the harbor was not to get one dollar for it, but the city was to get the benefit of the extension of boundaries, he said. The territory, the more chance to expand and improve, he claimed.

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The question, but I must be allowed to object that no diversity of opinion can justify the violation of the people's rights to all the information obtainable, nor any anticipation by those in authority and whose duty it is to afford every opportunity for obtaining such information, that the people do not want the information.

No diversity of opinion can justify the expression of opinions, in this particular case, without regard for the truth and the presentation of the case. It is to be recalled on facts and not faith in the possibility of having the act abrogated or subverted.

The question has been asked, "What is the big idea?" This refers to the effort being made by myself in an attempt to give you information I have secured, in order that you may intelligently weigh both sides of the argument, and intelligently record your opinions. It is my belief that you are entitled to every opportunity for enlightenment, as to the intentions of this act, and that if properly informed, you have a conscience to which an appeal can be successfully made.

I attended a meeting, last evening, in the Seamen's Mission, which was well attended, but from the remarks of the speakers who preceded me, and when describing the condition of our wharves, our harbor finances and the situation which you must accept, unless you voted for harbor commission on Monday next, you would be impressed with the idea that you were attending the burial rites of the city of St. John.

This is the language which has preceded the efforts of those who are in this position to make us to believe that the harbor is not to get one dollar for it, but the city is to get the benefit of the extension of boundaries, he said. The territory, the more chance to expand and improve, he claimed.

I do not propose to enter at length into the figures of the harbor, but in as brief a manner as possible, give you some idea of your harbor, its value, the cost of wharves and the cost of the harbor which you are asked to surrender the harbor on August 1.

Harbor Stands Alone.

The harbor of St. John stands alone in its efforts to be owned absolutely by the citizens of St. John, having been granted to them by royal charter in 1785, and it is not to be given or bartered away as a consideration for any individual or selfish interest. It is the property of the people of St. John, and it is not to be given or bartered away as a consideration for any individual or selfish interest.

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From 1880 to 1919 a loss is shown on operation after paying all the interest on a sinking fund of \$142,701.93 or an average per year of \$4,920.00.

During this time and in the years 1915, 1916, 1917 and 1918 there was a deficit of \$80,700.84, or an average of \$12,697.71, and in respect of this latter showing permit me to state that the deficit of \$80,700.84 in those four years in 1915, 1916 and 1917 of at least \$80,000, you would have had in lieu of a deficit of \$80,700.84 in those four years a surplus of \$30,509.16, and during the time from 1880 to 1919 instead of a deficit of \$142,701.93 an annual deficit of \$1,448.27 for 29 years.

What does the transfer offer you? The interest and sinking fund at present is, and this you are not taxed for, \$7,002.93. From the balance you would receive in receipt for 1920..... 7,551.93

The amount from which you are relieved at present..... \$85,154.80 In return you are handed the interest on \$85,154.80..... 32,864.12

The amount for which you will be taxed..... \$52,290.68

Admission by City Solicitor. These in favor of commission will say that you will not be taxed for the interest or sinking fund on the \$1,340,000 of bonds, and that the interest on the bonds of those who were present at last night's meeting can testify to the fact that the city solicitor admitted that the government had not accepted the liability for same, but that the government in good faith would be asked to do so.

Some have said that the fisheries are not accounted for in the harbor revenues and that I should not figure them. All I can say to this is that they will be taken from you, and that amount of revenue will have to be made up. Permit me also to say that if the harbor revenues had been added to the harbor account there would have been a very substantial surplus from harbor operation.

Yon harbor is all right and should not be disposed of at this time at any price. The more carefully I analyze the harbor the more I am convinced that I am persuaded to the belief that we should wait a while at least and enquire into the matter before we make any development by the C. N. R. and C. P. R. and for which we will not have to pay any taxes.

Why so much secrecy about the proposed C. N. R. development? Is it not public property, sure infor. admit. I can say to you, that I have personally seen the sketch of a proposed development of the harbor by the railway Department, and it is of such a nature as would surprise you.

Why has it not been proceeded with? For the same reason that the new station has not been commenced—lack of funds—and you are asked to rely upon the good faith of the government to develop the port while they are in a position that they cannot raise the money to supply their railways with proper terminal facilities.

Another question which might be considered. What about the right of the railways to expropriate any property they may require? They are authorized to do so and will do so irrespective of the commission or not. This may be a good business stroke for cheap purchasing of harbor property.

A Risky Plan. We have been anticipating proper development of the harbor for fifty years, and now on the eve of securing it, we are asked to give the harbor away, and at the same time lose our only lever to pry out from the people of upper and western Canada the money we are entitled to under Confederation.

Mr. Baxter says that we must have faith in the government's good intentions, and Mr. Elkin says that all business is conducted on good faith. If Mr. Baxter is sincere in his statement and belief that the government will exhibit that good faith, what about all the effort being made for Maritime Union in order that we may exert more influence at Ottawa in order to obtain our rights?

Let us see how much faith is exhibited in the act which you are asked to approve of on Monday next, and who is responsible for the act?

Messrs. Wignmore and Elkin admit their responsibility for the acceptance of the act, stating that it was the best

they could get, and that they accepted it for the people of St. John. Well, if it is certain that they were not bargaining for rail wire or milk.

When the matter was under discussion and the price was being criticized, Mr. Copp, of Westmorland, was very anxious to know if the people of St. John were willing to accept any such amount, and Mr. Wignmore stated that the Board of Trade council and past presidents of same make up the act; but what about the membership of the Board of Trade? Is it to be presumed for a minute that because the Board of Trade council promised to support harbor commission without making any qualification as to the nature of the act, and then learned that they had committed a mistake, that the membership is in favor of the act? Utter rot!

And so far as the Globe is concerned in attempting to influence the public mind by the publication of such a list, there will be a rebound in the nature of a list which I propose to submit, showing that only members of the Board of Trade and most prominent business men are quite willing to express their disapproval of harbor commission under the present act.

And let me here suggest that the Board of Trade in its operation has not always displayed a monopoly of business acumen. We should be thankful, in knowing that the fate of this harbor does not rest in the council of the Board of Trade. You will have some trouble in selecting from the list persons who are not selfishly interested, either commercially or politically.

In regard to the shipping men, the two first names are members of the Board of Trade Council and the third is a prospective member of the Harbor Commission.

Now let us look for a moment at the act, and the claims made that the mayor and city solicitor will see that everything is satisfactory.

"And, whereas the city has agreed to make a transfer of the said rights, powers, titles and interests aforesaid to his majesty under the conditions hereinafter set out."

This is the wording of the act, and the conditions are inserted. The idea that the mayor will not sign the transfer is balderdash as no matter what the provincial act says in regard to the plebiscite, the federal act is the badge of authority under which the government must act. It is also stated that the act will be changed by parliament. Who could expect the public to accept his guarantee for that? Who knows that there will be another amendment with the same government in authority? What if the Progressives should obtain control? You know Mr. Farmer, and he is supposed to be a very conservative man in regard to expenditures. What about another party in power and one which may regard the matter from its own viewpoint and especially when the present government has left them such a legacy of debt. How much influence would the gentleman have with either of these parties in power?

Analyze the Act.

Without repeating what I have said before, permit me to give you the deductions which have been arrived at by those who have studied the act very closely and with no selfish interest at heart but simply with the idea of protecting St. John and its citizens from being the victims of another attempt to take from us the only asset left.

Mr. McLellan here analyzed the act as he had on former occasions. After stating what the act really was, he proceeded, for the benefit of those who had not attended Tuesday night's meeting, to deal with the statements made in last night's Globe and the contentions that the act could be changed.

Referring to the mayor's statement, that if citizens do not vote for harbor commission on Monday next, he, the mayor, and the commissioners, would be forced to make some very large expenditures immediately, and that citizens would have to be taxed for them, Mr. McLellan said don't you figure on any such being attempted.

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He made some remarks about the way money had been spent in the last three years by those in city hall and warned his auditors not to be afraid of large expenditures for the West Side. He said that at the next meeting he would welcome questions as to his statement and his authority.

The future of St. John was at stake and the people should make a choice and give the harbor away under this act. He asked them to believe in his sincerity and contradicted the report that he wished to become mayor.

Mayor Makes Protest.

At the conclusion of Mr. McLellan's speech the mayor said that any statements he had made in regard to the matter he would stand behind. He did not consider that Mr. McLellan had treated him courteously in asking him to be chairman and then making the remarks he did about him. Mr. McLellan replied that he might have overstepped the bounds of courtesy, but he thought the mayor was open to criticism, no matter what position he occupied. The mayor said that he did not object to the criticism, but the manner in which it had been made.

Mr. McLellan said that the government would be equitable trustees of the corporation. He said that the government would be responsible for the act. Mr. McLellan said that he did not think the government would be responsible for the act. Mr. McLellan said that he did not think the government would be responsible for the act.

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