

THE CANADA HIGHWAYS BILL.

SECOND READING—CONSIDERED IN
COMMITTEE—THIRD READING.

Hon. Sir JAMES LOUGHEED moved the second reading of Bill 152, an Act to encourage the construction and improvement of Highways.

He said: Honourable gentlemen, this is a Bill in which it is proposed to expend the sum of \$20,000,000, for the improvement of highways, this sum is to be distributed to the various provinces of Canada. It is proposed, in the first place, to pay \$80,000 to each province; and after that a distribution, extending over a period of years, shall be made, based upon population and the contribution made by each of the provinces towards the building of highways.

This Bill is modelled very much on the lines of the Agricultural Aid Act. It may be said that education is a matter peculiarly within the jurisdiction of the provinces, and that the Dominion Government really took a unique position, and one perhaps not warranted, in extending to the provinces the aid which was given under the Agricultural Aid Act. But, notwithstanding the criticism to which that Act was subjected, it has been found to contain a very wise and desirable policy.

This Bill is along somewhat the same lines. It has been subjected to a good deal of criticism on account of an apprehension that seems to exist that the Federal Government is invading the provincial sphere.

It may be argued, and I think unanswerably, now that we have communication between the provinces, that the construction of highways is interprovincial rather than local in character, and that it is peculiarly in the Federal interest, as well as in the provincial interest, that the building of good roads should be carried out by means of some understanding between the local Governments and the federal authorities.

I think the machinery of the Act will work out in such a way that no conflict will ensue between the Federal Government and the provincial authorities. The work will be carried out by the provincial authorities subject to the approval of the Dominion Government, both as to the scheme and as to its details.

This matter has been discussed at very great length in the Parliament of Canada on several occasions, particularly in 1911, 1912 and 1913. But this Bill departs to some extent from the features of the legislation of those days, concerning which it

Hon. Sir JAMES LOUGHEED.

is arguable that the Federal Government was entering upon the provincial domain and assuming a responsibility peculiarly provincial in character. That argument is scarcely applicable to this Bill.

As to the propriety or the policy of advancing this money at the present time, very much has been said. It may very well be said that, owing to the enormous obligations which the Government of Canada has assumed, arising in and growing out of the war, this is a very inopportune time to be prodigal in voting large sums such as are involved in this Bill. But it may be replied, and with very great force, and I think it is an unanswerable argument, that at the present time it is highly desirable that both the provincial Governments and the Federal Government should enter upon an extended programme of public works in the interest of the people of Canada. If there is any problem facing us at the present time of which we are apprehensive, it is the problem of unemployment caused by the demobilization of the overseas forces and the conditions growing out of the war. The question of carrying on public works is a very serious one for the whole Dominion. Owing to the war, there has been a suspension for at least five years in the carrying on of our public works, and there could not be such a suspension, involving a suspension of the expenditure of public money, without the public feeling it very seriously. While Canada, since the cessation of the war, has been able to grapple with the question of unemployment, yet it is felt that in the near future the situation will grow more acute, and that it is desirable that every provision should be made to meet it.

In passing the Bill now before us, we shall place upon the statute book a measure which will afford employment that will be fairly equally distributed over the whole of Canada, and that will assist in meeting the very urgent demands which may ere long be made upon the people of Canada.

Hon. Mr. BOSTOCK: As the leader of the Government has said, this legislation has been before us on several occasions in a different form. The question was very thoroughly discussed in this Chamber, and very strong exception was taken to the form in which the measure was previously presented. The objectionable features of previous measures, according to the leader of the Government, have been left out of this Bill.

I regret that, on account of having only seen the Bill just before we met, I have not