

ture must be avoided, since interference by the central power in such matters could produce disastrous results. So it is up to the authorities of the province of Quebec to solve any problem which may arise from the existence and maintenance of tolls on bridges used by the general public. It was, of course, the government of Quebec under a Liberal administration that abolished tolls on all bridges which were the property of the province. When there were bridges which were not the property of the province, the owners of which collected tolls, the provincial government intervened, as was its privilege and also its duty. Such bridges were expropriated, as was the case in connection with what were known as the Bellefeuille and Plessis-Belair bridges. Following this procedure, tolls on those bridges were abolished, and the public finally obtained free access to them.

The same reasoning should be applied to the present case, and it is up to the provincial government to solve the problem of tolls on the Victoria and Jacques Cartier bridges. It is the duty of the government of that province to enter into negotiations with the central power to find ways and means of abolishing these tolls. For instance, the provincial government might very well follow the suggestion, which has been made time and again, that is, to offer to purchase the Jacques Cartier bridge at its present value. Of course the province should not be asked to pay the actual cost of construction, or the replacement value of the bridge. What should be paid is the actual present value, taking into account the condition of the bridge and the revenues derived by its owners. If the government of Quebec has not intervened it is because it has failed in its obligation to the population affected by this situation, or because it does not wish to put an end to the collection of tolls on the Jacques Cartier and Victoria bridges.

This question has been raised often in the provincial legislature. On the last occasion, when it was raised by a member of the opposition, the government of that province took the attitude, which it has taken time and again in other matters, that it would do nothing at all. It will surprise no one if I say that the government of Quebec gave its answer through its admittedly leader, the all-powerful Hon. Maurice Duplessis. Since the government of that province seems to be more or less a one-man government, and since that man does not happen to be Hon. Mr. Talbot, minister of highways, of whom the question was asked, the premier himself, speaking in the name of all the members of his cabinet, took the attitude that nothing would be done.

[Mr. Pinard.]

Since the initiative was not his, he replied by declaring that the solution of such a problem was of no interest to him. When a question to be decided is within the competence and authority of the Quebec legislature he would like to decide it by himself; but when such a question does not give him an opportunity to play politics the premier of Quebec ceases to shout about the rights and autonomy of his province. Since he could not resolve this difficulty, he resorted to his habitual method of playing politics and took the attitude that nothing at all could be done. So that once more the government of Quebec refuses to cooperate with the central power, and this question of abolishing tolls on the Victoria and Jacques Cartier bridges remains unsolved.

But as I said before, Mr. Chairman, the matter also falls within the jurisdiction of the federal government, because the two bridges of which I am now speaking are indirectly the property of this government since they are under the administration of two central bodies, the national harbours board and the Canadian National Railways. The Victoria and Jacques Cartier bridges are known and used by a great number of persons in the city of Montreal and the surrounding district, and, of course, by a great number of tourists who come to the province of Quebec each year. For those who live in the region of Montreal there is a popular way to describe these bridges. When one refers to the Victoria bridge he would refer to the old bridge, and when he refers to the Jacques Cartier bridge he would mention the new bridge. I think those expressions are not entirely accurate, because the Jacques Cartier bridge has now been in operation for more than seventeen years. Of course the expression is accurate when used with reference to the Victoria bridge, because it has been in operation since 1860.

I wish to discuss the Victoria and Jacques Cartier bridges separately, and will be as brief as I can in both cases. In order to be clear, and also out of respect for old age, I will first give reasons for the abolition of the tolls on that ancestral enterprise called the Victoria bridge. I am sure some hon. members who are not familiar with the situation will be astonished to learn that, despite its advanced age, the Victoria bridge is still a toll bridge. I will say more and state that in my opinion it is a bridge in connection with which the collection of tolls has become most remunerative, since on that bridge tolls have been imposed on all sorts of vehicles for the last ninety years.