

The Colonist.

THURSDAY, MAY 19, 1898.

PUBLIC EXPENDITURE.

There will be much discussion, and we may assume considerable adverse comment, over the very large sum which the legislature has been asked to appropriate this year. We shall in subsequent articles treat the matter in detail, for we freely acknowledge that it becomes the duty of those who support the government to satisfy themselves that the unprecedented outlay contemplated is in pursuance of a wise policy and is wisely distributed. Neither the government nor any of its friends have a right to expect anything in connection with these outlays to be taken for granted, except that the money will be honestly used for the purposes for which it is voted. The wisdom of the incurring such obligations and the judgment shown in selecting the services to which they are applied will form, and ought to form, a principal subject of discussion before the voters between now and the election.

To-day we propose to speak only of the policy of large expenditures. We maintain that such a policy is a good one and that the people expect it. The popular demand would not be of itself a sufficient justification, unless the government were prepared to show that the exigencies of the province call for large outlays; but the existence of a general desire on the part of the people that extensive public works shall be undertaken is an important element in the case. Under our system of responsible government it is right that the ministry and the legislature should meet, if it is possible, what public opinion expects. It is at the same time the duty, first of the ministry and next that of the legislature to see that in devising plans, whereby effect may be given to the popular will, undue burdens are not laid upon the taxpayers and the money spent is not wasted. The Colonist wishes to make its position clear on these points, which it desires to approach in such a way that any of its readers, who follow what it says, may arrive at the same conclusions.

It would be quite correct to say that the public have demanded large expenditures in so many words. What has been insisted upon has been that the government should adopt a progressive policy and should leave nothing undone to advance the prosperity of the province. The papers supporting the government have taken this position, as likewise have those in opposition. The latter have used, as one of their chief grounds of complaint against the government, the alleged indifference of the ministers to the needs of the province. Almost daily for months and years, for that matter, the people have been told by the press supporting the opposition that the government was criminally neglectful of their requirements. From every section have come demands for expenditures, and it may be said with perfect truth that very few of them have not been such as might properly be complied with, if the finances of the province would admit. In the house there has been the same desire shown. From all sides, from friends as well as opponents, from old residents in the province and from new comers, from the mining district and from the farming sections, from rural and city communities, from every interest represented in the province the same demand has gone up. This was to be expected. The province of British Columbia is exceptional in many ways; but in none so much as in the manner in which population has spread over a vast area difficult of access and equal to an empire. Four years ago, this province had about 100,000 white inhabitants, and they were spread over 400,000 square miles of territory, thus giving one person to every four square miles. Not only was the population so small in its relation to area, but it was spread broadcast over a very large portion of the provincial domain. It is impossible in a newspaper article to make the forces of this consideration fully evident. A speaker with a large map could make it clear to an audience, but in no other way can a correct idea of it be obtained, except by actual study of the map by those who desire to be accurately informed. Perhaps when we say that during the last four years expenditures have been made by the government of British Columbia within this province at points twelve hundred miles apart in a direct line, and that the distances between the outlying portions of the occupied area of the province measure from six hundred to a thousand miles, and that all this vast region, except the few small areas within cities and municipalities, has been administered from Victoria, and everything the people need in the way of public expenditure, every permanent improvement, every repair on public works, the whole administration of justice and the maintenance of education have fallen upon the provincial revenue, readers will begin to better to appreciate why the demands upon the public treasury have been many, and why, though the very great majority of them were wholly reasonable, it has been impossible to try to meet them all. No estimate of the position of the government or of the policy of expenditure, which necessity compelled it to adopt, can possibly be correct unless we endeavor to realize what these few bare facts imply.

It is true that many of these demands have come from communities which seem to promise little as yet in the way of direct returns; but with the conspicuous example of Kootenay before their eyes, no government would be warranted in saying that the expenditures in such places ought not to be incurred. For years Kootenay received far more from the province than it contributed, but royally, indeed, has it repaid the outlay. We suppose it would be difficult to find anywhere a more conspicuous example of the wisdom of spending money in the

promise of the future than Kootenay affords, or a greater incentive to the adoption and energetic execution of the kind of policy which public opinion in British Columbia has insisted upon. The Colonist has had excellent opportunities of hearing the claims advanced by the various sections of the province to assistance out of the public chest. It therefore knows how well-founded the very great majority of them are, and it feels able to form a tolerably correct idea of their merit. With these facilities for forming an opinion, the Colonist long ago reached the conclusion that the popular demand for extensive public works was wholly justifiable, and that the duty of the government was to discover ways and means of meeting it.

To carry on public works there must be an expenditure of public money. A progressive policy means that something must be done; if anything is done some one must be paid for doing it. If the work done is of permanent value it is fair that the cost of it should be borne by those who will benefit by it. It is impossible to execute a progressive policy if the outlay is confined to what can be raised from year to year out of taxation. Results would be reached too slowly. Moreover it would be unfair to ask those parts of the province, which have already contributed the cost of their own development, to stand the expense of developing new districts. Hence money must be borrowed for improvements, so that the districts improved can themselves bear the burden of the cost. This is evident that the demand for public improvements must be met by borrowed money, and it is a fortunate thing for British Columbia that its finances have been so well administered and its great natural resources are so highly appreciated that the money market stands ready to advance what funds are required at a low rate of interest.

The existence of a demand for public works being demonstrated and the propriety and possibility of the necessary money being raised by loan being established, we have next to consider whether the government ought to have yielded to the demand and asked the province to authorize the requisite loans. The government is not responsible for the demand, but it must be prepared to account to the people for having yielded to it. Was such yielding justifiable, or ought the government to have turned a deaf ear to all entreaties and allowed matters to drift along in the old way? This is the crucial point in the whole matter; for if it was right to yield, it was right to borrow the money to meet the outlays which would have to be provided for. The question may be stated in this way: Are the resources of British Columbia such as to warrant the incurring of future liabilities for money to be expended on public works? It would hardly be wise to attempt to give an answer in detail to this question at the close of an editorial article, and its treatment must be left for a future occasion; but this much may be said—that if the fulfillment of the promise of the future may be measured from the achievements of the past, the natural wealth of our province is equal to that of any country in the world of similar area, and if we cannot afford to take the risk of its development there is no country anywhere that is worth developing.

The Columbian tells us that when it spoke of people who would be helped out by the Yukon railway it referred to the transportation companies and others who have invested heavily on the strength of the Yukon trade. We do not suppose it would be a crime for the province to desire to aid enterprises in which large capital is invested and by which employment is given to hundreds of people. Indeed our impression always has been that it is a commendable thing for governments to second the efforts of capitalists and the commercial community. But granting that this is an error, we defy the Columbian to point out even one transportation company which has invested one dollar on the strength of a railway being built from the coast to Lake Teslin. The New Westminster paper also refers us to the Gazette for the names of people who have been taking time by the forelock by locating town sites. There is no law in this province to prevent any one from locating Crown lands. Hitherto it has been considered a commendable thing to do so. If, however, the Columbian knew what it was talking about it would know that the opposition to the proposed railway came largely from some of the very people who have been locating on possible townsites.

The Chilliwack Progress declares that it will depart from its neutrality in provincial politics and support Hon. Mr. Turner at the coming election, and it gives the following reasons:

NOT A DEFICIT.

Members on both sides of the house talk of the "deficit" at the end of the present and next fiscal years. There will be no deficit, that is not what is ordinarily meant by a deficit. When people talk of a deficit, what they mean is that the ordinary expenditures are greater than the ordinary revenue. This is not the case in British Columbia. If a merchant takes in \$100,000 a year and expends \$90,000 he has a surplus of \$10,000; and if he borrows \$50,000 and puts it into new stock, he does not convert his surplus into a deficit of \$40,000. His surplus remains the same. He has greater liabilities than before, but he has more assets. That is how it is with the province. Its public works are its assets and money out of loans expended on them ought not to be added to the expense side of the account unless the amount of the loans goes to the revenue side. As a matter of policy, ordinary and extraordinary expenditures ought to be kept separate, but they never have been in this province. Government members have been careless in following the

opposition in using the word "deficit," which is misleading and is employed by the opposition for the purpose of misleading the public.

If the public accounts for the present year were taken and every item properly chargeable to capital were taken out and the remainder were charged against revenue, there would be found to be a surplus, which has been used in meeting expenditures properly chargeable to capital. In other words the province has a surplus every year and is expending that surplus in meeting capital expenditures, that is in additions to the assets of the province. This view of the case ought to be kept to the front, for we are satisfied that comparatively few people have it in mind. It is a matter of very great importance that the impression that the province has had a series of deficits to meet should not be taken to go abroad without the explanation given above.

THE PROVINCIAL EXPENDITURE.

In his speech on the supplementary estimates yesterday, Mr. Semlin said that he could see nothing in the province to warrant the large outlay to which the government stands pledged. In these few words the leader of the opposition stated the difference between the two sides of the house. The government and its supporters believe that the needs and prospects of the British Columbia warrant extraordinary expenditures at the present time; the opposition does not, or at least claims that it does not, which amounts to the same thing. There is no middle ground. Either the natural resources of British Columbia are such as to warrant liberal expenditure in public works for its development, or they are not. If they are, then the policy of the government deserves the support of the electors; if the are not, if the province has reached the same of its advance and all that we are warranted in doing is to sit with folded hands and wait the slow progress that can be made out of the expenditure of such surplus of taxation as may be available after the ordinary expense cost of administering the government has been provided for, then the voters will do us right to condemn the present ministry for the policy it has adopted in this regard.

We do not desire the word "extraordinary," as applied to expenditure to be misunderstood. By it is meant those outlays which would not be necessary if the province were standing still and no preparation or provision had to be made for expansion. For such expenditures the revenue of the province is amply sufficient. If the voters should determine that a non-progressive policy should prevail and that all the government ought to ask the legislature to do should be to keep things going just as they are, making no new roads, building no new bridges, erecting no new school houses, court houses and other public institutions, assisting no new railways, making no provision for the needs of new and as yet poor localities, it would doubtless be possible to so cut down expenditures that the taxes might be considerably reduced. If the legislature of this province should follow the example of those of the other provinces and cast the expense of maintenance of public works and buildings, that of administration of justice for the most part and a large share of the cost of education upon the province, it would be possible greatly to reduce the annual estimates. The hon. provincial secretary has on several occasions pointed out in the house that about \$200,000 will meet the outlay for public repairs to public works. The opposition members think this amount is small; but Col. Baker believes it to be ample, and doubtless he is correct. For the purpose of the argument we are now making it would be better to assume that he underestimates the amount, but we will accept his figures. If to this \$200,000 we add that portion of the cost of the administration of justice, of education and of the maintenance of hospitals and institutions, which in other provinces are borne by the municipalities, we will get at least \$500,000 which might be cut off the annual appropriations made by the legislature; but such a reduction would not lessen the taxes a dollar, for the expense would have to be met just the same, only out of taxes collected and expended locally. It is highly desirable that the people should realize these facts. The ordinary expenditure of British Columbia includes fully half a million dollars, which under the system in force in every other province would be met by the local county or township organizations. A large portion of the cost of carrying on the general government is also due to the fact that the expenditures in question are regulated from Victoria. If the whole province were organized into counties or townships and the cost of repairs to public works and the other items mentioned above were thrown upon them, as is the case in other provinces, the annual expenditure of administering the provincial government could doubtless be reduced by upwards of \$600,000; but we repeat that the taxes of the people would not be reduced by that amount, because local taxation would be necessary to meet the liabilities thus thrown upon the several localities. We mention this matter only in passing for the information of those persons who may not be aware why a province of such a limited population calls for such large amounts for ordinary expenditure. Extraordinary expenditure means something outside of these things. It means new public works, some of which may seem far ahead of the requirements of the locality in which they are made. Such expenditures are made on the faith of the future, and we repeat that if none of these were to be undertaken it would be possible to reduce materially the taxes of the people.

What swells the expenditure of the province and makes it necessary to borrow money is the demand for extraordinary outlays; that is for works and

services in anticipation of increased population, increased business prosperity and hence increased revenue. The government believes such expenditures are warranted by the great resources of the province. Mr. Semlin speaking for the opposition declares that they are not. We do not think that any friend of the government will fear the result of an appeal to the people upon this issue.

But while Mr. Semlin and the gentleman who vote with him are frank enough with their avowal of the general proposition, to which he gave expression yesterday, when it comes down to extraordinary expenditures for their own constituencies, they become converts to the government policy. Mr. Graham, for example, is eager enough to have extraordinary expenditures made in East Yale; Mr. Kellie thinks they are all right in North Kootenay; the members from the Fraser valley believe they are necessary in that part of the province. The whole opposition army can be captured in detachments on the government proposition if it is confined in its application to the localities which they represent. It is only when it is applied to the province as a whole that they become reactionary. If now and then, for the sake of variety, some gentleman on the left of Mr. Speaker would rise in his place and protest against an expenditure in his own constituency, because there was nothing in that part of the province to warrant it; if Mr. Semlin, for instance, would object to any further extraordinary expenditure in North Yale on the ground that he could see nothing there to warrant it, we would feel compelled to credit him with sincerity, though at the expense of his judgment. But we never hear anything of this kind. In private the gentlemen of the opposition are like the horse leech's daughters. Their cry is "Give, give."

It is only when they talk to the country that they become the incarnation of economy and cry out for retrenchment. We suppose that while politicians are politicians these inconsistencies must be expected; but the people would think more of those who are guilty of them if, in attacking the government for doing what they in private ask to be done, they would not belittle the future prospects of the province, as Mr. Semlin did yesterday, or decry its credit, as Mr. Graham did. We repeat that the large outlays of this year and next year are based upon faith in the future of the province and a realization of the urgent needs of the present. No friend of the government ought to feel called upon to ask the voters to apologize for them. They are made in response to popular demand and in accordance with the views entertained by nine-tenths of the people as to the resources and capabilities of British Columbia.

IMAGINATION AS A FORCE.

Cecil Rhodes, speaking at a meeting of the South African Chartered company, referred to the great projects which he said meant "Africa for Great Britain." His enthusiasm provoked a smile, whereupon he added that what he predicted might seem like a flight of the imagination, but such things were the practical facts of American development. Rhodes is working to accomplish a great ambition, which he confessed in the words above quoted. It may be a dream, but it is on such dreams that the foundations of empires rest.

Canada needs imagination and enthusiasm. What these two forces have done for the United States it would be impossible to measure. The poet who sang: "No pent-up Ulica contracts our powers;

A whole unbounded continent is pure," sounded the keynote of the marvellous progress which his country has enjoyed. We do not say that he gave the movements its original impetus, for that would be untrue; but he certainly caught the spirit of it and helped forward it more than any act of congress that ever was passed. We all recall the expression: "Let me make the ballads of a nation; and I care not who makes its laws." It is on the same principle that we say that the man who catches the imagination of the people by a phrase, which chimes with the beating of the national heart, introduces a new factor into the national life. We find an example of this in the Dominion in 1878, when Sir John Macdonald told the people that he was about to inaugurate a "national policy." The phrase caught the imagination of the people. No one was quite sure what it meant, probably Sir John as little as any one. Certainly some memorable telegrams, which he sent out before the election, show that at that time it was not intended to be what it finally became. But the people wanted something of the kind. The confederation of the British North American colonies had been accomplished and Canada had been written across the maps from ocean to ocean. The people felt that they possessed a nation. What better could be offered them than a national policy? By the way, the expression, "From Ocean to Ocean," was another that appealed to the imagination of the people and did much towards making the taxpayers ready to assume the burden of the Canadian Pacific.

Canada needs a new stimulus to the imagination of her people, and the man who is fortunate enough to discover it will control the future. The leaders in public life are to-day simply playing "wailing parts" upon the stage. They are filling a gap. For a time it looked as if Sir Wilfrid Laurier was about to speak the new watchword; but he did not, and probably the reason was that the thought of the people has not crystallized itself, so that expression could be given to it. We think the new word will soon be spoken, for there are indications that the new departure is at hand. What will be its nature, and which of the men now in public life will speak it?

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An Examining Dawson, bearing and probably the Klondike following into

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