

*Municipal Improvements*

This parliament has assisted somewhat in the propagation of that sentiment. In my own experience I remember that I investigated expenditures made under appropriations voted by parliament, in the time of the late Sir Robert Borden, for the construction of roads and bridges in some of the provinces, especially in the province of Nova Scotia; and I do say on my responsibility as a member of this parliament that the expenditures so made were profligate and excessive and brought no real return commensurate with such expenditures. Those who expend moneys, for the raising of which and the payment of interest on which they are not responsible, do not consider such expenditures as public trusts in respect of which they, as honourable men, are bound to exercise a due degree of care and thrift.

In my opinion, as I have expressed it here, the British North America Act would not require very much in the way of amendment or modification if it were construed, interpreted and applied according to the views expressed at the time by those who framed that great constitutional measure. But for the confusion which does exist, this parliament and previous parliaments in my opinion are to a large extent responsible, because these parliaments have undertaken to interfere with provincial matters and have accompanied that interference with solatiums, sometimes amounting almost to bribery, in the way of financial assistance given to purely provincial projects.

I think there is no doubt, in view of the final decisions of the courts, that such appropriations as we have made for old age pensions and the like are not appropriations for subjects which are within the legislative competence of parliament. Every time we have interfered, out of a desire to assist in ameliorating the condition of some portion of the population in the provinces, we have brought this federal government deeper and deeper into the difficulty with the constituent provinces, or at least with some of them. At the present time in Canada there are provinces which are boasting of surpluses in their revenues, some very considerable surpluses. Under those circumstances why should we not refrain from expending federal money upon objects which are within the exclusive jurisdiction of such provinces, more especially since those are the very provinces which indignantly deny our right to interfere by legislation, administration or otherwise with the sovereign constituent rights of those provinces? Therefore it seems to me that a measure such as this is likely to sink the parliament of Canada and the Dominion of Canada more

[Mr. Cahan.]

deeply into difficulties which should be solved before a large measure of financial relief to the municipalities, such as this, is enacted by the parliament of Canada.

The hon. gentleman has said—and I am merely summarizing his words—that this is to provide employment by enabling municipalities to construct income-producing municipal works. There are municipalities which will be entitled to come in and ask for relief and credit from the dominion treasury that are far more capable of providing such funds than the dominion government is capable. There are great cities in which there are great volumes of traffic and trade, large amounts of property, many men and corporations of wealth, which are able to provide for all the proper and serviceable municipal facilities required. There are provinces also which are able to provide not only for themselves as provinces but also for the municipalities under their care, supervision and keeping. Why should they not be called upon to provide such assistance?

We took over, first, temporary relief for unemployment. We have increased that in various ways by appropriations of various amounts for public works, some of which could not by any stretch of the imagination be included under the heading of federal public works. Then we have gone to the extreme in providing for the relief of the indigent and unemployed in provinces which boast of their surpluses and of the splendid state of their exchequers as compared with that of the dominion, until the idea seems to have permeated the minds of the whole population that the finance minister of Canada is in control of a money chest into which he may dip his arms to the elbows for the relief of every person, company, corporation or municipality that thinks it is in need of relief, utterly regardless of the fact that our condition as a dominion is, it seems to me, approaching a perilous point, where we are not able to provide, by revenues derived from federal taxation and from other proper sources, sufficient to pay our annual expenditures, much less to pay for the capital expenditures which we are making by appropriations of funds borrowed from time to time.

The important point at the present time is this: Until the Rowell commission, so-called, has reported—and I do not wish to discuss that commission or its work—and the government has decided as to the measures it will adopt in accordance with that report, this appropriation is ill-timed and inopportune. Because we must at a very early day come to a clear and definite understanding