

Trans-Canada Highway Act

The Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. member for Papineau has the floor.

(Translation):

Mr. Meunier: Mr. Chairman, those people cannot see the difference between true autonomy and phony autonomy.

Mr. Tremblay: Order.

Mr. Meunier: Mr. Chairman, I was saying that for the general good of the people of Quebec province, the provincial authorities accept federal subsidies for railway crossings; however, when it comes to the trans-Canada highway, they turn down the subsidies.

Those are the points I wanted to make, Mr. Chairman. In accepting those subsidies from the federal government as regards railway crossings, the province of Quebec is yielding nothing of its autonomy, but in accepting subsidies for the trans-Canada highway, it considers that its rights would be infringed upon.

It may be, Mr. Chairman, that the matter of calling for tenders and the matter of asphalt thickness would make things difficult for the provincial authorities in their dealings with the federal government, but for the general good of the people of Quebec, the provincial government might perhaps unbend a little. I know the Minister of Public Works to be a persuasive and convincing man. I therefore hope he will succeed in urging upon the ministers and members of the Quebec provincial government that it would be to the advantage of the province to use that money for building the trans-Canada highway, and that no encroachment upon the province's autonomy would be involved.

Mr. Chairman, sometimes a good case is lost through the stubbornness of the other party, because sound reason and logic do not always prevail. Therefore, if the Minister of Public Works should fail in his efforts to have the Quebec government join in the trans-Canada highway construction scheme, I would ask him to extend the life of the act beyond December 31, 1960, because during the year 1960 a government that really understands the interests of the people of Quebec might well be elected.

(Text):

Mr. Argue: Mr. Chairman, the resolution before the house is one that commends itself to members of all parties. I want to associate myself with others who have asked that the program be extended to a national highways system. I think the arguments in favour of that being done are cogent. I believe that the Minister of Public Works is aware of the great advantages that would

accrue to the Canadian economy from an expanded highway program. The statements made by various cabinet ministers when in opposition as to the great need for action at this time have already been placed on the record many times.

I have notice that members of the Liberal party have been quoting resolutions passed at their annual conventions, Liberal policy on transportation drafted in the 1958 annual convention—

An hon. Member: You were there.

Mr. Argue: I was there for a few minutes and I enjoyed myself. I had my picture taken under a sign reading, "Pearson for Progress".

Mr. Bourget: The best convention ever held.

Mr. Argue: It may have been the best convention you ever held but the net results were very poor, judging by the election.

The policy statement found on page 39 of the report reads:

Assistance to the provinces and territories for developing roads to the north and consideration of a policy of a federal-provincial-municipal highway program aimed at providing a modern network of trunk highways.

We now have the programs of the two old parties. When the Conservatives were in opposition, they were in favour of a national highway system. They wanted an expanded program. When they become the government they continue the Liberal policy that was in effect. Members of the Liberal party, once they became the opposition, see the error of their ways in 22 years of government, and they have broadened their policy. They have had a national convention, and now they have a Liberal vision of an expanded highway program. The trouble with the two old parties is that they always have a visionary program when they are in opposition.

Mr. Pickersgill: That was not true in 1949 when this program was started.

Mr. Argue: This was a good start, and for 22 years this is what has been done. The Conservatives are continuing it. The point I am making is that this was all that was done. Once the members who were in the cabinet of the previous Liberal administration got to the opposition side of the house they took an entirely new attitude. It is surprising the amount of knowledge they have gained merely by taking a few steps from one side of this house to the other. I think that talk in opposition and inaction in government is scarcely the thing the Canadian people desire.

I am most proud that the province of Saskatchewan, where we have a C.C.F. government, has the distinction of being the first province in Canada to complete its section of