



Hon. Mr. Veniot Presents New Highway Act In House

Important Provisions Outlined by Minister of Public Works; Public Utilities Commission, Assessment, Hospital and Other Business

Fredericton, March 13—Highway acts have come and gone and, in the course of their peregrination they have proved a source of embarrassment to more than one New Brunswick government, and some of them have inspired emotions stronger than grief in the bosoms of the taxpayers.

One of the worst of the lot was a heritage of the present government from their predecessors in office and reform was demanded and needed. The government has answered the demand, and today Hon. Mr. Veniot, minister of public works, submitted to the legislature a bill to provide for practically a new highway act. In the preparation of the measure Hon. Mr. Veniot has shown a thorough knowledge of highway conditions, familiarity with the weakness of the present system and indubitable courage in providing a remedy. He frankly confessed that some of the sections might be too drastic, announced his entire willingness to accept suggestions from both sides of the house and asked the support of all the members in producing a thoroughly workable act.

Frederic Foster introduced a bill providing for a loan of \$45,000 to the New Brunswick Public Utilities Commission for the purpose of defraying two-thirds of the cost of a physical valuation of the plant, etc., of the New Brunswick Power Company. The city of St. John is paying the other third and the commission will repay their loan by a levy on the Public Utilities of the Province, spread over two or three years.

Petitions were presented from St. John for legislation to permit a change in the assessment act, by Dr. Roberts and relating to the general public hospital by Dr. Campbell.

Fredericton, March 13—Assembly chamber, March 13—The house met at 8 o'clock.

The bill to enable cities, towns and municipalities to contribute aeroplanes to his majesty's army was read a third time and passed.

Mr. Hetherington presented the report of the committee on contingencies.

Mr. Hetherington from the committee appointed to present the address to the lieutenant-governor submitted his report and his honor's reply, which was as follows:

Mr. Speaker and Gentlemen of the Legislative Assembly:

I thank you for your address and beg to assure you that I entertain the fullest confidence that in all your deliberations you will be guided by a most earnest desire to promote the happiness and prosperity of the people of the province.

(Sgd.) WILLIAM PUGSLEY, Lieutenant-Governor.

Notices of inquiry were given as follows:

By Mr. Murray (Kings) for Wednesday next, as to salaries paid and the number of officials in the agricultural department; also as to expenditures made by the farm settlement board during the year; and also as to how many applications for land have been made by returned soldiers.

By Mr. Crockett, for Monday next, as to the cost of the sanitary survey and investigations, conducted by John Hall, and as to whether Mr. Hall is a British subject.

By Mr. Smith (Carleton) for Tuesday next, as to the amount spent on ordinary roads last year, and as to the total amount charged to the roads since last session and after the close of the fiscal year, and the number of permanent highways constructed.

Would Change Names.

Hon. Mr. Robinson presented the petition of W. O. Swartz, praying for the passage of an act to enable William Lloyd Swartz and William Allen Swartz to change their names.

Mr. Crockett presented the petition of the Fredericton city council praying for the passage of a bill relating to the valuation of the assessment of Fraser Limited.

Hon. Mr. Roberts presented the petition of the city of St. John praying for the passage of a bill to amend the St. John Assessment Act of 1909. He also presented the petition for the passage of a bill relating to certain short term debentures of the city of St. John.

The Highway Act.

Hon. Mr. Veniot presented a bill entitled "An Act Relating to Highways." In doing so he said he felt it to be his duty to explain for the benefit of honorable members the change it was proposed to make with respect to the administration of the highways of the

province. He proposed only to deal with the subject in general terms at that stage, but promised when the bill came before the house for discussion at a later stage to furnish honorable members with ample reasons for the proposed changes. He was having the bill printed and hoped to have it ready for distribution within a short time, so that honorable members would have an opportunity to study and digest it before it came up for second reading. He wished to say that the bill embodied in its provisions the programme relating to highways, which the then opposition had adopted prior to the last election and on which they were returned to power by the people.

Speaking for himself and colleagues he wished to say that there were perfectly honorable members, opposite put forward the view of making the act more perfect. He regarded the road act as one of the most important pieces of legislation that could come before the house. Although he had only been in office a short time, he had managed during the last year to visit nearly every section of the province. He had travelled 9,800 miles in automobiles and had had experience with all kinds of roads, so he might claim to be more familiar with the roads than many honorable members of the house. Acting upon the knowledge that he had gathered during his travels, he had endeavored to place in the bill certain sections to meet the conditions as he saw them.

One section of the bill proposes to divide the roads into two classes—trunk roads and branch roads. This division was to be made by the minister of public works, and before acting it was his intention to discuss the matter fully with his colleagues on the government side, as well as with the honorable members opposite. Having adopted the principle of road divisions, it was only fair that those familiar with conditions in the different sections of the province should be consulted and their views obtained. While he differed in politics from the honorable members opposite he did not propose to allow that fact to interfere with his accepting the suggestions they might have to offer, with the view of making the act more workable.

In 1913 the then opposition had adopted the principle that to make highway legislation successful it was necessary to get as close to the people as possible. They had also taken the ground that road supervisors should be elected as school trustees are now elected. Therefore to carry out this principle section 6 of the bill provides for the election of road supervisors for branch roads at a public meeting of the ratepayers called for the purpose. With regard to great roads the supervisors would be named by the minister of public works. It might be asked why a distinction should be made? In reply he might say that the government had adopted a policy for the construction of permanent roads and it was provided that the work should be done under the supervision of the minister of public works and the road officials named by him.

Supervisors' Accounts.

Section 8 of the bill provides for the publication annually of the accounts of supervisors. Under that section he is required to post his accounts in public places throughout the district and to submit a copy to a meeting of ratepayers. The same principle would apply to any supervisor who is spending money on the trunk roads of the province, and in addition to posting his accounts he must forward a copy to the public works department. Statute labor will be made optional under the new act, differing in this respect from the present law. At a meeting of the ratepayers to be held in the month of April they shall decide the matter by a majority vote on a resolution, a copy of which is attached to the bill. If they vote to adopt statute labor, it will be carried on the same as under the old act. If they vote against statute labor there will be none performed in that particular district.

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Provision is also made for the adoption of statute labor with respect to trunk roads. A meeting may be called on the petition of fifteen ratepayers and the matter decided by a majority vote of those present.

Section 16 of the bill deals with the matter of road taxation. Under the existing law the road tax on property is twenty cents per one per cent, or five cents on the \$100. The new act proposes to increase this to the extent of one-quarter of one per cent, or five cents on the \$100. The poll tax is now \$1.50, but the new act will increase it to \$2. It is scarcely necessary to give in detail reasons for the increase. The cost of labor was much higher now than was formerly the case. A few years ago they could hire men to work on the road for \$1.75 a day, but last year they paid \$2.25 and \$2.50, and in some cases as high as \$3. Where men on the roads get increased pay it would only be reasonable that there would be an increase in the road tax to provide for the upkeep of the highways.

While the road tax had been increased, it was also proposed to increase the allowance to those who performed statute labor. The bill allows twenty cents an hour for labor, thirty cents for a man with a horse and proper tools, and forty cents for a team.

Road Tax Collections.

The bill also changed the method of collecting the road taxes. Under the existing law the tax was collected by the supervisor and paid over to the men who performed the work. In his travel through the province last year he had studied this method and arrived at the conclusion that a different plan should be adopted. In many cases under the existing act there was a duplication of accounts, and whether it was intentional or not he was not in a position to say. The supervisor sent in accounts chargeable to the municipal fund, which were paid by the secretary-treasurer. Frequently accounts for the same work were charged to the provincial fund, which meant that province and municipality paid for the same work. Although he had acted with great care in separating these accounts in his department, he felt that the law should be changed.

The bill providing that the collecting should be done by the collector of rates who, after receiving the money, would place the same in the hands of the secretary-treasurer who would deposit it to the credit of the province. He was hopeful that under the change in the system, the delinquent taxation list would be done away with. At the present time he was safe in saying that the sum of \$80,000 was outstanding in delinquent road taxes. He thought that the ex-minister of public works would bear him out in the statement that a change in the system of collecting was essential.

It was proposed under the new system to have the supervisor report monthly to the department of public works and he wished to add that money collected in a particular district would be expended for the improvement of the road in that district.

In regard to section 79 of the bill he said it gave authority to the minister of public works to inaugurate a patrol system. This would probably cause his honorable friend from Carleton to smile, but he wished to say that it made no difference to him from which side of the house the idea had originated, as it was undoubtedly a good one. He had given it a trial in a small way last season and had got the best results. That factor determined him to ask the legislature to adopt the system similar to that which prevailed in Maine and other states. He

had visited Maine last summer and had traveled over 500 or 600 miles of roads in order to investigate the patrol system. He had also asked his road engineer to go there and study it. It had taken four years to perfect the system in Maine, but he was hopeful of having one in this province, equally as good, at the end of two years.

The Rule of the Road.

An agitation had been going on in this province for several years with the object of changing the rule of the road. In the maritime provinces, as was well known, the rule was to turn to the left, while in Ontario and Quebec they turn to the right. He had got in touch with Hon. Mr. Armstrong, minister of public works and mines, Nova Scotia, on the subject and was informed by that gentleman that there was also an agitation in that province to change the rule, but that no definite decision had yet been reached. The matter will come before the Nova Scotia legislature this session, and Mr. Armstrong had promised to promptly advise him (Veniot) of the decision reached. It was an important matter and he did not feel that he should take it upon himself to make the change without taking the opinion of the legislature.

There were other provisions in the act to which he would like to direct the attention of honorable members. He had noticed when traveling through the coal districts of the province that mine operators, when carrying on excavations, did not give much concern to the roads which might be injured by their work. The bill proposed to hold the coal companies responsible for any injury resulting to the roads, and if they declined to make repairs, in order to do so, the public works department could have the work done and make a charge against the companies.

A similar plan would be adopted with respect to railways. It was proposed to have the railways give more attention to the condition of the roads at level crossings, and a clause had been inserted in the bill dealing with the matter. He had noticed also that when railways, in changing grades of lines running parallel with highways, were inclined to disregard the effect such changes would have on the roads. He had inserted a clause in the bill which he hoped would bring about an improvement in regard to this important matter.

Greater Care Urged.

While the people of the province were clamoring for good roads, it might not be out of place for some of those who have occasion to use them to exercise a little more care. There were some manufacturers of lumber, who take no heed of the damage that might result to roads early in the spring, so long as they can haul heavy loads over them. A clause would be inserted in the bill to meet this condition of affairs. He regretted that some automobile owners did not have the regard for the roads which they should have. Some owners of heavy cars seemed to take delight in driving over the country roads early in the spring, when the frost is coming out of the ground. He hoped, with the aid of his colleagues and the honorable gentlemen opposite, to be able to find some means to give better protection to the roads of the province.

On the conclusion the minister said he recognized the right of honorable members opposite to criticize but he wished to say that if they had any suggestions to offer, which would have a tendency to better any clause of the bill, he would be only too happy to accept them.

The bill was read a first time.

Hon. Mr. Foster introduced a bill to provide for the payment of an annuity to Jane Dickinson, relict of Joseph Howe Dickinson, late clerk of the executive council.

Hon. Mr. Foster introduced a bill to authorize the province to loan certain monies to the board of public utility commissioners. He explained that the board had asked for a loan of \$4,500. The plan of the St. John Power Company was now being examined and the law authorized the board to make a levy upon the company.

The levy will be made in a short time and will cover a period of two or three years. The money to be loaned by the province was needed now to defray the cost of the appraisal.

The bill was read a first time.

Hon. Mr. Tweeddale laid on the table of the house the report of the director of elementary agricultural education.

Mr. Campbell presented a petition for the passage of an act relating to the general public hospital, St. John.

The house went into committee, with Mr. Leger, Westmorland, in the chair, and agreed to the bill to enable cities, towns and municipalities to assess for aid granted to the city of Halifax. The bill legalizes all municipal grants made in aid of the sufferers from the disaster of December 6.

The house adjourned at 4.30 p.m.

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Soldiers Comforts Association.

At the monthly meeting of the Soldiers Comforts Association yesterday afternoon it was decided to defray the extra cost of wool by holding a tag day this month. It was announced that there would be no refreshments for the workers, but that the money which would go for this would be placed in the fund.

The wool reports for February showed 2,751 pairs of socks knitted, 26 pairs of mittens, twenty-five trench caps and two scarfs. The treasurer's report showed donations for the month, \$468.81; donations to the yarn fund, \$848, and expenditures from this fund \$863.91.

Kansas City is shortly to host a bond issue of \$1,200,000 to improve the water supply.



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