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COLONIZATION ROADS EXPENDITURE.

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The opening up for settlement of the newer parts of the Province is perhaps as important a duty as any performed by the Government. This necessitates the construction of colonization roads, which not only affords access and intercommunication, but gives to the settlers an opportunity of earning a few dollars. From 1872 to 1897 the Liberal Government has constructed an annual average of 182 miles of new roads; it has repaired an annual average of 413 miles; it has erected an annual average of 3,285 feet of bridges; and it has spent on these roads and bridges in the new districts an annual average of \$110,246. To sum up: In 26 years it has built 4,725 miles of colonization roads; it has repaired 10,737 miles of roads; it has erected 85,421 feet of bridges, and has spent in the above works \$2,900,000.

When one considers the number of men employed, the amount of money disbursed, and the thousands of hands through which it has to pass, mistakes might well be looked for, and the vigilant eyes of the Opposition might well have found them out, for each member or candidate of the Conservative Party is a Vigilance Committee of one to watch the expenditure in his county. Every Session of the Legislature the accounts for the various roads are asked for and brought down to the Public Accounts Committee, and there the Opposition members go through them hunting for frauds and mistakes. This keen inspection has gone on year after year, but there has not been found any fraud, or the misappropriation of one dollar, or any account which has not been properly vouched for. Indeed, a few years ago, the late financial critic of the Opposition, Mr. Clancy, had the whole expenditure on colonization roads since 1872 under his personal investigation in the Public Accounts Committee. He spent the whole Session examining witnesses and prying into accounts, and in this enormous expenditure, extending over so long a period, everything was found to be vouched for with the exception of two cents!

Speaking generally, prior to the Session just closed, the Opposition seemed to have abandoned all points of criticism except

two—the expenditure of the public money of the Province through the Government instead of through the municipal councils, and the wages of two or three overseers.

The Hon. Mr. Gibson, Commissioner of Crown Lands, has in the House fully replied to and refuted the Opposition criticism, yet it may be presumed that the same unfounded statements and deliberately misleading assertions will continue to be made during the campaign.

With respect to the expenditure of colonization road moneys by the municipal councils, at the last Session of the Legislature the Opposition moved that these moneys, where municipal government existed, should be handed over to be expended by the municipal authorities. It might be a sufficient answer to say that the House, by a majority of 26, negatived the motion, that one Conservative and eight Patrons voted with the Government, while only one Independent and one Patron supported the Opposition, but as this seems to be one of the two small planks to which the Opposition cling, it may be well to examine it. First, the Government is responsible for the appropriation it has to come down to the House and show where the money is to be spent and the necessity for it, and it is responsible for the application and proper expenditure of the sum voted. Under these circumstances why should it abdicate its supervision in favor of a body over whom it has no control and who have no responsibility either to it or to their constituents for the proper expenditure of this money? Why should it leave to these irresponsible parties the direction of the expenditure, the selection of foremen, the purchase of supplies, the fixing of wages, and probably the employment of only those favorable to the existing municipal authorities? It is an axiom that those responsible for the expenditure of moneys should control the spending. If that supervision is taken from them, they must be absolved from responsibility. Curiously enough, too, where counties or townships have made grants to roads to supplement the Government grants, they almost invariably ask that the Government shall take charge of the work and spend the money, and where this has been done no complaints have been made. Nor must it be overlooked that a very large proportion of colonization road money is spent where there are no municipal councils, so that in any event the Government would still have control of the major portion of the expenditure. Obviously, the Opposition have not thought this matter out.

With respect to the other little plank, the Opposition seems to have centered its attacks on the payment of a few overseers made five or six years ago, holding up unfairly a few cases as

being highly improper and as specimens of how the whole of the road money was expended, saying on one occasion that 90 per cent. of the money went to the road bosses and only 10 per cent. to the working men. Let us see how wild and unfair the statement is. With respect to the proportion of the moneys going to the overseers and laborers in the year just closed, it cost less than 10 per cent. of the whole expenditure to oversee it, and 90 per cent. went to the laboring men, the very opposite of what the leader of the Opposition stated as being the case. As to the overseers, the criticisms were confined largely to the case of one man, Mr. Wickett. This overseer resides in the district of Parry Sound. He is a man of energy and skill, and an expert hewer and framer and a first-class mechanic. When a bridge is to be repaired or replaced, he proceeds to the spot, sees what timber, iron and other materials are required, and advises the Department. Then he proceeds to get out the timber or make contracts for the sawing of it. Then he has to inspect it, measure it and take it over, and all this before there is any necessity for engaging a man to assist him. If he has to take the timber out of the bush he engages a few men to chop it down while he himself hews it. When he has it all on the ground, with one or two men he frames it, and when he has the timbers all ready to put together he engages the required number of men to erect the bridge. Perhaps the gentlemen of the Opposition do not understand this but any farmer who has built a barn will understand it, for the process is the same.

The particular case most dwelt upon by Mr. Whitney and his followers is that of the Musqueosh bridge, and it may be taken as a typical case. In Hamilton Mr. Whitney put the charge as follows: "Musqueosh bridge, pay of overseer, July 23rd to September 6th, both days inclusive, 49 days at \$3.50, total \$171.50; amount of pay list \$92.93." The inference which he tried to force his hearers to draw was that it cost \$171.50 to oversee the expenditure of \$92.93. Now, what are the facts? This particular bridge was erected by contract a great number of years ago, and cost \$1,500. In 1890 it became necessary to replace it, as it was in a dangerous condition. Mr. Wickett was selected to rebuild it, and came to Toronto to consult with the Superintendent of Roads as to the character of the bridge, and other matters. This being decided, he had to prepare the specifications of the timber, make lists of the other materials required, and plan out the work. He advised that considerable expenditure could be saved if certain bolts, rods and other irons which had been taken out of another bridge were used, and he was instructed to go and select such iron as could be economically used. He did so,

and arranged for its transportation. He then had to let the contract with a sawmill for the cutting of the lumber required; and while waiting for the lumber to be sawn he was instructed to examine two other bridges in the locality, which were said to be in a dangerous condition, but his services in connection with that were included in this particular account. He then returned to the Musqueosh bridge, inspected and measured the timber which had been sawed, and when it was all delivered it became necessary for the first time to engage a few laborers to assist in framing and preparing the timber for erection. When the timber was all ready to be put into the bridge he engaged a sufficient number of men to put it together. The result of his work was that a bridge, which originally cost \$1,500, was replaced by another equally as good and serviceable a bridge for \$988.

It has necessitated some detail to trace the work that Mr. Wickett did in connection with this bridge before engaging labor but the circumstances in this case are practically the same as in the other cases referred to by Mr. Whitney, and it has been thought well to enter into it fully. Had Mr. Wickett engaged some ten or fifteen men, and kept them idle under pay and stood round with his hands in his pockets watching them, presumably Mr. Whitney's criticism would never have been made, as it is only to the non-employment of labor he seems to object. But because Mr. Wickett did all the framing and preliminary work himself he is charged with extravagance and being a Government heeler. The curious fact of it is that Mr. Wickett was a Conservative when he was engaged, and was employed for his energy and skill, and not for his politics.

It will thus be seen how little fault can fairly be found when these are the only charges which can be brought, and it is necessary to rake the ashes of the past for them. The leader of the Opposition and his friends are never tired of praising the honest, economical and efficient Government of Sandfield Macdonald. Let them rake in the ashes of his road expenditure and see what they will find.

If they look on page 34 of the Public Accounts for 1868, they will find the following item: "Hon. J. Carling, to pay expenses incurred in survey of colonization roads, \$4,172 84." Let them investigate that item, and they will find that the survey consisted of a party of excursionists on a specially-chartered steamer, provisioned and supplied with wine and whiskey galore, with band and bagpipes, and that the only surveys made were through the bottoms of tumblers on the deck of the steamer. When Mr. Whitney and his friends find an item like that charged to colonization roads under the Hardy Government they will have some ground for criticism.