Alarming Situation Revealed In Public Works Department Under The Lea Administration

Taxpayers' Money Squandered Right And Left In Big Spending Department Under Minister McIntyre. Misstatements Regarding Conservative Road Policy And Work Under Stewart Government Are Nailed By Dr. W. J. McMillan In Budget Debate.

Provincial Legislature, April 29.

Speech in Budget debate by Dr. W. J. P. MacMillan, Charlottetown, continued from Saturday's Guardian:

"I now want to deal with the Department of Public Works. My. hon. friends say that they have a wonderful Minister; that he is a big man physically and mentally. They should have gone on to say that he is a big man financially and has been a big expanse ever since he has had anything to do with the administration of the Public Works Department. They say that the present Government has done more for the roads of this Province than any Government since Confederation. The Premier also declared, in his speech on the Draft Address, that this policy of good roads was begun in this Province by the Liberal party. **I want to tell him that that is a statement which cannot be borne out by fact.** His Statement was that the Dominion Highway grant was in operation in Nova Scotia before it was introduced into this Province, and for that year's jobs in the highway improvement he blames the Conservative Government of the day. You would think that a gentleman occupying the position of Premier of the Province, a man so specially ordained by Providence that he was started out in life "in his sock feet, would certainly be able to make a correct statement on a matter of such importance as this. **Yet when he makes that statement that this highway improvement scheme was in operation in Nova Scotia one year before it was here, he makes a statement which is absolutely incorrect, and I propose to deal with it in a manner that will leave no doubt about it.**

"I shall read first from the files of the Patriot newspaper. Here is a heading under date of July 3, 1919: "$20,000,000 to be paid over in Five Years to the different Provinces." And on July 7, 1919: **"Highway Aid Bill passes its Third Reading in the House."** That should satisfy my hon. friends as to the date on which this scheme was introduced in the Federal Parliament.

THE CONSERVATIVE ATTITUDE

Now I come to what happened in this Province. At the session of this Legislature in March, 1919, we have the speech of the Premier, the Hon. A. E. Arsenault, on the Draft Address, in which he states:

"It is the intention of the Dominion Government to appropriate the sum of $20,000,000 for the improvement of roads, this amount to be expended at the rate of $4,000,000 a year spread over a period of five years. That bill is now before the House; I do not know whether it will go through or not. It is up to each province to say whether they will take advantage of this amount of money or not. When the question came up, it was a question of how this money would be divided among the provinces. The first proposition was that the division be made according to population. There were those members in the Dominion Government who would not agree to that. They said that if the money was divided according to population, the bulk of it would go to the larger provinces.

"Some years ago when it was proposed to make a grant for agriculture an amount of $20,000.00 was set aside for each province, and the balance given on a population basis. The same basis was proposed to be used in the division of the road grant. It was then proposed that of this grant $4,000,000 a year, the sum of $40,000 should be granted to each province and the balance divided according to population. The members who were friendly to the small provinces prevailed, and the end of it was that the appropriation was made on the basis of a flat grant of $80,000 to each province, and the balance divided according to population; and on that basis Prince Edward Island would be entitled to get as much as the larger provinces of Ontario and Quebec, and I understand that on that basis this Province would be entitled to the sum of $120,000 or $125,000 per year for five years. However, in order to get that grant of $120,000 or $125,000, which is a free gift from the Federal Government, the province must put up 60 per cent. to the Dominion Governments 40 per cent.

"It is my conviction that if an intimation is not given from a province that it intends to take advantage of this grant, that province will forfeit the amount, and its share shall be divided among the other provinces. It would require a great deal of consideration before a government of any province could well refuse to take advantage of this amount. . . .

Answers Anti-Road Propaganda

"There has been a sentiment spread in this Province; I don't know whether my hon. friends of the Opposition are responsible to any extent for that sentiment, that it was the intention if this grant was accepted to build a highway from Tignish to Souris, an automobile speedway so-called and to spend the money there and leave all the adjoining districts—some of them fifteen or twenty miles distant—and to impose taxes on them and leave them without benefit of this road improvement.

"Now if there is such a sentiment abroad, I want to say here today that the Government has no such idea in view, or in mind, as the building of a speedway or permanent highway from Souris to Tignish. . . .

"The intention of the Government would be to connect, by improved highways, the different points of the Province — the different settlements with shipping points, and once the different settlements of the Province are so connected we would have a main improved highway. So that, if you had improved highway five or six hundred miles long, there would hardly be a man distant from any of those highways, more than a very few miles.

"Moreover, once those highways had been improved with this money, it would release the other road money for the purpose of improving the byways; so, eventually, you would have all the roads uniform. The improving of the highways is a matter more or less of engineering skill. Before any attempt at improvement could be entered upon, it would be necessary to employ competent engineers to go over the roads, ascertain the grades and survey the roads, in order that proper drainage could be obtained, because the first principle of road making, as I understand it, is through drainage, and unless you have thorough drainage you could not have good roads.

"Another matter would be to make the roads, in as far as possible, of uniform width, because we know of many roads that are not safe by reason of being too narrow. You must have the proper drainage; you can have the proper grading of the road, it would then be necessary to ascertain what hills there are in those roads, in order that the hills may be cut down to make the grades less heavy. The low places will also need attention; after being thoroughly drained they would have to be built up properly in order that you would have good, hard surface. The culverts along these roads would have to be taken up and replaced with permanent structures, as well as the small bridges.

"This program, I have reason to believe, will be acceptable to the Federal Engineer in charge of the road grant. This money must all be spent under the approval of such Dominion Government engineer. No roads can be touched until the plans are submitted to the engineer and approved by him, and after the work has been done, he must also pass upon the work so that, so far as the Dominion is concerned, they are protected in the expenditure of that money. . . .

NO SPEEDWAY CONTEMPLATED

"It may be asked: What about the towns? In building highways of that kind from centre to centre, the main highway will necessarily pass through the towns. What will be done in such cases? I am not in a position to say definitely, because, after all, I don't know whether the grant applies to the towns, but so far as we are concerned, provided it meets with the approval of the Dominion authorities, we would be willing to allow the amount of 40 per cent to go on the main highways passing through the towns, in order to build them up. It would not involve the province in any expenditure, and if the town through which the highway would pass were willing to put up the 60 per cent. we would not take objection.

"Then you would have a highway, not a concrete highway, not made of asphalt nor of metal, but the first consideration would be to build there a dirt or clay road, properly drained with proper permanent concrete culverts, not the round culverts but culverts built in; build up the low places, have thorough drainage and then you would have a surface that would be ready for any hard surface preparation you wanted to put on. Then possibly as you approached the shipping centres where the traffic was heavy, it might be necessary to put a hard surface road, which afterwards, if the means were available could be extended further out. But for the present it would not be the intention to build these hard surface roads where the traffic was not heavy.

"I want to repeat that if there is any sentiment in the Province that it is the intention to build a speedway from one end of the Island to the other, that impression is not founded on fact.

"Whilst speaking on the roads, I may say that we are considering the question of road patrols. Such patrols would look after broken or raised culverts, would fill up the ruts, replace broken planks in the bridges, and otherwise keep the roads in repair during the summer and fall months. We think that they would thus save more than the costs involved besides keeping the main road in good condition.

"The program as I have laid it down was submitted to the Dominion Engineer, and he was of the opinion that so far as he could see there was no possible objection to it."

I wonder if my hon. friends will say now that the Conservative Government in this Province wasted a year before taking advantage of the federal highway grant? **As a matter of fact, the then Premier of the Province was making provision to take advantage of the grant before it had been passed in Parliament, and I do not think that the present leader of the Government has any right to say that his party were the orginators of the good roads scheme in this Province. The records show that that is not so, and when he make a statement like that he only makes himself foolish and ridiculous in the eyes of the people.**

PRESS PROPAGANDA

Much was said by the Premier about press propaganda. He has only to turn up the files of his own party organ to see the kind of propaganda that was used to defeat the good roads scheme in 1919.

"The Arsenault Government," It was charged, **has committed the Island to an expenditure of $875,000 for improved highways for five years. Where is the money to come from? Does it mean increased taxation or increased debt? Electors, ask the candidates these questions at every meeting!"**

And again: **"Vote out a Government that is attempting to bribe the people with their own money by spending thousands on the roads just before an election."**

"The Tories have been the tax doublers in the past. Now they are planning to be the tax treblers."

Those were the kind of scare-headings used in the Patriot newspaper during the campaign of 1919. Here is another piece of campaign propaganda from the same newspaper. It is entitled: "How the Tories Propose to Tax the Farmers."

"What does this (Education) propose?. . . Take for instance a farmer whose farm is worth $6,000. What increase does this mean in taxation? It means an increase of $18 on the land and a poll tax of $4.00, a total increase of $22.00 for education. But that is not all. they propose to accept the Dominion Government road scheme, putting up sixty per cent from Prince Edward Island to every forty per cent from the Dominion. The initial grant is $80,000. We will have to put up $120,000 in order to obtain that $80,000. What will this mean in additional taxation? Will they raise this on the land as usual? Roughly speaking the valuation of our taxable lands is $17,000,000. To raise $120,000 on this valuation will mean that the rate would be 7 mills on the dollar, or 7-10ths of 1 per cent. Take this tax on a $6,000 farm and what would it amount to? 1 per cent on $6,000 would amount to $60. 7-10ths of 1 per cent would mean $42.00 on a $6,000 farm. **This $42.00 added to $22.00 additional proposed educational tax WOULD AMOUNT TO AN INCREASE OF $64.00 PER ANNUM ON A $6,000 FARM. THAT IS THE PROPOSED NEW TORY TAXATION, MR. ELECTOR. HOW ARE YOU GOING TO VOTE?**

That is the way my hon. friends on the other side of the House regarded this policy of good roads in the year of 1919. (Applause). That was the propaganda carried on by their official organ. The Arsenault Government was accused of taxing "everything but the scenery." **But it was only a few months after these same hon. gentlemen were returned to power that they introduced a Tax Act, in which they taxed everything, scenery included. To quote a prominent member of their Government at that time, they taxed everything "tangible and intangible."** (Applause).

MR. LEA'S RESPONSIBILITY

The present leader of the Government went through the Province in that election campaign, and used the very same arguments, because I heard him, both in regard to the federal highways scheme and the Arsenault Government's proposal to tax the people $75,000 extra for educational purposes. **That was "his attitude towards highway improvement and education at that time, and he cannot deny it, because it is here, in the Patriot files, in black and white,** (Applause).

When the Bell Government came into power they adopted this highway scheme which they had condemned as an "infernal scheme" from one end of the Province to the other. And the same gentlemen come forward now, at this stage of the game, to say that they have done more for highways than any Government in this Province from the time of Confederation. That is a wonderful boast; the only trouble is that it cannot be substantiated; it is not supported by the facts.

The highway improvement scheme, like the agricultural grant, was started by a Conservative Government at Ottawa. **Both the agricultural grant and the highways grant were abolished when the Liberal Government came into power at Ottawa. There, in a nutshell, you have the record, of both parties with regard to these projects.** (Applause).

MORE MISTATEMENTS ANSWERED

Under the present administration the Department of Public Works has made a record for itself as the great spending department. Where previous governments dealt in thousands and tens of thousands of dollars, this Government deals in hundreds of thousands and half millions and so it has gone on for four years. Every member who has spoken on that side of the House has talked about the neglect of public works under the Stewart Government. I propose to show what the Stewart Government actually accomplished in that direction. All that is necessary is to take the annual report of the Public Works Department, and you will find that shortly after our accession to power this Province was visited by a terrific storm.

PREMIER LEA: Providence was showing its wrath.

DR. MCMILLAN: If Providence ever shows its wrath on you, it will wipe you out altogether; **unless it gives you a second chance under the Ticket of Leave Act.** (Laughter) The first thing we encountered in 1923 was this storm, which is thus referred to in the report of the provincial Engineer:

"It is impossible to state the actual cost to the country of repairing the damage done by this storm as in several cases the structures will be rebuilt of more permanent material and in other instances partial repairs only will made until permanent structures can be built. It is safe to assume, however, **that the damage was no less than was done by the storm of 1915, when it was estimated that the cost of repairs would exceed $50,000.00, as the destruction was just as widespread and the cost of labour and materials higher now than then."**

That was the first legacy we received. And the condition of the roads, when we came into power, augmented the difficulty. The Premier says that in 1927, after this Government assumed office, he had occasion to go to Freetown station and that his car got stuck in the mud of the road, in the middle of summer. He did not tell us, however, about the year 1923, when he was a member of the outgoing Bell Government, and when, to their everlasting disgrace, they stopped all the road work in the Province through pique and spite over their defeat at the polls, and **left not only one place but a hundred places on the roads where cars could be stuck because the roads were piled up for weeks with clay and stones and pockmarked with ruts and holes. The most disgraceful roads ever known were the roads that the people of this Province had to travel over for several weeks after the second day of the defeat of the Bell Government, and my hon. friend who is now posing as patron of good roads was the first lieutenant in that Government.**

He talks about the condition caused by the elements in 1927, but what about the condition for which he and his Government were directly responsible in 1923, and which they could have remedied. They might, in common decency, have continued the employment of men on those projects which were left in such a state of dispair. But, no; just as soon as they found that they were turned down by the people the order went out the next day, and every man and child that was working on the roads obeyed that order, and quit the job.

STEWART GOV'T BRIDGE WORK

Under these conditions, the Stewart Government set to work. The engineers report for 1923 shows that work done on the following bridges: Souris Bridge, Stanley Bridge, Goff's Bridge, Lot 6, and Kildare Bridge, Lot 3, Walls Bridge, Lot 26, Lord's Bridge, Tryon, and Wright's Bridge, Bedeque, Barlow's Bridge, Wellington, Bridgetown Bridge, Gillian's Bridge, Ellis River Bridge, South West Bridge, Lot 16, Darnley Bridge, McIntyre's Bridge, New Annan, Clifton Bridge, Stanley Bridge, Anderson's Bridge, Bay View Bridge Rusticoville Bridge, Oyster Bed Bridge, Shaw's Dyke, Brackley Point, Cass's Bridge, Covehead, McIntyre's Bridge, Savage Harbour, Sturgeon Bridge, and a number of smaller bridges and culverts. Many of the larger bridges mentioned were badly damaged by the October storm, and had practically to be rebuilt.

In 1924 the work was continued at the following locations: Southwest Bridge, Lot 16, Goff's Bridge, Lot 6, Kildare Bridge, Lot 3, MacDonald's Bridge, Lot 11, Egmont Bay Bridge, Lot 15, Wellington Bridge, Lot 16, Wheatley River Bridge, Lot 24, Dixon's Bridge, Lot 58, Pisquid Bridge, Lot 37, Montague Electric Light Bridge, Lot 51, Lewis's Bridge, Lot 53, Crane's Bridge, Lot 52, Wall's Bridge, Lot 26, Dougherty's Bridge, Lot 6, Hunter River Station Bridge, Lot, 23, Warren's Bridge, Lot 32, Cambellton Bridge, Lot 21, Anderson's Bridge, Lot 57, Munn's Bridge, Lot 47, Sutherland's Bridge, Lot 59, McIntyre's Bridge, Lot 37, Mill Creek Bridge, Lot 14, Those bridges, in most cases, were rebuilt. In addition, extensive repairs were made to a great many bridges, the most important being at Belle River, Hall's Bridge, Duffy's, Rusticoville, Johnston's River, Corran Ban, Big Point, Gascoyne, Brown Creek, Balum's Wilmot, Little Pond, Black Pond, North Lake, South Lake, Cow Bridge, Mill River, Bay View, and West River.

In 1925 the work of rebuilding bridges was continued, the most important being: West River Bridge, Bay View Bridge, Lot 22, Upper Montague Bridge, Head of Hillsboro Bridge, Lot 38, Douse's Bridge, Corran Ban Bridge, Lot 35, McPherson's Bridge, Lot 37, Leards's Mill Dam Bridge, Lot 9, Richmond Bridge, Lot 14, Yeo's Old Mill Bridge, Lot 13, McKelvie Bridge, Lot 18.

That gives you some idea of the destructive ravages of the storm which we encountered after we were a couple of months in power. We repaired or rebuilt those bridges and left substantial steel structures which are there to this day. **Yet the members of this Government will get up and say that the Stewart Government neglected the bridges of the Province when they came into power!**

PERMANENT WORKS

You will notice, Mr. Speaker, that these were permanent works—not work that needs to be renewed every second year, like much of the expenditure that was detailed the other day by the present Minster of Public Works.

At the end of 1923, notwithstanding the fact that upwards of 400 wooden bridges had been replaced by iron culverts and 450 larger ones by reinforced concrete, there were still approximately 4,000 wooden structures to be renewed or maintained. In the 1924 report of the Department we find that the policy of replacing these wooden culverts by pipes of corrugated iron was extensively pursued. 8,000 feet of these pipes being purchased, varying in size from 15 in. to 36 in., and 375 wooden structures were thus replaced by these iron culverts. During the year, also, 110 large wooden bridges were replaced by reinforced concrete structures.

In the following year, 1925, this policy was steadily continued. 4,850 lineal feet of these pipes were purchased varying in diameter from 12 in. to 36 in. and 200 structures were replaced by iron culverts. As far as possible the larger wooden culverts were rebuilt of reinforced concrete. 37 of these were replaced by reinforced concrete structure with openings varying from 3 to 100 square feet.

In 1926 we replaced with corrugated iron pipes 150 of the former wooden culverts, twelve of the larger wooden bridges being replaced by concrete structures with openings varying from 8 to 100 square feet.

At the end of 1926, 1125 culverts and 609 bridges had been errected, where we found 400 culverts, and 609 bridges when we came into power.

The year 1927 was an election year and it can be left out of the reckoning.

In the year 1928, this wonderful Government that claims to have done so much for public works, after borrowing over half a million dollars every year, put in 268 small culverts and 29 large ones. **How does that compare with, out, 375 small culverts and 110 large ones in 1924, the first full year under the Stewart Government. The figures speak louder than any empty words.**

THE RECORDS COMPARED

In 1929 this Government put in 372 small culverts, 27 larger ones, and 10 new steel bridges. In 1930 it is true they built more small bridges—420—than we built in any year, and they built 29 larger ones. **Comparing the total bridge work under both Governments we find that this Government built more small culverts in their time than we did in ours, and we built more large ones. That is how the record stands, and no words of the Minister of Public Works or any other member of this Government can contradict that record as it stands in the reports of the Department.**

I would not have gone into this matter at such a length but for the fact that an attack had been made against the Arsenault Government that they had wasted one year before they embraced the Dominion Highways scheme. **I have shown conclusively from the records that the Arsenault Government actually anticipated the action of the Dominion Government and that they were ready to proceed before the Highways bill had been passed in the House of Commons.**

I have also endeavored to refute the misstatement which has been made on several occasions during this debate that the Stewart Government neglected public works. One speaker declared that not a single bridge had been built in his district in our four years. The Minister of Public Works said he had to spend days in taking an inventory of all the work that was to be done through the neglect of the Stewart Government. I may say that we had to take the same inventory in 1923, and what did we find? **We found that there were 4,000 bridges in the Province that needed attention.** At the end of 1926 there were at least 1125 small concrete culverts put in, and 609 larger ones. That is 1800 that they did not have to do anything with, and so, when the Minister of Public Works states that he went over the Province in 1927 and found evidence of neglect of public works on all sides, he is making a statement which is more or less imaginary.

We were told on several occasions about cars being stuck in 1927. The Minister himself said it was not safe to go around Tea Hill. When I drew his attention to the fact that cars were being stuck even last year—ten or twelve in one day, at one place—he admitted it. What is the use of bringing up those solitary examples as the Premier did when he mentioned a car being stuck in the middle of the road at Freetown Station?

PREMIER LEA: In the middle of Summer.

DR. MCMILLAN: I say at all times last year cars were stuck on the road.

PREMIER LEA: In the middle of the road?

DR. MCMILLAN: On all parts of the road, and on many roads. It was mentioned in the press.

PREMIER LEA: Not unless they were under repair.

THE PATRIOT'S COMPLAINT

DR. MCMILLAN: **At times they were under repair, and at times the repairs had been made; the job had been completed and the cars were stuck dozens of them.** I can cite instances where there were dozens of cars stuck on the St. Peters Road at one place; they had to be dragged and hauled out of the ruts after repairs had been completed, under the present system. This occurred at different place, and it became so glaring that the chief Liberal newspaper of the Province, a couple of years ago, had to complain, in two or three editorial articles, about the way you were building the roads. You were criticised even in your own press about the humpbacked roads and your neglect of the approaches to this city. Here is an example of the criticism that was made by the Patriot newspaper at that time:

"First impressions are always lasting. The impression one gets in motoring from Charlottetown in any direction is anything but complimentary to our City. Without the slightest fear of contradiction we declare that those who motor, and their name is legion, must be thoroughly disgusted with the condition of the approaches to the capital.

"For instance last night we took a short drive across the Hillsboro Bridge. The approach on this side of the bridge was very bad; while the approach on the Southport side was infinitely worse. Approaches! No! Reproaches! There can be no possible excuse for this.

"Then the roads close to where the asphalt begins are in a pretty bad condition.

"We believe that two or three men with a couple of carts and shovels could repair all these approaches in a few days—perhaps less. What on earth is the reason that they are kept in this state of disgrace, annoyance and danger? What's the matter anyway?

"Time and again we have in these columns advocated the employment of a proper road maker. There does not appear that such a person is engaged in road making in Prince Edward Island.

Shortly there will be conventions and hundreds of visitors to the Island. If we want to make a good impression on these people then let it be seen to that these approaches to the city are put in proper shape. A reasonable exercise of common sense would remedy the whole matter in a very short time. Perhaps there is too much red tape and too little necessary practical work. Enough money in one shape or other is taken from motor owners to construct Roman roads."

That is pretty strong condemnation of a Government that presumes to be the last word in road making; and it is uttered by their own party organ.

MOUNTING EXPENDITURES

They say they revolutionized the roads. They certainly did! The first revolution as instituted by the Minister of Public Works when he bought $100,000 of road machinery over the telephone. He said he did not buy it over the telephone—he only closed the bargain, he only accepted the tender. Isn't that a wonderful explanation? He said, too, that the machinery was going to pay for itself. Has it paid for itself? Up to the present time between repairs and new parts, there has been paid out in this department nearly the price of the machinery ever again. There has been enough money paid out to buy nearly two sets of machinery. And they say it was economical, that it was going to save money! They have had it for three years in operation; where is the saving of money it was going to effect. Shouldn't we begin now to see some effect of the saving it was going to make? **The fact is that the expenditures in the Public Works Department are going up year after year, and so far as we are able to judge, the road machinery, far from effecting economy, has been the cause of more expense to the Province. Look at the figures in the Minister's report.** Where will you find any saving? He is asking for another half million dollars this year. It would seem that the only way they can think in the Public Works Department is in millions or half millions. The Premier himself, in his budget speech, said it would be a good policy to borrow three or four million dollars for highway improvement, because money is cheap now, times are hard, and labour is scarce.

PREMIER LEA: I didn't say three or four million. I said it was a good policy to borrow, but I didn't say how much.

DR. MCMILLAN: You named a definite amount.

PREMIER LEA: I named it for Nova Scotia, but I didn't say how much we proposed to borrow.

DR. MCMILLAN: Then I must have misinterpreted his remark. But he was dealing with the proposition of borrowing money because the times were hard and labor was scarce; and he submitted figures to show that it would be good business for this Province to borrow money on a very large scale.

PREMIER LEA: Oh no.

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