

SIR ANDREW PUTS ISLAND CASE TO TEST

Incisive Examination of Premier Stewart Brings out the Strength of Island Claims.

Upon the opening of the sessions of the Royal Commission in Charlottetown on Friday morning last, Sir Andrew Rae Duncan, the chairman, explained that the Commission had been sitting in Halifax and at St. John, hearing the case with regard to the rights of the Maritime Provinces, as presented not only by the Governments of these two Provinces, but also by the members of the public who cared to give evidence.

He thanked Premier Stewart for going the Commission to present the case of Prince Edward Island. The Commission was quite prepared to hear evidence, not only on behalf of the Government, but by any citizen who chose to give any information in reference to Maritime claims and conditions.

Sir Andrew thanked the Premier and the Board of Trade for turning in before-hand a full brief of the matter to be discussed. The brief had been carefully read and will be incorporated in the records of the case. It might be supplemented by discussion of any point requiring further elaboration and development.

Premier Stewart, in reply, welcomed the Commission on behalf of the province generally. The claims to be presented by this Province naturally divide themselves into two parts.

1st. Presentation by the Government of the Province, asking for additional provincial subsidy.

2nd. A presentation by the Boards of Trade and the business interests generally of the Province, with regard to transportation.

Continuing, Premier Stewart said that so far as the general situation in the Maritimes with regard to freight rates is concerned, he felt that a sufficient presentation had already been made by the other provinces.

Beyond that, he felt that the village those who will affect in the same manner as they will affect the other Maritime Provinces, and that presentation has been backed up by evidence given by Mr. Corwell, the freight rate expert recently engaged.

The presentation now made in regard to transportation will deal with conditions concerning this Province with the mainland, and within the Province, it is proposed to submit a considerable amount of evidence on behalf of the second claim for transportation.

It was unnecessary, he believed, to give evidence in regard to the Government claim for subsidy. This was purely historical and legal.

The chairman agreed. This was on the record.

We didn't resist them. The offer was made by the Province generally to reopen negotiations which had been dropped. They had been speedily accepted, intermittently ever since 1865. But even then we got better terms especially with regard to our debt allowance.

THE CHAIRMAN: In the sentence I refer to you say that you have been deflected from your original channels by reason of Confederation?

PREMIER STEWART: I say that advisedly. We had been developing our own trade route and establishing our own market. We had complete control and we controlled it through our own tariff and in that way we could adjust our trade relationships. We considered that we surrendered our independence in that way, when our trade became controlled by the Dominion.

THE CHAIRMAN: If I read this right, I draw a distinction between your entry into Confederation and the entering of Nova Scotia or New Brunswick. You did not enter into Confederation until you were having trouble in carrying on.

PREMIER STEWART: Quite so, but in the same way the original Provinces were able to carry on and they finally got together as partners.

THE CHAIRMAN: There is a difference surely in the historical narrative as indicated by the action taken by the Nova Scotian Government and yourselves. They went into Confederation, so to speak, without a vote of the Province; and you yourselves rather went into it voluntarily.

PREMIER STEWART: That may be. It just amounts to this: You form a business partnership, the original partners agree to come in, and if another partner comes in after, it must be by agreement with the original partners.

THE CHAIRMAN: Just in that analogy, the person who seeks a partnership later can hardly turn around and complain that by so doing he has been deflected from his original course.

PREMIER STEWART: We are not saying this by way of complaint; we are saying that that is what happened to us, and that account we feel that we are entitled to redress. We have lost our revenues on that account.

THE CHAIRMAN: You cannot say you were originally attracted, because you made overtures.

PREMIER STEWART: In the end I do not think it matters much because as a result of the partnership we had ceased to be masters of our own destiny and have lost our revenues on that account.

THE CHAIRMAN: On the principle, apart from the actual figures, is there any qualification you must make in the light of circumstances such as these?

PREMIER STEWART: No, I say that it is unnecessary, he believed, to give evidence in regard to the Government claim for subsidy. This was purely historical and legal.

THE CHAIRMAN: Do you regard your roads as satisfactory now?

PREMIER STEWART: That is a comparative statement, of course, and I think, can be considered without being gravely. We have no such material in the Province; at least, not available.

THE CHAIRMAN: I assume you are not boasting about them, at all events?

PREMIER STEWART: No, they are made as satisfactory as they can be with the money and material we have at hand.

After some further discussion on Falconwood Institution and the firm, the expenditure on Legislation was referred to. This item is really less than at Confederation, but largely due to the fact that the length of the sessions recently has been greatly reduced.

THE CHAIRMAN: Is Parliament getting less talkative in this part?

THE PREMIER: It must be supposed.

THE CHAIRMAN: It is a most surprising feature. I was very surprised to see that it actually costs less now than in 1874.

Railway Subsidy. On the subject of railways, Sir Andrew asked Premier Stewart, you set out quite fully and clearly the history of the public debt, and I understand it rightly your railway property, taken over as part of the Dominion, so far as mileage was concerned, as part of your public debt?

PREMIER STEWART: Well, the cost was charged to us as against the debt allowance. As a matter of fact our public debt, apart from that, was negligible.

THE CHAIRMAN: I presume you can show us how the public debt of the time was made up?


PREMIER STEWART: Certainly.

THE CHAIRMAN: The argument, I understand it, is that whereas in the Western Provinces the railways were subsequently built for them; in your case, when the railway was completed it was charged to your public debt?

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PREMIER STEWART: I think information, we will give you the two principal ways are tonight on our taxes as much as possible and to make us a real part of the rest of the world. I may say that we are most anxious for us to have conditions such that we can have some way of holding our own population. That will be a gain.

THE CHAIRMAN: Have you any suggestions as to how you might ask me about it?

THE CHAIRMAN: The brief is very clear on it. If we have any questions to ask regarding it, in the light of subsequent information.