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JOHN NEWSON.

Charlottetown, June 4, 1891.

THE TUNNEL QUESTION

Able and Convincing Speech by Mr. John McLean, M.P.

[CONCLUDED.]

I cannot do better than show this House the loss which the people of Prince Edward Island sustain in being unable to ship their products to market. In Prince Edward Island, as hon. gentlemen belonging to the Maritime Provinces know, although it may not be so well known in Provinces like Ontario where they have an early harvest, our harvests come in very late. Last year, for instance, our harvest was not housed until the middle of October, owing to the unusual wetness of the season. In ordinary seasons we are not able to complete harvesting our grain until the 1st of October, In that respect we are placed in a different position from the other provinces. Prince Edward Island raises more potatoes to the acre than any other province of the Dominion. A great many farmers raise as much as 2,000 bushels, and some as much as 4,000 bushels. The farmers of this House can understand how long it will take a farmer to house from 2,000 to 4,000 bushels of potatoes in the fall of the year. An hon. gentleman the other evening, in speaking of a railroad, remarked that in some parts of the Dominion the people did their fall ploughing at the very time that the people of Prince Edward Island housed their potatoes. The people of Prince Edward Island have

A VERY SHORT TIME

in which to do their fall ploughing; in fact, in seasons like last year, they get scarcely any done at all. During the month of October, when the farmers are housing their potatoes, the markets in the United States and in the neighboring provinces are low and the most of the potatoes that find their way to the Boston, New York and Philadelphia markets go there before they are housed at all. They are shipped to these markets at a time when the products of those countries come into competition with them. It is the 1st of November before any potatoes are shipped in large quantities outside of those shipped to the Maritime Provinces. This being the case, as a merchant doing business in Prince Edward Island I find that whereas you can charter a vessel to take potatoes to Boston in October at from 12 to 15 cents a bushel, at the time the market is likely to be of any service, as in November or December, these rates go up to 18 cents and, sometimes as high as 25 cents a bushel; and as soon as the 1st of December arrives every hon. member of this House knows that in the Gulf of St. Lawrence insurance rates go up from 1 and 2 to 4 or 5 per cent., and sometimes it is not obtainable at all. These expenses have all to be charged against the products of our farms on the Island, which are shipped to the neighboring provinces and the United States. Again we know that, from the 1st of November until the middle of December, the people of the Island have only six weeks in which to ship 1,500,000 bushels of potatoes; and any hon. gentleman who will give this matter a moment's attention will understand how hard it is for us to send 1,500,000 bushels of potatoes to a near market like the neighboring provinces or to the United States and find a profitable sale for it, while the people of the Island are competing with each other in these markets. It is well-known that sometimes we ship a good many of these potatoes to the Halifax market, which is the market, to a fair extent, for many of our products. It is also well-known, and the hon. members from Halifax will bear me out, that sometimes after westerly winds have prevailed for several weeks, which prevent our vessels reaching their destination, an easterly wind sets in and as many as 70,000 to 80,000 bushels of potatoes arrive in the Halifax market in the one day, completely demoralizing the market; and you can understand, Sir, how hard it is for our people, who have no shipping advantages, to have to face this state of things, for they have to make all their shipments in the fall season, within a space of six weeks. If they do not ship in the fall they have to house their potatoes until the spring, so that

DURING THE WINTER

while the markets in the United States and the neighboring provinces may rule very high, the people of the Island are as much excluded from them as if there were no such markets in existence; and besides, in a great many cases, fully 25 per cent. is lost of the quantities they have to store in their cellars before they can be shipped. Again, we have only a market in those places from the middle of May to the middle of June, because then the markets fall off; and if not shipped in the previous fall, the potatoes have to be shipped in a very short time in the spring of the year, so that we are obliged to compete against one another. And what is true of potatoes applies to all other Island products. Those are some of the disadvantages the people of Prince Edward Island have to contend against, through not having the means of getting their products to market. Another loss which the people have to sustain, and which was not touched upon by the hon. member for Queen's, probably because it was not so plain to his mind as it if to mine, being a merchant, is due to the fact that the imports to the Island—and its imports amount to about $3,000,000 per year—must be brought in during the month of October, or, at the very latest, before the 1st of November, in sufficient quantities to carry us over until the 1st of May of the following year, so that we are obliged to import six months in advance and carry those goods over during all that time. I claim that there is at least a million dollars' worth of goods carried over on the Island from October to May, which we would not be obliged to carry were we provided with continuous communication with the mainland. We lose the interest on that money, and, more than that, a great many of these goods, in all probability, might have been purchased at lower rates during the winter months. Any business man will know that, under these circumstances, it requires twice as much capital to carry on the same amount of business in the Island as on the mainland. Take, for instance, a man engaged in the flour trade, and there are 75,000 barrels of flour imported into the Island during the year. A merchant doing business at Pictou can order a carload of flour in Ontario within four or five days of the time that his stock runs out, and is not obliged to import to any extent in advance, whereas on the Island we have to import in October sufficient flour to carry us over until the spring, instead of importing it as we require it. I admit that the cost of the tunnel makes the undertaking a very serious one; but, on the other hand, it would confer more than commensurate benefit on the people of Prince Edward Island and of the provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick; and I believe that if the question were submitted to the people of the two latter provinces, they would be quite satisfied to support the scheme, provided it can be accomplished for a reasonable amount of money. And it has been declared by world-renowned engineers to be feasible. I believe also we would have the good will and assistance, not only of the men doing business in these provinces and who know the advantage it would be to them as well as to the Island, but that even the hon. member for Centre Toronto (Mr. Cockburn), when he comes to think the matter over, will not be so unfair, representing, as he does, one of the largest constituencies in one of the largest provinces of this Dominion, as to take the stand that because the Island is our smallest province it should not get what is its right; and I am confident even he will give his support to the scheme when the House is called on to vote the money. The Government lose at the present time the difference between the cost of the winter service and revenue we derive from that service, which amounts to $15,875. They lose also the interest on the cost of the steamer, which amounts to $5,438; and the depreciation and insurance of that steamer, amounting to $29,000 a year, and the summer mail subsidy amounting to $5,000, which would not be required if we had the tunnel. That makes a total annual loss of $55,313. Now, there is a loss on the Prince Edward Island Railway of $105,000 per year. If we had the tunnel built, and were in continuous communication with the rest of the Dominion, that loss would be reduced by $75,000 per year.

I WILL EXPLAIN

how that reduction would take place. Any hon. gentleman at all familiar with Prince Edward Island knows that the railway runs almost from one end of the Island to the other. It runs within at least ten miles of each shipping place. It runs from Tignish to Alberton, from Alberton to Summerside, from Summerside to Charlottetown, then to Georgetown and Souris, all being shipping ports. At present, suppose a man doing business in Souris or Georgetown wishes to have a carload of freight carried over to the mainland, he ships to the nearest shipping port; and I venture to say that the loaded cars hauled on the railway are not on an average hauled a distance of over twelve to fifteen miles. For instance, they will go from St. Peter's Bay to Souris, or from Morell to Mount Stewart, or from midway between Tignish and Alberton to either Tignish or Alberton. If we were placed by means of the tunnel in communication with the mainland, these cars, instead of being brought to a shipping place and the freight then transhipped on board vessels, would travel the whole length of the railway from the place where loaded to their final destination. Not only that, but I claim the tunnel itself would give a revenue of about $75,000 a year; and I further believe, in case that revenue be doubted, that if the matter were submitted to the people of the Island, they would allow a rate to be imposed on the goods passing through that tunnel, which would, beyond doubt, bring the revenue to $75,000 a year. I claim again that if the tunnel were completed, it would increase the trade of the Intercolonial Railway by furnishing it with additional traffic to the extent of $100,000 over and above what the Intercolonial Railway receives at present. Take the item of potatoes, or oats, or any of the classes of goods shipped from the Island. Any hon. gentleman who will consider for a moment, will know that it is almost tempting a loss to ship from 3,000 to 5,000 or 8,000 bushels of potatoes in a vessel when they are not actually seasoned because if we commence early in the season we have to ship the potatoes right out of the field, and if we house them that entails additional cost. I believe that four-fifths of the potatoes shipped from Prince Edward Island to Boston, New York, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, would pass over the Island railway first, and then go through the tunnel, and then pass over the Intercolonial Railway, and be the means of increasing the traffic on the Intercolonial Railway to the extent of $100,000 over its present traffic. If I am right in these figures, they amount to $305,000 per year, which this Government would receive if the tunnel were built, and I claim those figures are pretty nearly correct. I believe that if the Prince Edward Island Railway were in connection with the Intercolonial Railway to-day by any means, the Island railway, instead of showing a loss of $105,000 per year, would be a paying institution, because, if it does not pay at present, it is on account of the hauls being so short. For that reason I claim that, if these figures are right, or nearly right, the terms of Confederation can be carried out with Prince Edward Island

WITHOUT ANY MATERIAL LOSS

to the rest of the Dominion, and I sincerely trust that when this question comes up we will have the votes of hon. members on both sides of the House, and that they will not claim that, because Prince Edward Island is the smallest and most insignificant province of the Dominion, the terms made by the older and richer provinces with that province shall not be carried out. A point was raised that this was not a party question. I claim that it is not a party question, but it was a live issue on the Island, as the member for Queen's said the other day, at the late election, and I for one do not wish to deny it. Hon. gentlemen can understand that the question af the tunnel was in this position. The people of the Island were not sure whether the engineers would pronounce it feasible or not, whether the estimates would show that it would cost $5,000,000 or $25,000,000, but they expected that this parliament, after the reports of first-class engineers had been received, if these reports showed that the tunnel was feasible and could be built for a reasonable amount of money, would deal honestly and fairly with the Island. There were letters and telegrams received from gentleman on both sides of politics, and I will trouble the House by reading some of them. There was the following letter from the Right Hon. Sir John A. Macdonald to Senator Howlan:

"EARNSCLIFFE,
"OTTAWA, 6th February, 1891.

"MY DEAR HOWLAN,—In response to your pressing request with respect to the tunnel across the straits, I desire to repeat that, under the present circumstances, the Cabinet are not in a position to deal with the question. If, as I believe, the country will continue to give us its confidence, the Ministry will, under my guidance, take the matter up without delay. I understand that Sir Douglas Fox is of opinion the scheme is a feasible one. The chief thing still unknown is the cost of construction. I fully appreciate the nature and extent of the obligation incurred by the Dominion to maintain continuous communication between the Island and the mainland. We have tried to carry this out by the Stanley, but of course she cannot fight against the elements. So, if the cost comes within a reasonable amount, such as Parliament feels itself justified in incurring, I shall be prepared to submit the question for their favorable consideration.

"I am, yours sincerely,
"JOHN A. MACDONALD."

I claim that was just such an answer as we might expect, the question being in the position it was at that time. The right hon. gentleman did not know, when the estimates of the engineers came down, whether they would be such as could be entertained. We have a telegram from Sir Charles Tupper to Hon. D. Ferguson:

"I regret deeply that it is impossible for me to go to the Island as the Stanley cannot cross, and I dare not attempt the Capes. I have satisfied myself that the tunnel can be made for six million dollars, and you may rely upon all the aid I can give to that important and necessary work.

"Amherst, 28th February, 1891."

I claim that this is quite a proper telegram. Sir Charles Tupper knew exactly the terms upon which Prince Edward Island entered the union, and he knew that these terms had not been fulfilled, and that the expenditure of $6,000,000 would place Prince Edward Island in a similar position to that of the other provinces—in such a position that they would feel, as they have not yet felt, that they are part and parcel of the Dominion, that they are truly a province of the Dominion in every respect, and that every dollars worth of taxation placed upon the rest of the Dominion they should assume their share of. They have not felt this yet, but if they have this communication afforded them they will not hesitate to bear their share of the burdens of the whole country. We also had a telegram from the leader of the Opposition. I always heard, before I saw him, that he was a man of honour and stood high in this country. We know, of course, that he must stand high before he could occupy the position he does to-day. Since I came to this House, and since I have seen and heard him, I have come to the same conclusion—that he is an honorable and high-minded man; and it is clear that he knew that this would be a live question in the Island at the last election. Here is a telegram from the Hon. Mr. Laurier to L. H. Davies, Esq.:

"I am in favor of the tunnel, provided the surveys show the scheme is reasonable and practicable."

That telegram is quite correct and proper. He knew the terms upon which the Island entered in as well as other hon. gentlemen did. Then there is a letter to the editor of the Guardian, and I am quoting these telegrams, not to find fault with them, but to show that on both sides these gentlemen knew that this was a live issue, and made these statements not to influence the election but as a promise to carry out the terms of the union. This is a letter from the Hon. Mr. Laurier to the editor of the Guardian:

DEAR SIR.—I have your favour of the 2nd February, inst I hardly would have thought that an expression of opinion as to the construction of a tunnel to connect the Island of Prince Edward with the mainland should be required from me. Every man who has given any attention to the condition of things and the necessities involved by the entering of the Island into Confederation must admit that such a tunnel must be constructed if the thing is reasonably practicable. The first requisite is to have an accurate survey and reliable estimates. I am only sorry that these were not obtained long ago.

W. LAURIER.

This puts the two political parties in this House in exactly the same position. They both realized that the terms of Confederation had not been carried out, and those letters were written to show their willingness to have the terms carried out so soon as any opportunity offered. In conclusion, let me say that I would not have troubled the House so long but that I felt that I would not have been doing my duty to the county I represent and the Island from which I come without placing this matter fully before the House, and I have endeavoured to do so fairly and honestly as the case presented itself to me.