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HON. A. G. BLAIR'S SPEECH

ON THE INTERCOLONIAL RAILWAY—FROM AN EXPENSE IT HAS BEEN TURNED TO A PROFIT.

(St. John Telegraph)

(Continued from last issue.)

Mr. Powell—Do you include trainmen in the car statement?

Hon. Mr. Blair—No, we do not include trainmen for a very important reason, for the reason that it depends entirely on the amount of business you have, as to whether the number of train hands will be increased. If you want to furnish all the facilities which the business calls for, and all the accommodation that the travelling public require, it might increase the cost of your train service, but train hands are not paid out of these items of expenditure, but out of another class of expenditure which do not go to build up the road. That, of course, is important, in connection with the amount of business that is done, but it does not effect the other proposition in any degree. Now, the question which might fairly be put before this committee, and a question which might be fairly put to the country is this: Is there any better or improved showing, as compared with the control of my predecessor, brought about by spending less upon maintenance? The facts which I have referred to, as to the correctness of which I challenge criticism, enable me to answer that question in the negative. So, I think, I can fairly see that the argument, if used, cannot be successfully used, and that it has been disposed of. I have admitted that we have an increased mileage of 169 miles. We have spent 10 1/2 per cent. more than my predecessor spent during these years, taking them altogether, whereas during last year we had 14 per cent. more mileage. It may be said: By reason of you having 14 per cent. more mileage, you ought, therefore, necessarily, to have spent something more for maintenance and repairs, because you have made road to keep up. I mention that in order that I may put my view before the committee on that subject, and in order that it may not be supposed that I desired to present the question other than fairly, or that I intended to pass over any view of the question which might be criticised. It is correct that we have only spent 10 1/2 per cent. during these years, more than the late government, under these three important heads, whereas during a period we had 14 per cent. more mileage. In that connection, I will call the attention of the committee to the fact that we only had this increased mileage during one year, and during four months of another year. We had during last year, ending July 1, the full mileage of the extension to Montreal. We only had it during four months of the year preceding, so that during the three years in regard to which I have made a comparison, it would not be a fair argument to urge that the expenditure ought to be greater, because the mileage

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is greater, except to a very limited extent, for the reason that the whole additional mileage has not been in operation for half of this period. For half of this period, this additional mileage has been in operation, but we did not have occasion to make an outlay upon it to the extent that we would have, if it had been some years in our hands, for this very good reason that 43 miles of the road was entirely new. As to the other portion of the road, one of the conditions under which we purchased it was that it should be put in first-class repair, and \$100,000 was taken out of the purchase price to be expended upon the road, so that we did not require to spend money upon what is called the Drummond County portion of the line. We have only been operating the road for a short time, and any person who has had any experience in any business, much more so, any person who has had any experience in railway business, knows that you must have a railway in operation for a considerable period before you can expect to realize results from it, which you might fairly anticipate after the lapse of a little time. You cannot expect that the business of the Intercolonial railway arising from its extension to Montreal would jump in a month, or six months, or a year, beyond what it has been during these three years. It will require a longer period, but under the same conditions of business, in five years, the business of the Intercolonial railway, by reason of the extension to Montreal may be enhanced beyond what it is to-day, as it is to-day, greatly enhanced from what it was six months ago. These facts must necessarily be kept in mind if we desire to reach a fair, a just and reasonable conclusion upon the conditions as they exist, as to a large portion of this 169 miles we did not have to make any considerable outlay upon it, in addition to the outlay I referred to, upon the Grand Trunk railway end.

Mr. Haggart—Do you know the exact amount you expended over and above the \$100,000?

Hon. Mr. Blair—I am informed it was about \$15,000. If we owned the Grand Trunk railway portion of the line ourselves, and if we were operating it ourselves, you would see at a glance that we would have to bear the whole expense of the annual repairs which would be very considerable. For we only bear that expense in proportion to the amount of business we do on the line compared with the Grand Trunk railway and the other lines of railway that are using the road. Our percentage is small, and the charge

we have to meet now or at any future time, must be small compared with the charge which we have to bear upon the rest of the Intercolonial which we own ourselves, which we operate exclusively and in connection with which we get no contribution from any other source. In connection with the results as shown by the accounts for the year ending 31st June last, I would like to impress upon this committee another very important fact, and one which accentuates still more the value of that extension to Montreal. Wherever and whenever the opportunities are afforded me, I shall never cease to impress upon those to whom I am speaking, the utter weakness and the utter failure of the contention which the Conservative party in this house made with respect to the Montreal extension. It is a fact, Sir, that we were able in connection with that extension, not only to produce these results, but we paid the rental \$210,000, and had a surplus in addition to it. We paid the interest at a higher rate than if we had owned it, because we paid at the rate of 4 per cent. on the Drummond County. Was there ever a railway bought by the Conservative government; was there ever an extension of the Intercolonial railway under their administration that contributed one dollar towards the interest upon the capital outlay? Not one. They never made any addition which contributed to the increase in the business as I have shown, but here we have an act of policy by this government which not only enabled us to produce better results as to the gross traffic upon the railway, but actually enabled us to pay the rental of \$210,000 a year, and upon the Drummond County as part of it, interest at 4 per cent. upon the whole value of that road. Now, Sir, this came out of the profits. My Hon. friend (Mr. Haggart) ought to have spoken with some experience on this matter, because I understood him to say that at one time he had in his mind the extension to Montreal, although it did not take a very vigorous hold upon him, nor did it bear fruit, but he must have considered the question, and if he did consider the question he should have formed some idea as to what that policy was worth. However, the hon. gentleman (Mr. Haggart) would have us believe in this parliament that when we had the Intercolonial railway running for one full year and produced our accounts, we would show a deficit in addition to the deficit which he had, by a sum not less than the whole rental we were paying. The hon. gentleman (Mr. Haggart) on the authority of a gentleman who had been

at the head of the department, and with all the weight that brought; when he was condemning this policy of the present government he deliberately predicted that we should show a deficit of \$260,000. Now, Sir, as it turns out there is \$60,000 the other way, and the hon. gentleman (Mr. Haggart) therefore, made an error in his calculation of \$320,000 a year.

There is another thing that I anticipate will be stated here, because it is stated in the Conservative press with all show of particularity. It is said to us: Your results are misleading and fallacious; you never had a surplus of \$62,000, because you have actually maintained the road out of capital and made improvements which were formerly paid out of earnings and so no wonder you can show favorable returns under such circumstances. Well, Mr. Chairman, I challenge most emphatically the correctness of that statement. I say that I shall be able to convince the house that there is not a shadow of justification for saying that the results which have been accomplished have been accomplished by any such means. Even the opposition papers which are published along that line of railway which are bitterly opposed to this government and would misrepresent it without much hesitation if they thought they could make a point against us by doing so, even they do not say that the condition of the railway, and of the road-bed is not improved. The equipment, I am free to confess, the locomotives, largely, the new cars, have come out of capital. But, even as respects that portion of the expenditure, we have not had as large a proportion available to us yet as we are entitled to by reason of the increase in our mileage. When the line was extended by the late government from Riviere du Loup to Levis, the calculation was made that they were entitled to so many additional locomotives, so many additional passenger cars of various kinds, so many additional freight cars, and they got them; and they were paid for out of capital, because when we added 169 miles to the railway, we had necessarily to get additional equipment, and we have not yet got the proportion which the additional mileage and the additional business requires, as I shall show the committee before I conclude my statement.

Now, in these statements as I have put them to the committee, I think I have anticipated every reasonable argument that would be made against the legitimate character of the surplus which the last year's transactions have shown; and I think I have answered those arguments, and I think the conclusion must necessarily be drawn that we have this surplus of \$62,645 to our credit, as compared to the deficits during the period of the honorable gentleman. The normal deficit got up to about \$55,000; that was the honorable gentleman's last deficit; and if you will add that to the \$62,645 of surplus which I have shown this year you have, as between those two years, a comparative difference of \$118,000, a sufficient sum to pay the interest upon \$4,000,000 at 3 per cent. per annum—I think a very fair showing, and a matter of legitimate congratulation.

I am not going to make any boast with regard to this, from any personal point of view. I claim no credit particularly for myself. Whatever credit there may be due to the improved business, outside of the extension to Montreal, I think is fairly due to the increased activity and increased interest which the men employed on the Intercolonial railway have exhibited. I have had no reason at all to be other than satisfied for the way in which they have responded to the demands I have made upon them. Nor do I wish to criticise the honorable gentleman in any serious way. I am entitled, however, to say that with regard to the honorable gentleman, that I do not think he took any interest in the Intercolonial Railway from the beginning to the end of his administration. I think he wanted the deficits to be cut down, and I think he would like to see a surplus; but, as to his making any study of the situation and devoting his talents to it—and I have no doubt he has exceptional talents—I am compelled to believe that the honorable gentleman gave very little, if any, of his

ability to the administration of that railway. And I think that is a legitimate ground of complaint against the honorable gentleman, because there is no doubt that if the men employed on the railway know that the minister takes no interest in it, they take less interest, they become less careful and more lax, and you do not get the results that you would if the minister followed matters up closely, kept himself in close communication with the officers, advised with them, got their views and gave them his, and spurred them on to greater interest in their work. I venture to say that there is to-day, and has been for some time past, more activity displayed by the officers of the Intercolonial Railway than there were during the honorable gentleman's administration; and anyone who travels over that road will acknowledge that the character of the service, the character of the men engaged in the service, the attention people get, and every other element that goes to make the popularity of a railway, have been improved in recent years beyond what they were during the administration of honorable gentleman opposite. I do not pretend to say that down to the present moment the railway is all we desire it to be. It is deficient, no doubt, in many particulars. It is deficient in its equipment; it is deficient in the number of its locomotives and in the number of its cars. But it is improving. The money we are spending on it we are spending to better purpose and with better results than was formerly the case; and I am in hopes that in four or five years we may have that railway, in all respects, one which will compare favorably with any other railway in the dominion.

This brings me to the subject of the capital outlay upon the Intercolonial. I will make a comparison between the expenditure in that particular under the late government and the expenditure under myself down to the present date. The capital expenditure, in round figures, was as follows:

1890-1	\$ 80,000
1891-2	320,000
1892-3	297,000
1893-4	437,500
1894-5	327,000
1895-6	260,000

Under the present administration, the capital expenditure has been as follows, in round figures:

1896-7	\$ 149,000
1897-8	253,000
1898-9	1,082,000

Of the latter amount \$640,000 was for rolling stock, and there was no corresponding item for the rolling stock expenditure out of capital during the recent years of the honorable gentleman's administration. Comparing the three years of Liberal administration with the six years I have given you of its predecessors, the comparison would be, I think, not at all unfavorable to this government, having regard to the fact that we have put the equipment of the railway into the condition in which it is to-day and which is infinitely better, I think, in the judgment of everybody than it ever was before. We have an entirely improved class of locomotives and service. There never was a dining car service until since the change in the administration. There was no such thing as a vestibule train, the locomotives were of inferior class, and therefore the expenditure which has been made on capital account has produced results which amply justifies it.

Look at the items which go to make up that expenditure closely, and you will not find any of the class which are included in the statements that I have read. These expenditures, every dollar of them, on capital account, are outside of the amounts I have named as paid out of consolidated revenue account, so that the statement cannot be accurately made that we have kept the road up in the condition in which it is by reason of the capital account. An examination of these figures will demonstrate the incorrectness of such a conclusion. Among the items for which we have asked appropriations on capital account, there is only one about which any possible question can be raised with any force. There is only one concerning which it can be contended, with any show of argument, that a similar class of items

was charged by our predecessors against revenue. That item is the sum that we have obtained for the strengthening of the bridges on the road. As a matter of policy, owing to the increased weight of engines and trains, it has become imperatively necessary that there should be a strengthening of the bridges quite generally upon the railway. They were built for lighter engines, and must be strengthened if they are to be crossed by heavier engines. When the vote of last year or year before—I do not remember which—was under consideration by this committee, there was a vote on capital account for strengthening the bridges, and I was asked whether it had not been the policy of the late government to expend upon revenue account all that was necessary for the strengthening of these bridges. I stated that I did not think that that was the policy of the late government, although I admitted that there was one or two instances in which that had been done; but I endeavored to point out that there was no similarity between the classes of work done in the strengthening of bridges by the late government, and what we now propose to do. We are proposing to spend—not all at once, but in two or three years—\$200,000 or \$300,000, and in referring to what expenditure was made by the late government for the strengthening of bridges, I pointed out that they had only strengthened two or three bridges. I think they were the two Miramichi bridges and the one across the Restigouche.

Mr. Powell—And the Sackville bridge. Hon. Mr. Blair—I beg my hon. friend's pardon. Not one beyond these three I have named.

Mr. Powell—The Sackville bridge was not charged to capital.

Hon. Mr. Blair—If rebuilt or strengthened, it must necessarily have been built out of capital, because I have had the whole records of the correspondence upon all the bridges on the Intercolonial railway searched with the utmost thoroughness from beginning to end, with the result that there was only these three bridges, the two Miramichi and the one at Restigouche, and upon those the total, laid out for strengthening, was only \$36,000 or about \$15,000 a year extended over two years.

But no one, with any desire to be fair, will say that because the late government put in a few additional braces and strengthening rods into three of their bridges, during the whole period of their management of the road, at an outlay of \$18,000 a year for two years I ought to be expected to spend \$300,000 in completing, renewing and constructing the whole bridge system of the Intercolonial railway, and I ought to do that out of earnings. There is no reason or common sense in doing that. If the argument is made that we ought to do this in order that there may be a continuity in the system and a fair comparison between one administration and the other, then I say the very statements defeats itself. There is no comparison between spending a trifling sum for two years upon some additional braces and the strengthening of three bridges, and spending some \$300,000 in practically renewing bridges. What are we doing? We are replacing one-half nearly of these bridges by new bridges. We are not in any such sense strengthening the existing bridges; but we put two small bridges together so as to double the strength. We have taken a bridge up at one place and put it alongside a bridge in another place. The bridges were good, they did not require repairs, but practically a renewal, and we took that method of doing it. We put an entirely new bridge down double the capacity of the old bridge which we took up. And I maintain that if any person desires to make a fair comparison between our expenditure upon maintenance of the Intercolonial railway and our predecessors' expenditure for the same service, he will compare on the same basis the work we have done and the little trifling repairs for strengthening bridges and so on which they have done.

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