

THE LOCAL BUDGET DEBATE.

Mr. Flemming Indulges in Mild Criticism

OF THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION.

Mr. Copp Effectively Replies in a

VIGOROUS SPEECH.

Mr. Morrison Spoke and Mr. McLatchey Has the Floor.

In the legislature yesterday afternoon the order of the day being called

Mr. Flemming

arose to criticize the provincial secretary's financial statement. He said: It is not pleasant to be forced to look on the dark side of the picture. The Provincial Secretary had been very optimistic in his tone and I would be pleased to agree with him if I could see any reason for the conclusion he arrives at. I wish to compliment him on the fact that he did not charge the opposition with declaring that the country was going to the dogs. He also omitted to charge us with being unpatriotic. Both of these charges occupied a prominent place in his address in previous years. He has said that the government has a progressive policy, the effect of which has been to keep our young men home and that it will not be necessary for them hereafter to go elsewhere to seek their fortunes. I declare I cannot see where the progressive policy comes in, unless you call it progressiveness to have increased the debt year after year and rolled up a burden which the coming generations will find it hard to bear. The Provincial Secretary said "The opposition has sneered and made light of the province." I challenge him to state when and where the leader of the opposition of his followers in the House and country have sneered at the resources of New Brunswick. On the contrary we view them with as much pride as any man on the floor of this House. But while we are buoyed up with that faith we cannot see the wisdom of increasing the debt year after year. The opposition has also been charged with opposing the policy of building permanent bridges. We have never opposed that policy, but we did protest strongly against building permanent bridges and paying two prices for them. You all remember the investigation three years ago into the two-priced bridge policy of the government upon which they are now so dumb, which showed that thousands of dollars of public money had been wasted and which resulted in the government being forced to reverse its policy and call for tenders, thus effecting a great saving.

I would not object to the expenditure incurred in building the bridge at Hartland provided it were made free. The difference between the cost and contract price of the Woodstock bridge would have been nearly sufficient to have paid for the construction of a free bridge at Hartland.

The estimated revenue last year was \$855,676, and the estimated expenditure \$805,767, leaving an estimated surplus of \$49,909. Adding to the estimated surplus the sum of \$20,000, excess of small pox fund, we have \$69,909 as the amount in which the Premier is astray in his estimate, the actual surplus this year being only \$6,785.

The premier said the opposition were always referring to the public debt of the province. They are justified in doing so, and it is not necessary to go back more than ten years to show the unenviable position the present government occupies in comparison with its predecessors. In

1893 the net debt was \$2,183,563; 1894 in \$2,252,829; in 1895, \$2,321,412; in 1896, \$2,374,869; in 1897, \$2,488,577; in 1898, \$2,621,867; in 1899, \$2,734,298; in 1900, \$2,851,086; in 1901, \$2,776,264; in 1902, \$3,076,140. The average increase for the five years from 1893 to 1897 was \$66,069, compared with \$117,642 from 1897 to 1902.

The receipts last year from all sources were \$1,102,423. Included in this are bonds for \$100,000 for permanent bridges, \$60,000 for smallpox and \$150,000 on account of fresher emergencies, making in all \$310,000, which leaves the net receipts \$766,066. The total expenditure was \$1,095,632. In other words the receipts were exactly 70 per cent of the expenditures.

In 1902 the deficit admitted at the end of the year is \$19,570. The smallpox bonds yielded \$60,000 and there was expended \$18,927, leaving a balance of \$14,072, so that the total actual deficit was \$60,613. Add to this the lunatic asylum deficit of \$13,087, and we have an aggregate deficit of \$73,730, without taking into consideration the \$250,000 spent on roads and bridges. This is a condition of affairs which does not admit of optimism on the part of any honourable members.

The Premier began his remarks with a reference to the agricultural policy of the government. In the past I have been able to say that I was quite in accord with certain things that the government had done for agriculture, but the more I investigate their policy in this respect the less of praise I can find to say in regard to it. In 1875 the legislature voted the sum of \$22,000 for this service, which was a very substantial amount compared with the sum spent last year. The province is progressing and it is not to be expected that the amount voted for agriculture will remain stationary. But the increase in 1902 over 1875 is not any more than we might expect. In 1890 the agricultural grant was \$26,108; in 1900, \$36,103; in 1901, \$35,691; in 1902, \$32,089, so that in the last two years the amount expended for agriculture has actually decreased.

If we find that the cost of administration of justice is considerably more now than in former years it is only fair to assume that we are paying larger fees than heretofore. In four years, 1890, 1892, 1894 and 1896 we paid for this service \$9,605, or a yearly average of \$2,401, compared with \$16,633 paid in 1898, 1900, 1901, 1902.

Executive government cost the province in 1892 \$26,036, and in 1902, with the agricultural department included, \$35,651.

Passing on to the item of public printing we find that in 1898 we paid for this service \$11,646, and in 1902, \$17,480, an increase in five years of \$5,834.

I note with pleasure the efforts of the chief commissioner to improve the ap-

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pearance of the report and extend the information therein contained.

For the current year a surplus of \$13,257 is estimated. Now I don't want to assume the role of a prophet, but I venture to predict that instead of a surplus there will be a substantial deficit at the end of the year.

Continuing Mr. Flemming said the course of his remarks the Premier referred to me in terms.

Hon. Mr. Tweedie—I don't see how I have any occasion to say that I am cutting words toward you. I have no intention of doing so and do not think I did, and if you understood me I am very sorry and apologize.

Mr. Flemming—You said that after thirty years as a legislator you hoped my record would be as good as yours, and you further stated that I never promoted a single thing in the interests of Carleton county or the province, and that I never said a wise thing in the House. I occupied a seat in this legislature for three years prior to the last election and the electors of Carleton county heartily endorsed my course. The premier, after thirty years in the legislature and with the prestige of the premiership, went back to the electors and what was the result? His colleague whom he had referred to as a serpent crawling on the ground, led him by 187 votes while his other colleague, to whom he had been pleased to refer as the deacon, led him by 65 votes. The three other members of the government ticket in Northumberland county were left at home. Therefore it would not seem that the Premier had been warranted in saying that I had never done or said a wise thing. He hopes my record will be as good as his thirty years hence. Whether I will be in public life for that length of time I do not know; our lives are not our own, but I hope to stay in public life as long as possible, and long after the misdeeds and shortcomings of the Premier have been forgotten and forgiven by a forgiving and considerate public, I trust to occupy an honourable place in public life and never be charged with turning my back on party or principle.

MR. COPP'S REPLY.

Member for Westmorland in Excellent form.

Mr. Copp said: As this is the first opportunity I have had this session of addressing the House I may take the liberty of referring to some other matters before dealing with the subject matter of the debate. The leader of the opposition expressed his regret at the absence of many familiar faces in the House, and I feel that it is proper for me to express regret also. He might perhaps have stated that he felt not only regret but disappointment for he certainly expected a better result from the elections than he had realized. I myself regret the absence of many members for whom I had a personal regard, the three gentlemen from Charlotte, who were colleagues of the Hon. Mr. Hill, and the three gentlemen from Northumberland who were colleagues of the Premier. In Mr. Burchill I lost a political and personal friend and I think it will be some time before either of the gentlemen who were elected with the Premier will be competent to fill Mr. Burchill's place. In the county of Westmorland two of the former members, Messrs. Melanson and Humphrey have been defeated, but I think the gentlemen who have taken their places are men of such ability and character that the county of Westmorland has suffered no loss. One of them has been taken into the government with the approval of his colleagues and although young, I have no doubt that he will prove himself a most valuable member. I congratulate the county on having such a representative and I know that he will do himself credit. The other gentlemen from Westmorland, Mr. Leger, will I am sure prove equally worthy, and I bespeak for him a very great career in this House. The Acadian people of Westmorland have reason to be proud of him.

I also desire to congratulate the Premier on his budget speech. I feel, as every member must feel, a degree of pride in the able manner in which he dealt with the affairs of the province. He gives us plain, unvarnished facts and figures, and it is for us to grapple with the questions which he suggests. I for one am prepared to support the administration of Mr. Tweedie so long as it continues in its present course. I congratulate the Premier because he has never sought to deceive his followers or to conceal the truth, but has always courted

the fullest investigation. I also congratulate him on the policy he has announced with regard to three important public questions. He has told us that the stumpage is to be increased. That is the proper policy for the government to pursue, not by an increase that will injure the operator, but which will enable the province to share in its prosperity. I do not believe that the stumpage should always be fixed at one figure. It should be regulated according to the prices of lumber and labour, and if this is done there can be no ground for complaint. I also hail with delight the proposed new road law. It is a step in the right direction. We have now too many commissioners and supervisors, and the money for the roads passes through too many hands. Let one man in each district be responsible for the expenditure on the roads and we will have a better result. I also approve of the policy of requiring companies that seek franchises in this province to show their ability to carry out the work they propose to undertake. The franchises of this province belong to the people, and we have a right to see that they are properly bestowed.

In following the member for Carleton I do not expect to enter into every detail that he has dealt with. I must congratulate him on the effort he has made, for he has given a great deal of study to the questions for weeks, and I feel that I am placed at a disadvantage in not having the opportunity of studying the figures he has quoted. Still his speech reminds me of the answer given to the old clergyman, who asked one of his parishioners how he liked his sermon of the day before. The parishoner cheerfully replied, "I always liked that sermon," and so we have heard Mr. Flemming's speech so often that some of us really begin to like it. He complains that the Premier has drawn a very rosy picture of the condition of the province. But surely that is better than drawing such a gloomy picture as the member for Carleton has done. He starts out with complaining of the size of the public debt, which is being imposed on the province for future generations to pay. I do not see any reason for anxiety on account of this debt. If we figure it up we shall find that it amounts to about \$10 per head for each inhabitant of the province. Yet the member for Carleton, who sheds tears over this debt, steadily supported a government in the Dominion which had a debt amounting to \$35 a head for each inhabitant of Canada. Did he hold up his hands in holy horror at the size of this debt? By no means. It did not give him any concern, nor did he think it a reason for withdrawing his support. I would also like to point out that the debt of St. John is almost \$100 a head and the debt of Moncton \$60 a head, yet no one believes that these cities are likely to be ruined by their debts. Our provincial debt is very small in proportion to our resources, although the opposition have sought to minimize these resources. I remember in 1899 the ridicule with which two gentlemen who were candidates for the opposition in Westmorland spoke of the prospects of getting oil and natural gas in New Brunswick. They said that the only natural gas in the province was that which emanated from the government. Yet now we see the results of the government's policy in the development of the magnificent oil fields of that county.

(CONTINUED ON THIRD PAGE.)

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