

AN UNFAILING BILL OF FARE.

Legislators Discussing the New Highway Bill in Great Detail.

MR. HAZEN OBJECTS TO MANNER OF APPOINTING SUPERINTENDENTS.

And Moved Amendment Giving Power to Municipal Councils.

The House again went into committee on the Highway bill, on Wednesday afternoon, Mr. Copp in the chair, and the reading of the bill from section 39 was resumed.

Mr. Allen said that there was a clause to be added to section 43, sub section 1, making section 80 to 117 of Chapter 170 of the new consolidated statutes as to the collection of rates to form part of this act. Another section was to be added at the end of subsection 3, that the chief commissioner should notify each superintendent of the amount available for his parish out of the road tax and provincial grant. There would also be an addition to subsection 4, that the same percentage should be allowed for collecting this road tax as other rates.

Mr. Flemming thought that there should be an addition to subsection 2 providing that the money to be handed over as the proceeds of the road tax should have deducted from it the cost of collection.

Mr. Allen said it was not the intention of the bill that the burden of paying the cost of collection should be placed on the council it was usual to add ten per cent to the amount required to meet this charge.

Mr. Flemming—That does not alter the matter for it would only add to the amount to be paid. The better way would be to take from the money returned the cost of collection.

Mr. Allen—Then you will have so much less road money.

Hon. Mr. Tweedie said that he observed a disposition on the part of some members to make it appear that the legislature desired to throw an additional burden on the municipalities. That was not the case. The road money would be collected in precisely the same manner as at present, only the tax will be smaller.

Mr. Flemming—In some parishes that I could name this road tax will be about equal to the whole amount now levied for county purposes.

Hon. Mr. Tweedie—The system of assessment is not altered. If more money was obtained from the counties they will have the more benefit. The point is, are we right in making this poll tax a dollar, and ten cents for each \$100 of property. If we are right the money will be collected in the ordinary way. If it is right to put a money tax on the people there can be no harm in collecting it in the ordinary way.

Mr. Tweedie—The exception taken by the member for Carleton would only reduce the money collected by the percentage of cost of collecting it and not make it necessary to pay for its collection out of the county contingent fund.

Mr. Hazen—With regard to the amount of money to be expended, is the sole responsibility for expending the money on the superintendent?

Hon. Mr. Labillois—The superintendent will expend the money as he is ordered by the public works department.

Mr. Flemming—How will the money be divided?

Hon. Mr. Labillois—Each superintendent will be required to furnish a report as to the needs of his district and the chief commissioner will decide as to the amount required. This statement applies to the government grant.

The parish road money will remain in the county treasurer's hands to the credit of the parish until it is needed. The by road monies amounting to \$70,000 a year will be in one fund and the department

will divide it as the needs of each county requires.

Mr. Clarke—On what basis is the money now divided?

Hon. Mr. Labillois—It is divided on an old system which has been long in operation but which I do not think is just. We desire to divide the money in a manner more equitable to the several counties.

On section 46 providing for winter roads being read Mr. Morrison said he did not see why they should not be looked after by the superintendent in the same manner as summer roads.

Mr. Burden agreed with this view and said if the system was not changed it would throw the burden of keeping the roads open on a few people so many being at work in the woods.

Mr. Hazen said it was quite as necessary to have improved roads in winter as in summer and if the law remains as it is there will be no improvement for in many places the law is now a dead letter. This bill throws the whole burden of keeping up winter roads on the municipalities although the entire control of the roads is taken out of their hands. Winter roads should be looked after by the superintendent, and if his district is too large for him to attend to personally he should divide it into sub districts each under a competent man.

Hon. Mr. Labillois—This is no doubt one of the most important sections in the bill. He was afraid that if the superintendent had to pay out money for keeping the winter roads open there would be very little left for summer roads. There might be a provision requiring each man to give three days work on winter roads and after that the superintendent could pay for any additional work that was required.

Mr. Smith said he referred to this section a few days ago. As the principle of the bill was against the continuance of statute labour the only proper way was to have this work done by the superintendent. The same machinery that repaired the roads in summer could keep them open in winter.

Mr. Tweedie thought the system of calling men out to break roads in winter was an antiquated system that should not be continued. There were machines now available at a trifling cost by means of which roads could be kept open. He also thought that provision should be made for properly housing the machines used on the roads.

Hon. Mr. Tweedie said he was rather inclined to agree with the member for Victoria that it would be best for the superintendent to take over the winter roads. He did not think the present law was satisfactory.

Hon. Mr. Hill could hardly agree with the idea of devoting so large an amount to winter roads. In Charlotte there was only danger from drifts about two months in the year and it must be remembered that while the money expended on winter roads had only a temporary effect that on summer roads was permanent.

Mr. King agreed with the member for Charlotte and thought that it would be impossible for one superintendent to attend to all the roads in winter in a large parish such as Sussex. It would take all the money that could be collected to keep the roads open as the matter was in charge of the superintendent no man would turn out to assist and every man would claim that the road should be kept open for his convenience.

Mr. Tweedie—My opinion is that one third of the fund collected should be

expended on winter roads. It is not my desire, however, to increase the tax but the people are clamoring for better winter roads. I think two thirds of the fund expended on repairs will do more good than statute labour.

Mr. King—I would like to have some definite knowledge in regard to how much one third of the fund would do. I know in my county this method would not be satisfactory. No one superintendent in a parish could look after the breaking out of roads unless the country is thickly settled. In winter it is highly important to have the work done immediately, whereas in summer it is not.

Mr. Tweedie—I think a superintendent could clear out ten miles of road in a day with a snowplow.

Mr. King—I am satisfied they could not clear five miles a day through the Kings county roads.

Mr. Morrissey—It is doubtless the object of the act to provide better roads and I think it would be well to put the superintendent in charge of the road for the whole year, winter and summer. Get good men and pay them well and they will do efficient work. It is almost impossible to tax men away from home and call out old men who are home to work. There ought to be a provision made for the opening of roads through the fields in winter.

Mr. Osman—I think the important question is whether the superintendent or council shall have power to appoint men to break the roads. There is no question but that superintendents should have the power which would save considerable money. The government might also consider the propriety of taking measures to have the old fences replaced by wire ones which would prevent drifting.

Mr. Legere—The present system of keeping open the roads is highly satisfactory and should not be changed. As I understand the new law it provides one superintendent for each district. One man cannot do the work and the expenses would be great. There is no complaint at present and I feel sure the people would oppose a change.

Hon. Mr. Dunn—It is very essential to keep the winter roads open, but the drifting is not a very serious matter especially when wire fences are used. There are only about two months when the roads are blocked and generally it is in certain places on the road. The superintendent could be appointed to look after these places and wire fences might be erected there.

Mr. Carpenter—The principal feature of the new bill which commands itself to me is the centralizing of the whole business. If the superintendent is appointed to look after the roads and has all the fences and funds in his control there would be more satisfaction.

Hon. Mr. Sweeney—We cannot do better than leave the case of winter roads as it is at present. I know in Westmorland county, it would be impossible for one superintendent to look after a whole parish, because one contains as much as 100 miles of great road. He would not be able to keep the road clear, and it is possible only in small districts for one superintendent to undertake the work. I think it is well for the people living along the road to keep it clear and this is the only proper plan.

Mr. Jones—I agree with the proposition that the superintendent should have control of the roads both winter and summer. It may be the superintendent should have the same right in appointing a roadmaster, as the county council has now. There are great objections no doubt to calling out men to clear roads, but the work had to be done promptly, and no one could do it better than the people along the road. It would be hard to fix a definite portion of fund to keep the roads open.

Mr. McLatchey—The object of the bill is the betterment of highways. It has been felt that statute labour did not give best results. The power of looking after the roads should be given to the superintendent both in winter and summer. The burden of opening the roads should remain on the farmers as money intended for the betterment of summer roads should not be diverted for winter roads.

Mr. Flemming—I had a letter from a gentleman in Carleton of experience in road making who keeps the hardest roads in the section open satisfactorily and at small cost with a snowplow and this plan might be adopted in other sections.

Mr. Ryan—It seems to me the main trouble is with the fences. When the old fences are replaced by wire there is no more trouble with snowdrifts. Also I think each county should have its separate fund and better results would be achieved.

Mr. Hill—In regard to section 47, I do not see why fences built before 1890 should be regarded as sacred as they might be just so much hindrance as any. The superintendent should have the right to remove them.

Mr. Allen—I would say in reply that the provision was made in the old act because it was not felt just to have some valuable fences removed which were constructed previous to the passing of the act. It was not felt advisable to give the superintendent power before getting the opinion of the house.

Mr. Hill—I think section 49 in regard to wide tires for vehicles is valueless as it is a repetition of the old act which was ineffective, since there is no way of settling how much the load weighed.

Mr. Hazen said the owners of Oromocto Island thought that a portion of the amount assessed on that island should be expended on a wharf or landing to enable them to get on and off the island at baying time. He asked when will the act be put in operation.

Hon. Mr. Tweedie thought there would be no difficulty in bringing the act into operation next November. The money of the province would be available for the roads even if the sums assessed were not all collected.

An Amendment.

The bill was then read section by section. On the second section being read Mr. Hazen said that this bill made a radical change in our road system and that he had an amendment to move. The bill took all the power out of the council except that of ordering the road assessment and placed it in the public works department. He did not propose to agree to the principle that the board of works should expend the money assessed on the people. If this was done the money would be used for political purposes. For many years the bye road monies were paid to the municipal councils which was elected without regard to politics but of late years the system has been changed. If the road money was expended by the council the expenditure would be more carefully scrutinized and better results would be obtained. For years the bye road money had been appropriated on a certain scale to every county and that system had a great deal to recommend it because it insured to every county a certain amount of money. The bill placed far too much power in the hands of the chief commissioner and on the eve of an election money would be used for political purposes as was done in the parish of Lincoln where \$700 had been disbursed in an absolutely unnecessary expenditure. It was wrong in principle that a direct tax should be placed on the people and the money handed over to the government and without the municipal council having any control over it. Members of the municipal council were prudent to a degree and there was no reason for believing that they would expend this money otherwise than in the public interest. That being the case he would move that the second section of the bill be amended so that the appointment of the superintendents would be in the municipal councils.

Hon. Mr. Tweedie said that as the House was rather thin the discussion of this question had better stand over. He might say, however, that the government whether right or wrong had taken a

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stand with regard to this measure. Last session he had outlined the bill to the House and stated what it would be like. Its leading features were the abolition of bye roads and of statute labour and these features had met with the approval of the country. The leader of the opposition was endeavouring to raise an outcry against the bill by pretending that it was opposed to the interests of the municipality, yet no opposition paper had ventured to declare that the principle of the bill was wrong. Does he propose that all the money provincial and otherwise shall be handed over to superintendents nominated by the council? Surely the people of this country would not support such a proposition as that. He says that no government is to be trusted with expending the bye road money fairly among the counties, yet for years this has been done with the great road money without any complaint being made. Surely if the chief commissioner can be entrusted with the expenditure of the great road money he can equally be entrusted to expend the sum hitherto given for bye roads. We in New Brunswick give more money to the roads than in any other province and the time has come for the government to see that the money is expended on public roads only. The people generally have not such a good opinion of the county councils as the leader of the opposition. Some years ago we gave the bye road money of the people of Northumberland to be expended by the council, and the people complained that it was not properly expended. This has been the experience of other counties and the feeling of the people is against the practice. When the government is expending so much money it is right that they should have control over it and that this control should not be divided.

Mr. Flemming said that the plan of having money spent by the supervisors or commissioners appointed by the department was adopted some years ago and the premier says it has been unsatisfactory. He contended that it ought to be handed over to the municipality, and he claimed that the system brought better results than when the sum was handed to special commissioners. Referring to the annual report, Mr. Flemming said that in some counties more was expended on bye roads than was appropriated, in other counties the expenditure was less. He contended that if by the act the appropriation shall be handed to the municipality, the amount expended in each county would not exceed the appropriation. He had great faith in the chief commissioner but he would not wish to see any man have perfect freedom in apportioning the amounts to the counties. The bill proposed to impose a direct tax on the people and to hand over the money to the government, and he wished to register his disapproval of that. He was willing to do away with statute labour but in fairness to the people the amount of tax should go to the municipality.

Mr. Morrison wished to take exception to the statement of the premier that bye road money in Northumberland county had been so badly expended that it raised a howl from the people. He regretted that the matter was not left in the hands of the council. Only about thirty per cent. of the money usually given was handed to the council. He

(Continued on Second Page.)

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