

Mr. NICHOLSON: What happened in 1923?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I do not know to what my hon. friend is referring.

Mr. NICHOLSON: The gentleman brought here to be president of the Canadian National Railways.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: If this clause had been inserted in the original act, how would the ministry of to-day have felt had they been obliged, notwithstanding whatever argument or reasons they might urge, to retain in office whoever had been appointed? The leaving of the appointment of the president of the railway as at pleasure was the only sound and sensible position to take. I do not think the ministry can do other than agree with this statement because, when they came into office, they became responsible, and they assumed their responsibility in the way in which they believed it should be assumed. If they assumed it in the wrong way, and without justification, their action is subject to criticism. The very fact, however, that as a responsible ministry they found it advisable to make a change is the strongest reason why they should hesitate in binding any subsequent ministry.

May I say this with reference to the appointment of Sir Henry Thornton. The government of the day before it was able to secure Sir Henry, had sought high and low for a president of the national railway. As I recall the circumstances, it was a matter of a search of a year or more before the person regarded as suitable could be found to take the position of president of the national railways. When we appointed Sir Henry, we believed we had secured one who was in no way associated with either the Canadian National or the Grand Trunk, who would as between these former rival systems have no preference or feeling one way or the other, and who was independent of all other former influences. He was given a free hand. He came to us from England; his experience had been largely in the United States. If there ever was a man who was ideally fitted so far as general qualifications and the like were concerned, and calculated to be impartial in the discharge of his duties once given a free hand, Sir Henry Thornton was that man. Whatever hon. members may now wish to say about him, or of his administration during the last year or two, they will have to admit that they themselves when on this side of the house were as strong in endorsement of Sir Henry Thornton's management of the road at the time as were the members of the government in office.

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

Mr. McGIBBON: They could not find out anything about the situation.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: We must admit that at any rate up to a certain period there was general agreement throughout the country that the best man possible had been found for the position. But the man who was regarded the best at the time was evidently not thought to be the best man to continue indefinitely. A like situation may arise as regards any appointment. Therefore the ministry of the day, of whatever complexion it may be, should be given a free hand to assume and discharge its responsibility in its own way.

The hon. member for Muskoka-Ontario has made a reference to political interference. I am not going to bring that subject into the discussion except to put on record one statement which I think it is owing to the former administration should be on record so far as alleged political interference on the part of the government of the day is concerned. Sir Henry Thornton himself gave to the *Saturday Evening Post* on July 6, 1929, a statement of the circumstances under which he took office as president of the railroad, of the manner in which he managed its affairs, and of the extent to which up to that time there had been aught in the nature of governmental interference. I shall quote just one paragraph from page 9 of the *Saturday Evening Post* of the date mentioned. I shall say nothing at present about what Sir Henry Thornton may have subsequently said on the same subject. After mentioning the circumstances of the problem with which he was confronted he continues in this article as follows:

But, as I have mentioned, I love a good fight. So I crossed the ocean and had a talk with the Right Hon. Mackenzie King, the Prime Minister. He, too, said, there would be no politics. I took the job.

There never has been any politics. But that wasn't the fault of a great many persons. Premier King kept his promise. And during the period between elections when the Conservative party was in control no one laboured harder in the real interest of the property than Sir Henry Drayton, who carried on governmental administration during the election period. Within a year a bulwark had arisen to back him—the opinion of the people of Canada. To-day there is as much chance of politics getting into the Canadian National Railways as there is of an elephant walking a tight-rope. Both have yet to be done. Last year, for instance, the railways which I am fortunate enough to administer bought \$99,000,000 worth of supplies. Not one cent of those purchases was dictated politically, nor any that preceded them.

I place this statement on record because it has been before the public for some years and no exception has ever been taken to it;