

suavely pressed the button which put into operation the air compressor of the gagging machine, thereafter gracefully making his exit from the Chamber. And now, Mr. Chairman, we have this patented infernal machine working smoothly, and to the keen delight and entire satisfaction of its ingenious inventor. I am going to be fair with my hon. friend the leader of the Government, because I should be loath to criticise him unduly; but I must perforce ask him the reason for his assertion that all of us Liberals are opposed to public ownership of railways, and why he should think it a crime for us to ask questions. Why, he himself asked for information; and I may ask him, has he not himself ridiculed the proposition of public ownership? Certainly, for he was reminded of the fact by my hon. friend from Maisonneuve, and I was glad to observe that he took it in good part. I do not suppose my hon. friend will deny me the very same privilege that he claimed for himself. I do not see how I can endorse legislation introduced for the purpose of bringing railways, either taken over or to be taken over by the Government, under the control of a corporation responsible not to Parliament but to the Government of the day. There are good arguments in favour of public ownership.

Some hon. MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

Mr. FOURNIER: That is all right. I have an open mind on this question.

Some hon. MEMBERS: Hear, hear.

Mr. FOURNIER: Hon. members may laugh but they will hear the rest of my statement: There are also objections to public ownership. There are arguments on both sides, and I do not question the authority of the sponsors of the Bill, the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Railways. Indeed, they may be well versed in railway matters, but in my opinion, considering the qualifications of the two hon. gentlemen, and with all deference to them, I should say that one of them is best versed in law, while the other is undoubtedly best versed in starch. It seems to me that the present Cabinet has developed a remarkable propensity for the assumption of responsibility at a rate which the public has not been able fully to follow, and I do not know how I can vote squarely on the question when we cannot get the information which we seek. Am I going to tell my constituents that the greatest argument in favour of public ownership is the revival of forty-four charters to gentlemen owning townships and all the land on which they can specu-

[Mr. Fournier.]

late? I am in favour of public ownership but I want to say to hon. gentlemen who have sat here all through the discussion and some of whom, it seemed to me, were almost dead, that before I undertake to support public ownership I want the few pennies in my pocket and my watch put in a place of safe keeping. I have listened very attentively to all that has been said in regard to this Bill, and all that I have been able to gather is the fact that it creates a combination of very great power which will exercise a political sway unprecedented in our history. This legislation has been very comprehensive in its provisions. Even the headquarters are to be chosen by Order in Council. The form of railway administration proposed is not so much public as it is cabinet ownership, and the ministerial party is vested with powers far beyond the traditional responsibility of Governments. Now, I am a French Canadian, but a Canadian wherever I go. I have the honour to represent Bellechasse, the finest riding in the province of Quebec, and I come from that very spot where the first page of Canadian history was written, where Christianity and civilization made their first lodgment in that vast extent of country covered with wilderness, where the toilers of the soil converted forests into verdant fields thereby planting the first seed of Canadianism on this continent. I am a Canadian, I repeat; therefore why should I not believe in Canadian enterprise? I am a firm believer in Canadian enterprise and progress, and I resent any insinuation to the contrary.

There are strong reasons against the proposed legislation. I am open to conviction on this matter, but how am I to be convinced when the Government refuses me information? The Government's record is not one that can be accepted with good grace, is not one to lead us to trust either the financial capacity or the political honesty of the system which it represents. In this connection let me quote the opinion of an expert on railway matters, Mr. Lovatt, he says:

There is nothing so essential to the financial peace and the commercial and industrial welfare of this country as a definite government railroad policy.

That is very good advice, let us have a definite policy, but here we are confronted by a new condition. I will be frank with the leader of the Government. Here we have the Canadian Northern on our hands, and I ask who is responsible for this?

An hon. MEMBER: Yes, who, tell us?