

FAIR WARNING TO POLITICIANS.

*Thornton
Mee*

The promise to take the National Railway out of politics seems in a way to become a fact. Sir Henry Thornton has made it clear that if in the administration of that property the politicians come in, he goes out. In language so plain and unequivocal that the simplest mind can comprehend, he defines his attitude. From the admirable address Sir Henry delivered in Montreal on Tuesday evening, we cull these—not flowers of rhetoric—deliberate, emphatic words uttered by one who instead of a servant intends to be master in his house. The words deserve being framed and hung up in the corridors of Parliament as well as in the offices of the railway executives.

“Let it be emphatically understood now and for once and for all, that there is to be no political interference, direct or indirect, in the administration and working of the Canadian National Railways. I cannot put it any more forcefully without transgressing the rules of polite speech, and if I knew of any words which would make this point more clear I should unhesitatingly employ them.”

“Let me again repeat that there is to be no political interference or influence in the administration of the Canadian National Railways. Any other policy will reduce your railways to a spineless nuisance with no body to kick nor soul to damn. Therefore, the railway administration must be master in its own house, and in the interest of efficient management no interference of any sort can be tolerated.”

Sir Henry Thornton has written into his contract of engagement with the government the pledge of the Premier that there is to be no political interference; it is so nominated in the bond; and if the pledge is violated Sir Henry Thornton will throw up his job. Now, there is not a man of ordinary sense in all Canada who will not agree that the sole and only chance of making the National Railway a paying proposition under public ownership is by rigidly adhering to the line laid down by the President. A new experiment is to be tried, that of public ownership and private operation; not as in India, where the government constructs the roads and leases them to private companies at a price commensurate with interest charge on capital; but private operation by an independent staff appointed by a selected head to whom all power is given, and in whom all confidence is placed. All the money Sir Henry can make out of the railway is to be turned into the public purse, but he and he alone is to determine the policy, perfect the organization, and direct the methods by which results are to be produced.

Will the politicians stand for this? If so, a great change of heart will come to them. The loss of civil service patronage is a small matter compared with the loss of railway patronage, not only in respect of appointments, but in making rates for favored communities and using the property to promote party purposes. Sir Henry Thornton's conception that the Canadian system differs from that of some other countries having public ownership of railways, inasmuch as in Canada there is but one shareholder to deal with, namely, the government, is scarcely accurate, as he may learn before the next session of Parliament terminates. The government is not the shareholder but trustee of the shareholders, and liable to be deprived of its trust whenever the real shareholders, the taxpayers, consider the trust not to be well administered. The Premier and his colleagues put their ministerial life at stake when they turn over to Sir Henry control of the National Railways, always assuming the government does not falter in this course. The Gazette is far from assured that the railway can be kept out of politics, be the decision of Hon. Mr. King ever so firm; but The Gazette is equally certain that the National Railway will come a cropper if Sir Henry Thornton is not permitted to play the autocrat, even at sacrifice of those principles of democratic government of which so much vain and foolish boast is sometimes made.

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