

must have been some reason. So why not, in reviving these charters, if there are only four of them, give the people a chance to present their objections?

Mr. RICHARDSON: I dislike very much at this late hour on Friday night to take up even a few moments of the time of the House, but the discussion that arose this afternoon and which has continued this evening is so vastly important that I believe it my duty to present a few points which I think have been overlooked.

In regard to these charters, even if there are forty-two of them, like my hon. friend Acting Prime Minister (Sir Thomas White) I cannot understand why there should be any opposition on the part of members of this House to their renewal. Renewal is being asked in the interest of the people. These roads have passed into the control of the people and the people are merely asking that these charters be renewed and that the time for construction be extended. Every member on the opposite side of the House who has had any experience whatever in the Railway Committee during the last twenty or twenty-five years knows that the policy had been adopted of free trade in railway charters. Hundreds, if not thousands of times, railway charters have been renewed in the interest of private corporations. One of the evils of the renewal of these charters has been that it has prevented the construction of railways. I am happy to say that the Railway Committee has adopted a new policy and that most of the members of that committee are now of the opinion, and they have enforced that opinion, that charters should not be renewed.

But there was never any opposition, as a rule, to the renewal of these charters and here, I repeat, the renewal of these charters is in the interest of the country. In some cases the work has been started on these branches, and it would seem inexplicable that any opposition should be offered to them. Let me give a summary of these charters. In Alberta there are twelve or thirteen. This is not, as has been suggested by speakers on the other side, the construction of new railways. These are only little branch lines designed to accommodate settlers here and there, feeders for the nationally owned railway. In Saskatchewan there are twenty-three; in Manitoba, four; and in British Columbia four. These are not new railway systems but they are merely feeders. Why should they not be granted?

Mr. McKENZIE: I am perfectly in accord with my hon. friend in saying that these railways should be built wherever they can be usefully built. My position is that we have the authority in this new Act and in the Government Railway Act which might be made applicable to build these roads absolutely in the same places, on the same lines and more quickly for the advantage of the people under this legislation than by bothering with these old charters. That is why I am opposed to this section.

Mr. RICHARDSON: Even if you had that power under the General Railway Act, is there any harm in giving them this authority? The company that obtained these charters must have considered them of great importance, and the Government, acting in the interest of the country and in the interest of the nationally owned railway, asks that these charters be renewed. Surely that is a reasonable and fair proposition. I cannot understand why there should be any opposition. I think my hon. friend from Maisonneuve raised the point that it might prevent the construction of railways. He knows, because he is an intelligent man and because he has been in this House for twenty-four years, that henceforth there will only be two systems of railway in this country, the Canadian Pacific and the Canadian National. No company is going to build a little line from nowhere to some other indefinite locality, because it will not pay. From now on the policy will be to build feeders for these two railways. Then, why raise any objection? The Canadian Pacific will be knocking at the door of this Parliament very soon asking for feeders for their great system. It will be interesting to watch the position which hon. gentlemen on the other side will take in regard to that application.

I remember—and I am not a very old man—when the Canadian Pacific applied to this House for a blanket charter to build lines indefinitely all over the Northwest. I sat on the Liberal side at that time and I opposed the application with all the force at my command. But I was as the voice of one crying in the wilderness. The old Liberal party just swept me aside and this blanket charter was granted in order that the Canadian Pacific might fasten its monopoly on that country.

As a young man I learned some of my politics at the feet of the Hon. Alexander Mackenzie, the namesake of the present leader of the Opposition. Alexander Mackenzie's policy, and the historic Liberal policy in those days, was public owner-