

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I have not in mind what the last treaty was, but I have in mind very distinctly the question of the St. Lawrence waterway treaty which is a very important matter, very much more important than any treaty in connection with the scenic beauty of the neighborhood in which my hon. friend lives.

Mr. CHAPLIN: It was a treaty regarding water power, which was a very important matter, quite as important as Beauharnois.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: May I direct attention to the next clause which appears in the speech from the throne:

A commission has been appointed to inquire into the whole problem of transportation in Canada. My ministers expect that the report of the commission will be ready for submission to parliament during the present session.

There, again, is a paragraph in the speech from the throne which may mean very much or very little. I should like however to draw the attention of hon. members to the fact that it is rather significant at a time when the government has chosen to announce to the house its intention to complete the St. Lawrence waterway that they have appointed a commission to inquire into the whole question of transportation. One would have thought this order of things would be the reverse and that the government would have waited until the transportation commission had made its report on all phases of transportation, on the effect of waterways upon transportation, on the effect of motor traffic and aerial navigation. I assume all these matters are being considered by the commission now functioning.

In regard to transportation all we have before us at the moment is that the administration intends to have a report presented to this parliament on that subject. I notice my right hon. friend, speaking at Toronto the other day, said the appointment of the commission was the result of a recommendation of the select committee of this house on railways and shipping. I wish to tell him that he was in fact quite mistaken. The select committee on railways and shipping did not recommend the appointment of a transportation commission. That committee passed on for the consideration of the government a suggestion originally made by Sir Henry Thornton that such an inquiry might be advantageous. May I again comment on the skill with which my right hon. friend seeks to deprive parliament of an opportunity to discuss matters of public interest and public concern. If it was his intention to appoint a royal commission to inquire into the matter

of transportation why did he not advise parliament before the last prorogation. Before we left this house last August, he had the report of the committee on railways and shipping which, he says, is the basis of his action. Why was the house not told that as a result of that report the government were going to appoint a royal commission? Why was there not placed in the supplementary estimates a sum of money for the purpose of making provision for the work of this commission? I think I am right when I say this parliament has not appropriated one dollar for any transportation commission, yet we know for the past few months such a commission has been at work across Canada from coast to coast. As I said earlier to-day action of the kind constitutes an ignoring of the rights and privileges of this house. We should not be called upon to vote sums of money for any purpose after the work has been performed, if it is possible to have those sums voted in advance. We should have an opportunity to discuss the reasons for appointment of bodies of this kind and what is to govern their actions when they are appointed.

Concerning the transportation commission I have taken exception to the fact that its deliberations have been conducted in secret. I notice my right hon. friend was very indignant that I should venture to criticize such secrecy. He said when the Liberal administration was in office questions were asked and information refused time and again; that he had been told information could not be given; that it was not desirable to make a statement which might be helpful to competitors. That is perfectly true. The fact however that here and there certain information was thought to be of a character which had much better be communicated privately, rather than publicly, to hon. members of the house did not interfere with this parliament having the freest latitude to discuss all phases of the transportation question.

My right hon. friend forgets—no, he does not forget, because he knows very well—the fact that the whole business of these transportation companies is discussed publicly in the committee on railways and shipping. These companies are before committees of this house and hon. members have the right to ask any questions they desire. There it is customary, where certain matters are of a private nature or should be so regarded, to have the information reserved, so far as the public is concerned, for a time at least. That procedure however is the exception and not the rule.