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The Railway Problem

Article VI.—Blight of private ownership in early days of Confederation—What Joseph Howe foresaw—A chapter of heretofore unwritten history.

By E. B. Biggar

On July 1, 1867, the federation of

On July 1, 1867, the federation of the four provinces which at first formed the Dominion of Canada was proclaimed with rejoicings that were confined mostly to the two upper provinces. The cause of this division of sentiment will appear later.

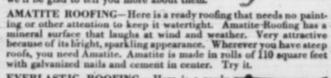
The economic basis of the union was the Intercolonial Railway—the first inter-state railway in North America under government ownership—for the express condition on which Nova Scotia and New Brunswick joined Upper and Lower Canada was the building of this and New Brunswick joined Upper and Lower Canada was the building of this railway. When some people sneer at the Intercolonial as a railway that has never paid a profit they misconceive the primary purpose of this project, which was to be an instrument for bringing was to be an instrument for bringing these provinces into social, political and economic unity. No Dominion of Canada could ever have been created while the world stood if these purposes had been subordinated to the low aim of merely getting a profit out of the instrument itself. It is only when private citizens are permitted to exercise a state function that such an object becomes the measure of national aims. None of the founders of Confederation

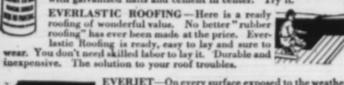
submission to a precedent, but as early as 1850 he foresaw the troubles that would arise in Great Britain and the United States from private ownership. In a speech advocating the appropriation of £330,000 of public money for a railway from Halifax to Windsor, N.S., he said: "There are things that they—the government—should not control, but the great highways—the channels of communication—should claim special consideration, and when I am told that we should hand over for all time to come this great western railway to a private company, I have to such an assignment a serious objection. All our roads in Nova Scotia, made by the industry and resources of the people, are free to the people of this hour. The toll bar is almost unknown, and this railroad, which will be the Queen's highway to the western countries in all time to come, should be the property of the province, and not of a private association. The roads, telegraphs, lighthouses, the standards of value, the administration of justice—these are the topics with which a government is bound to deal. There was a time, in the feudal ages, when every baron adthe feudal ages, when every baron ad-



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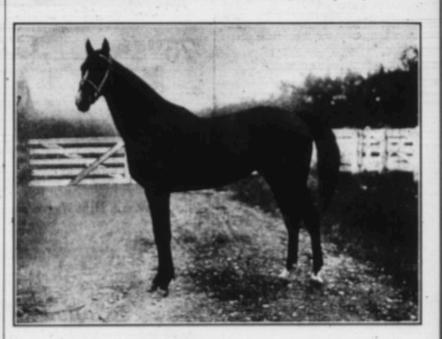
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ever considered a profit on the road as an end in itself when discussing the railway. None of the great confederaan end in itself when discussing the railway. None of the great confederation speeches even mention railway profits in any way. But suppose the Fathers of Confederation had lost sight of the great end, and had narrowed their vision to the mere means, how can the people of the present generation expect a profit in operation when the Intercolonial has always been beheaded at the point where it would be possible to make a profit from the traffe of the great West, which would come to it if the private roads, operating to private advantage, did not intervene! How, indeed, can the Intercolonial make a profit when the privately owned roads are allowed to levy taxation on the whole of Canada at higher rates than are permitted to the government line, while the private lines are also allowed the further advantage of a larger population upon whom they may levy taxes.

Joseph Howe on Private Ownership

Joseph Howe on Private Ownership

No statesman in the history of Can-ada ever accomplished so many legis-lative reforms in the provincial sphere. or left a deeper impression on the whole of British America than Joseph Howe. Altho the world was still young in railway experience when his public life began, he saw from the first the true relation of the state to the railway. He was not awed into a slavish ministered law to his tenants and retainers according to his own will, but the progress of civilization swept this system away, because men found it inconsistent with liberty, and because they found that all these modes of dealing with that which belonged of right to the state, led to tyranny. . . The government of Great Britain erred when it surrendered to private companies the control of the highroads of the land. The little state of Belgium acted in a far wiser manner. In Belgium, the railways, radiating from a common centre, reach every section of the country. They are all owned and have been constructed by the government. In my judgment, of all the nations of Europe, not one has shown more wisdom in the ministered law to his tenants and re not one has shown more wisdom in

not one has shown more wisdom in the construction of railways than this little state. There is greater unity of action, greater-power for good, in a government than in a private company."

In another speech he said: "I believe that if all the railways of England had been made by the government it would have saved millions of pounds to the country." and he added that the depression and bankruptcy that prevailed thruout Great Britain in 1847 were due to the railways "constructed were due to the railways "constructed by private associations." Owing to the wholesale discharge of men by the railways, there was a great exodus in 1847, and 17,445 persons died on the passage to Canada and New Brunawick

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To ma tory it s Howe, af to the un erica, an railway to as 1835, s est oppon-created in onism tha eration. opinion, t Hincks to ship of the many in speech in whistle opasses of journey for six saw this the railwa livered or leaven of which wo to be ave to have a While I ial aid fo owned rai the Pacificown nest throwing way plan the Grand vate own working o gave out up the De-had failed meet him that he h and it is e that Hine policy of. When Arc lish railwa up a move built line relentless public and succeeded, known tha guaranteed ment, was les, the qu became do ly interest have in it money che possible. barass ours seciations extremity, to aid us, them: . . . I see no r expend, fo the whole s as co-partn ey, and inv I desire to Archibald i wick, he w wick, he wo together, a and resour quaintly sa buy the ho They could on a single the people risk the co in compari objections l jection tou pounds, shi the state or ly granted ritory, with tenances, Nova Scoti grant if she man who p in our asser-be less par once made

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