

*Hudson Bay Railway*

scale, perhaps some less permanent scale—facilities by which the route can be tested, the feasibility of the navigation of the straits as a commercial venture can be tested, and all these obstacles be tried out. There should be some way by which—with a less expenditure, on a less extensive, possibly, let me say, a less permanent scale,—the whole plant could be put to trial.

Now, assuming so much let me say that it should have priority in my judgment, over other national ventures of a major kind. I do not think good faith will be kept with western Canada unless that is recognized by this House. Men have gone in there, families have gone in, settlers have gone in, on the faith of the determination of this parliament that the road would be built. Whatever may be the average judgment of a member here to-day, there is no disputing the fact at all that the three prairie provinces of the West are a unit, virtually a unit—behind the feasibility of this scheme. They to-day look to the Hudson Bay railway with the same enthusiasm, with the same confidence, that they displayed at the time they were able to persuade this parliament to undertake the venture. Settlers have gone in; large sections are to-day more populated than they would have been had the word of parliament not been given in this regard. Not only have settlers gone in but those already there—farmers of western Canada—relying upon the policy to which parliament was committed have extended their operations, have made investments and commitments on the face of the project. Of that there can be no question at all. This is the case over a large area of land; it applies to many tens and hundreds of thousands of our population. When we get that far we have not the option of turning back. It is the duty of this parliament to go on with the project and complete it, and parliament cannot say "We will do so in the long distant future, we will do so when we feel good and ready at some indefinite time." Such a course would not be keeping faith with western Canada. Parliament, of course, is justified in saying "We cannot do this now. We cannot commit ourselves to similar ventures now; the state of our finances will not permit." Such was the attitude assumed by the late administration. Such an attitude on the part of this government is less defensible because at the present time our railway commitments are by no means what they were, more time has elapsed and longer delay has occurred. While it may be defensible for a while, it would not do for this government and parliament to say

[Mr. Meighen.]

"We leave ourselves free to launch on any venture whatsoever; we leave ourselves free to assume large national undertakings of a transportation kind, and let the Hudson Bay railway, to which we have been committed for 20 years, stand indefinitely in abeyance." I do not think such a course would be justified, and I think a negative to this resolution would virtually be a statement by this House that it left itself open to adopt such a course. Consequently, it does not seem to me a negative should be given. With the reservation, that I stated at first, that the completion of branch lines or local undertakings, proved essential in any part of Canada, is not necessarily affected by the passing of the resolution—with that reservation, I support the affirmative.

I believe, aside from all I have said, that every portion of our country is entitled, just as soon as the financial strength of the country justifies it, to the shortest, the best, the cheapest, let me say in one word, the most efficient lines for the transport of its surplus that can be procured, subject only to this qualification, that transport through Canadian ports west, north or east, should always have priority over transport through the ports of another country. With that reservation, I say the farmers of the far West have a right to reasonable facilities for the best transportation of their produce, namely, through the Pacific. Farmers through the central part of the West have the right to the best transport on the shortest line that can be provided for them. Canada has determined that this route furnishes that requirement for at least a considerable section of the country. Consequently Canada must comply with her undertaking in this respect. The same thing applies to eastern Canada. That is the general principle which is followed. In pursuance of this principle, relying mainly on the engagement this country has entered into, relying on the fact that we must keep faith, or respect for parliament will be lost, I support the resolution.

Let me express my regret that the minister has gone no further than to state that the government is not purposing to abandon the route. If I fully understood his remarks, he did not go beyond that assertion. I do not think such an assertion on the part of the government is sufficient. I think the House has a right to expect something more definite from the administration. Does the administration accede to the resolution or does it not? As far as I am concerned, there can be no mistaking where I stand, and it is not too