

The Voice of The West.

THE PEOPLE HAVE A RIGHT TO SPEAK.

In the last issue of the Western Home Monthly reference was made to the western visit of the Premier of the Dominion and some of his colleagues. During the course of that visit the people of Western Canada lived up to their reputation for hospitality. It is easy to be hospitable to those who possess charm of manner and winning personality. Yet that did not stand in the way of plain speech, and the direct representations of the working classes and more particularly the farmers on matters touching their welfare and the welfare of the Dominion was truly refreshing. And why should not the people speak plainly to the members of the Dominion Government? They are no gods—these men—but rather servants, whose first duty is to carry into effect the wishes of their masters—the people. We say this just now because of the remark of a somewhat prominent speaker to the effect that a certain course, highly advantageous to the west, was impossible, as the minister in charge of the Department viewed the matter in a different light. The theory that national policies are to be determined by the personal feelings of those who chance to occupy office is altogether wrong. Personal opinion is no account at all unless it reflects the opinion of the people. It is the duty of ministers to go among the people, to study their needs and their interests and then to legislate accordingly. The Premier and his party have done well to come amongst us. They should by this time be fully alive to our needs and our desires. It is for them, when they return to the Capital, to press for the legislation we require, and to protect us from the legislation we have reason to fear.

THEIR VOICE ON THE HUDSON'S BAY ROUTE.

The most important question on which there was full expression of opinion had to do with the completion, the ownership and control, and the operation of the Hudson's Bay Railway. There is no possibility of mistaking the views of the West on this point. The road must be completed as soon as possible. It must be owned by the people and operated in their interest. It must not be handed over to the Canadian Northern or any other of the great companies nor to any private corporation, either completely or in part.

IMMEDIATE ACTION NECESSARY.

The road is a short one and not too difficult to build. There is no good reason why it should not be rushed to early completion. Laborers can be had; material is available, and the country is ready and anxious for immediate construction. There is no reason for delay. The Premier and the Minister of Railways seemed to recognize this fact but there was lacking an emphatic declaration as to the intention of the government. A plain unequivocal "yes" is more to the western people than columns of well-turned phrases that may mean one thing to the west, another to the east, and still another to the companies who are expecting a plum. It is not enough to say that the government will proceed without delay. We have had examples of "proceeding without delay" in the past and it is not much wonder we have grown skeptical. How long did it take to complete St. Andrew's Locks after the promise was made that the work should be undertaken "without delay"? Must we be equally patient in the case of the H. B. Railway? It would have been sweet music to western ears to have more emphatic assurance on this point. The government may as well understand that the condition of the support of the west is immediate attention to this matter.

THE ROAD TO BE OWNED BY THE PEOPLE.

But, not only must the road be completed at once, it must be owned by the people. This means that it should be built by the government. In any case the people will pay for it. They have already paid for three transcontinental roads, although they do not own them, and all they ask now is a fighting chance. They want one loophole of escape from their self-imposed servitude. If bonds were guaranteed for the building of this road (and it has been rumored that they will be guaranteed for twice what it will cost to build the road, in fact that very proposition is said to have been made in government circles) the people would pay the piper in the long run. Then why should they not own what they pay for? It is said that the Minister of Finance objects to government ownership. What has that to do with the question? There are other Ministers of Finance to be had. It is said that the Minister of the Interior looks kindly towards Mackenzie & Mann. The Minister of the Interior is a very estimable man, but he may as well understand that there are others capable of taking his position who will look kindly on the people rather

than on these magnates. The West stands for it most emphatically—that the country must own the road when it is completed. It is ready to pay the money; it is ready to pay it at once, but the road must under no circumstances be handed over to any of the three great companies now in existence or to any other private company. It is idle to say that the Railway Commission will control the rates. It has never done so in an adequate fashion and it will never do so in the future. Nobody can control such organizations as the great railway companies of Canada. On the other hand they control not only legislatures, but so many members on both sides of politics in the Dominion Parliament that they can do as they like. But a halt must be called right here and now. This new road must not be handed over to any one company as a monopoly, but running rights must be guaranteed to all on fair terms. In any case such arrangement must be made that the farmers will find in the road to Hudson's Bay a competitor to our present lines. This is the one essential feature of the whole scheme. Unless the government will concede this it had better not go on with the prosecution of the scheme at all. The people of the West can wait until they have a government that will carry out their wishes in the matter.

WHY THE PEOPLE WISH TO OWN THE ROAD.

If anyone should ask why the western people should be so anxious to have this road controlled and operated by the government this one answer is sufficient—that it would mean immediately a saving of ten million dollars a year to the West, and ultimately a much greater sum. A correspondent in the Toronto Globe has clearly demonstrated that there could be saved 5½¢ per bushel which is the price from Fort William to the sea by way of Welland Canal and 4½¢ per bushel because of the short haul to the Bay instead of the long haul to Fort William—a total of 10¢ a bushel. On one hundred million bushels this would mean ten million dollars more per annum for the farmers than they now receive.

WHY THE COMPANIES WISH TO OWN IT.

It is no wonder that Mackenzie & Mann or the directors of other of the great roads should sit up at nights wondering how they might secure control of this new road. It would pay them very well indeed to spend a few millions to bring about this result. As a matter of fact a few million dollars is a bagatelle, all things being considered. If any one of the three existing corporations owns the road to the Hudson's Bay it will never become a competing line. The cost of transportation will remain just what it is. If it does become a competing line there is bound to be a reduction in rates from the moment the road is in operation. It is no wonder if during the next few months these companies do no move heaven and earth to prevent such a thing as control of the new route by the people.

HOW THE PEOPLE'S WILL MAY BE THWARTED

Should any of our readers be so simple-minded that they cannot understand how the peoples' will might be thwarted in matters of this kind it is only fair to say that when a great company gives \$1000 towards the election expenses of obscure members of Parliament on both sides of the House such members are inclined to look kindly upon any demand of that company for favorable legislation. When one of these companies gives one-half a million, more or less, to the general campaign fund the votes of a whole party may be relied upon, and, perhaps, when permanent positions of affluence are thrown in the way of ministers themselves they may find arguments for private ownership that are unanswerable. And it is not altogether impossible to get some newspapers into line. Yes, a few million dollars properly spent at the psychological moment may work wonders. The psychological moment is just now. Parliament meets in November and no doubt legislation will be brought down touching this matter. Again we say that the West will stand for nothing but national ownership and control. It wants no partnership; it wants a reduction in rates; it wants competition; it wants the toiler on the farm to receive the benefit of his toil; in other words it wants a square deal, and it will have it eventually.

EASTERN INFLUENCE.

It has been going the rounds that eastern influence is going to force through Parliament a measure whereby the construction and operation of the road will be given to Mackenzie & Mann and it is said that this legislation will be brought down before the next census is taken so that the influence of the prairie provinces will not be felt. Should such a course be taken we would only remind the eastern

provinces that nothing is finally settled until it is settled right, and that what one parliament does can easily be overruled by another. Mackenzie & Mann have had enough out of this country. Their methods of securing funds it is not necessary to discuss; their manner of building their lines, and of treating the communities among whom they operate are known to all. For them to seek this further favor, a favor which means millions every year out of the pockets of the western farmers, would be going a little too far. Let us trust that it is all idle rumor. Better a thousand times that the Toronto Globe should continue its opposition to the road as a road, than that it should favor bringing it under private control. If the east is afraid of the cost, let the whole thing be laid on the shoulders of the western provinces. They will take chances as to the feasibility of the scheme, but they must be assured that the road will be a competitor to those that now exist.

EAST AND WEST ARE ONE.

If the people of the east were only awake, as our honored premier and his colleagues are awake, to the magnitude and possibilities of the West, if they clearly perceived the advantage to themselves of a rapidly developing territory which they must supply with manufactured goods, they would hesitate to take a course which must tend to impoverish their best customers. We cannot believe that any such step will be taken, but knowing the corporations with whom we might have to deal we sound the note of warning. In this matter the West must have its way.

THE NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PUBLIC OWNERSHIP.

Although the argument for public ownership of the road brought forward most frequently is the financial one, it is by no means the most weighty. Our national peace and harmony depends upon the confidence which our people have in their government, and their feeling that they are being fairly treated. There is nothing makes for disunion and anarchy more surely than the robbing of the masses to make the few wealthy. This is why in protectionist countries there is either a class reduced to practical servitude or an organized revolt against existing conditions. It is the reason why in our own land there is such an intense feeling against those railroad owners who by many and devious ways have grown enormously wealthy at the expense of the people. If we were convinced that these men and the governments through whom they work were as honest as they are astute there would be no word of censure and no feeling of revolt. But the hard word cannot be withheld, and the feeling of revolt is growing with the seasons. Now our people want their own and they will have it. This is what the government at Ottawa must understand.

REASONS GIVEN FOR REFUSAL.

Among the reasons advanced for granting the privilege of operation to one of the big three is this that the operation of the Intercolonial has been carried on at a loss. It would be as sensible an argument for one to say that because he opened a blacksmith shop in an obscure country district where horses are scarce, and where the shop was in charge of a spendthrift who only half understood his business, that, therefore, blacksmithing is a poor business altogether. The fact is that the Intercolonial though only a small fraction of a road could be made to pay handsomely if given half a chance. There is no one understands this better than the ministers themselves. And as for a road like that contemplated it would surely pay, and if not the people are willing to suffer the loss. The farmers of the West are just gamblers enough to take chances on the venture. They have as much right to get a chance as Mackenzie & Mann or any other private concern.

Another reason given for not meeting the wishes of the people is that the experience in building the Grand Trunk Pacific has not been a very happy one. Then let us have the whole truth with regard to this experience. If all the facts are given it will be found that there is absolutely nothing to prevent any government from undertaking the construction of the road, provided it sets about the work in a business-like way and there is every reason for asserting that the only fair and patriotic method of handling the road after it is constructed, is the method advocated by the people of the West.

Yet notwithstanding the arguments in favor of a competitive road, and notwithstanding the emptiness of the objections to it, there is a possibility and may be a probability, that Canada will lose its last opportunity. If so there is but one explanation that can be given, and every school boy in these days can give it.