

House of Commons Debates

THIRD SESSION, FOURTH PARLIAMENT.

CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY.

HON. SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD'S SPEECH.

OTTAWA, 17TH JANUARY, 1881.

Sir JOHN A. MACDONALD. Mr. Speaker, I had intended, on Friday night, to have made some remarks on the amendment that was then in your hands; but, unfortunately for myself and, perhaps, fortunately for the House, I was too much indisposed to be able to do so, and I was obliged to leave the Chamber. That motion is, however, disposed of; considerable discussion was carried on, but it is still supposed to be *en règle*, and with your permission and the permission of the House, I shall offer a few remarks, and they will not be long, on the subject so brought up and involved in that resolution and the amendment, and on the discussion which arose upon it. Sir, in the first place, I would like to speak of the position of the Government with respect to this whole question. It is true it has been treated *ad nauseam* in this House and in the country; but, holding the position that I do, I think it will not be improper, or idle, or a waste of time, if I recall the attention of the House to some of the facts connected with the present condition of this great enterprise, and in doing so, I must offer my most humble and respectful apology to my colleague who sits next me, the hon. the Minister of Railways, because he has again and again gone over the whole ground in a manner which I may envy, but which I cannot hope to emulate. It is known that from the time that British Columbia came into Confederation, and I need not read the Journals of the House to prove the fact, that the declared preference of both sides of the House, of the then Parliament, was in favor of the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway by an incorporated company. We commenced from that starting point, and if we look through the whole line of the discussion and the whole line of the policy of the two Governments which have had to deal with that question, we will find this thread running through the whole subject, and connecting it in such a manner that it could not, without complete severance of the thread, be altered. It was felt in the country, in the House, and by every thinking man, that if we should be fortunate enough, if Canada should have sufficient credit in the market where capitalists do most congregate, to induce capitalists to come

forward and undertake this great work, we would have obtained for the Dominion a great advantage. Our legislation was based upon that idea in 1872. The legislation of the Government that succeeded us was based upon the same principle, that it was advisable, if possible, to avoid all the trouble, responsibility and uncertainty, and all the danger to be apprehended of making a great work like this a political engine, it was thought by all parties that it was of the greatest consequence that all those obstructions to the successful prosecution of the work, to the carrying out of this great object, and connecting this country from sea to sea and making it one in fact as well as in law, should be removed; that it was of the greatest consequence that the work should be expedited; that it should not be carried on as a political work; that it should not be made a matter over which rival parties could or would fight; that it should be undertaken on commercial principles and be built by a body of capitalists like any other railway, with the hope and expectation that the capitalists would get a fair and full return for all their risk, for all their expenditure, and for all their responsibility. The whole country was in favor of that proposition, if it was possible to have it carried out. We tried and we failed, although we made an effort, a strong and almost a successful effort in 1872, to thus build the railway. I will not drag into this discussion, as far as I am concerned, and as far as my remarks are connected with the subject, any references to the political past. Allusions were made to it by those opposed to the Government, especially by those who desired to asperse myself; but, Sir, there is the record, there is the fruit of the appeal to the country, and I am Prime Minister of Canada. But whatever may have been the cause of the failure of Sir Hugh Allan and the first company that was organized for the purpose of building this road, I can see, without reference to any political reason, why that company was defeated. I can only say it was not from any want of the strongest opposition offered to the Government of which I was the head, but it was in consequence of the two things occurring together: the personal object in attacking the Government and the desire to overthrow the scheme.