

The **MINISTER OF FINANCE** (Mr. Fielding). What is the total mileage?

Sir CHARLES HIBBERT TUPPER. About 700 miles; but a considerable number of these are independent and self-supporting. Several of the companies, as is known to the Minister of Finance, coming as he does from the province of Nova Scotia, are in financial difficulties and are very much hampered by the expense involved in providing a large quantity of rolling stock for a very short mileage.

The **PRIME MINISTER** (Mr. Laurier). I did not quite understand from the language of my hon. friend if he had made up his mind as to the wisdom of the policy of the Government acquiring those lines. I did not understand him to express any definite opinion.

Sir CHARLES HIBBERT TUPPER. A tentative opinion; but perhaps I did not make myself clear. From the information in my possession, which is by no means thorough, I thought it was a wise policy, but before coming to any conclusion and asking the House to express an opinion, it seems to be desirable to seek for the very best information that possibly can be obtained in connection with the proposal.

The **PRIME MINISTER.** In my judgment it would be rather premature to express an opinion on this subject, which is a very important one. There is no objection to bringing down the papers asked for, but my hon. friend will admit that we may not be able to submit all the information sought. In the second paragraph the hon. gentleman asks for:

Also, reports and other information showing the effect upon the receipts and expenditures of Government railways by the operation of the Rivière du Loup, St. Charles Branch, Oxford and New Glasgow, Eastern Extension, Cape Breton and other additions to the Intercolonial Railway as originally constructed and operated.

Sir CHARLES HIBBERT TUPPER. It would be merely an approximate statement.

The **PRIME MINISTER.** It would not be an approximate statement, but it would be largely a matter of speculation; however, the Government will furnish the hon. gentleman with the best possible information on the subject.

Sir CHARLES TUPPER. This question is a very important one, and it is one to which no hon. member would perhaps feel disposed to commit himself unreservedly as a question of public policy. The fact remains that the Government has expended very large sums of money in aiding those branch lines. Subsidies have been granted, very large expenditures made by Parliament, and considerable sums of money have also been expended from private sources and from local subsidies. The result taken as a

whole has been very disappointing. The very important object the Government and Parliament had in view in promoting the extension of branch lines was that we should bring an increased volume of traffic to the Intercolonial Railway, and thus while benefiting the various sections of the country through which those lines were constructed, we would at the same time largely increase the traffic on the line of railway in which the country is directly and immediately interested, and in which the Government has so much at stake. The result has been to a large extent that the expenditure has been unproductive, either of benefit to the particular localities or to the Government by increasing the volume of traffic on the Intercolonial Railway, for the reason which has been stated, that the operation of the various lines as separate organizations in regard to management, has been attended with considerable expense, which would be saved to a large extent by using the central organization of the Intercolonial Railway. The fact has been referred to that a very much smaller amount of rolling stock, supplied by the Intercolonial Railway, and a central organization, would effect the object in view and accomplish it more effectively than by working these different lines as separate and different branches. If it be found in a large number of cases, as I am quite sure it will be found, that the country is not well served owing to the inability of those companies to operate their roads vigorously and successfully, and also that the Government has not obtained increased traffic over the Intercolonial Railway from them, and if it be found, as I believe it will be, that the parties owning those branch lines would be only too glad to make an arrangement with the Government by which the roads would be amalgamated with the Intercolonial Railway, and the parties interested would receive some return, those companies would then be placed in a much better position than they now occupy. I think it would be well worthy the attention of the Government to ascertain upon what terms these lines could be obtained; not perhaps to become absolutely the owner of them, but that they might be placed under the management of the Government. I am inclined to believe that if the Minister of Railways directed his attention to that subject, he would find that the communities would be only too anxious, and the parties now owning the roads would be only too anxious, to meet the views of the Government, and bring these various lines into such communication and co-operation with the trunk line of the Intercolonial Railway. This, I believe, would greatly benefit the district in which these roads have been constructed, and at the same time cause a much larger return to the Intercolonial Railway, because of the greater volume of traffic which would thus be obtained. Therefore, while it is very desirable to obtain this in-