

*Hudson Bay Railway*

I do not believe any policy would appeal so strongly to men of the intelligence of hon. members of this House unless there was merit back of it.

And so I think that is really a premise upon which we can build our argument at the present time if such a premise is required.

Now then coming to the present time, I am not going to attempt to express the opinion of any hon. member of this House who is capable of expressing his own opinion, and I presume every member is capable of doing that. I am very pleased to find so many expressing themselves as favourable to this movement. There has been a suspicion in the minds of a great many people in western Canada who are interested in the project that some of the members, perhaps not of the present government so much as of the government which dropped the work, were losing their interest, or perhaps had changed their minds with regard to the feasibility of this project. I have in my hand a letter published in a local newspaper in western Canada, the Melfort Journal, which purports to have been received by a resident of that town of Melfort from the right hon. leader of the Opposition (Mr. Meighen). I wish to quote a paragraph or two of this letter from the leader of the Opposition. The letter reads:

The present government has involved the country in large sums much less justifiable than would be immediate completion of this outlet. I am opposed, and the Conservative party is opposed to the indefinite postponement of the execution of this work. Had it not been for the war we would have completed it long ago.

That letter is signed by the right hon. leader of the Opposition. I just offer that statement for what it is worth as I offered the quotations, from other hon. gentlemen's utterances of years ago. We will wait with very great interest for members of the government to express their attitude regarding this question.

Now the question naturally arises from the statement of the leader of the Opposition, who was at the time the work was discontinued, the leader of the government, as to why that work was discontinued. I have heard many rumours, of course, as I suppose every member from western Canada has, and probably members from every other part of Canada, regarding the reasons why the construction of that road was discontinued. I referred to Hansard for the years just preceding discontinuance of this work to see if I could find any good cause for abandoning the project at that particular time. In 1916 I find one of the earliest intimations regarding the possibility of not going ahead with the work, when the hon. member for Rich-

[Mr. C. W. Stewart.]

mond (Mr. Kyte) urged the government to discontinue work on the Hudson Bay road, to relieve the Finance Minister of further expenditure in that direction under the existing circumstances, the existing circumstances, of course, being the war that was then going on. Further, after perusing his speech at that particular time, I find that he based it largely upon a report that has been referred to very often during the debate this afternoon and evening, of Captain Anderson, that the project was not feasible. Then I think it was the year following that the report was handed to the government by a commission that was appointed to consider a number of subjects, and among others, that commission reported on this matter. I refer to the Drayton-Acworth Commission. Among other things it briefly summed up this matter as follows:

We recommend that future expenditures on the Hudson bay railroad be reduced to the lowest possible amount.

This was made the basis of a further attack upon the project. I am not going to quote at length the remarks of hon. gentlemen, but one of them who is a member of the House at the present time, the hon. member for Pictou (Mr. Macdonald), making an attack on the project based on that report, and criticizing the government of the day, said:

Hon. gentlemen are not honest with the people of this country when, after imposing taxation for the purposes of the war, they divert the money to building unnecessary works like the Hudson bay railroad.

I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, in the light of the facts that have been presented in the debate this afternoon as to the provision made for funds for the construction of this road, that that was not a fair criticism. Other attacks were made upon the project in that year, 1917, not going as far as the hon. member for Pictou went, but affirming that owing to the existing conditions, or words to that effect, it was inadvisable to expend more money on the Hudson Bay railway at that time. So apparently—for I can find no other reason—the government accepted the advice that was offered. Whether or not the conditions really did warrant such action, I am not prepared to state now. But if such conditions existed during the war, if the state of the public treasury was such that it was inadvisable to go ahead with the project, those conditions do not exist now. In the light of all the facts as they have been presented to the House during the last two sessions I feel that the people of western Canada are making a reasonable statement when they say that the time has now come to proceed with the completion