

Peace River—Railway Outlet

I was also glad that my hon. friend had discovered a lot of oil up in that country. If he has, he is the only one who knows anything about it, and I think he must have kept silent about it because the large oil companies, which are so often accused of saying that there is tremendous exploration going on there, do not yet seem to have discovered oil, although I hope that they will ultimately discover very large deposits there. The government of British Columbia, of course, must wake up. They are going to develop these resources on their own but they do not care to spend any money in doing so, and so their oil, I think, will remain where nature put it, in that great storehouse below, if it is down there at all.

I rise for one purpose and it is this, to say that we in Alberta of the political persuasion of which I am, are most heartily in favour of this resolution. We are not newly converted to it by any means. I attended a convention in Alberta in January of this year; we there affirmed a resolution that we had passed at the convention the year before, and it was right along this line.

May I also say something with respect to what was said by the hon. member for Vancouver South (Mr. Green). I know, Mr. Speaker, that one cannot refer to what has been said in a previous debate, but I have received from some organization in the maritime provinces literature dealing with what they call the maritime railway question. All that this resolution asks is that this government give consideration to the building of this railway. Why should we not in this parliament adopt a new outlook; in short, do our duty in the maritimes, do it in the northern part of Alberta, in Saskatchewan and in British Columbia, and so help to make this the Dominion of Canada rather than the sectionalized business that it seems to be at the present time.

Mr. C. C. I. MERRITT (Vancouver-Burrard): Mr. Speaker, I rise also to support this resolution. I think it might be pointed out that although all the members who have spoken in favour of it come from the west, we all speak as Canadians and not as westerners, and the reason we speak as we do is because we know naturally better than the people in the eastern part of Canada what are our problems.

I have just three points and they are very short. First, it seems to me perfectly obvious, from what we have heard already in the telling arguments that have been advanced, that the non-completion of this railway outlet is a matter of expense alone. That is the only reason in the world why it has not been done. I was particularly interested in the only part

[Mr. Smith (Calgary West).]

of the remarks of the mover of the resolution (Mr. Irvine), with which I disagreed. He took some time to explain the great preference of the people of British Columbia for a government-owned railway over one owned by private enterprise. So far as I am concerned I do not care who builds the railway just so long as it is built. I think it is very likely that the people of that area feel as I do about it. But that question hardly arises. I do not believe there is any private enterprise that is particularly anxious to build that road now. They would not want to spend a large sum of money in the construction of a road which would not be a profitable operation at the present time.

If the government should consider that the expense of this construction is an insuperable obstacle, I wish to point out that this is not an isolated demand on the part of British Columbia and Alberta members for the building of an uneconomical railway purely for their sectional interests. I suggest to the responsible ministers that this is, rather, one part and perhaps one small part of a very great programme of public development, and particularly of development of communications, which we can embark on now that we have secured peace. We can make these developments into profitable operations either for private enterprise or for the government—if only we are prepared to face the obvious facts and link such developments, this one and many others over Canada, with a programme of large-scale immigration into this country. If we have the additional people who will settle in such an area, all questions of whether or not the expense is at present too great, or whether the traffic or the people in the Peace River could support a railway, disappear, just as they disappeared in the early days of railway building and colonization.

I should like to refer, too, to what the hon. member for New Westminster (Mr. Reid) said about the provincial government of British Columbia having set aside a million acres for soldier settlement and having put a string on it that the settlers must be British Columbia returned men. I agree with the hon. member that that string should be removed, but I would still be fearful that veterans would not take up those million acres in any great numbers unless they were sure that a very large additional number of people were going into the area. I have not yet been there; I am going. I am told it is very fine indeed, that the yield of the crops is very great. But according to a professor at the university of British Columbia there are many people in that general area who have not a cash income of more than \$400 a year.