

Hon. Mr. GRAHAM: Supposing the government did that, and the railway said, "That is all very well, but we will give you a report now to show that you will lose so many millions of dollars there." Whose advice should we ask? I admit that this road has been started, and I am not discussing it very much. The completion of the Hudson Bay railway would have to be a policy of the government, approved by Parliament, but the government ought first to get advice from somebody outside of the government, as to what to do in all these things.

Sir HENRY THORNTON: Might I just answer that in this way. In connection with the Branch Lines Bill last year, the Canadian National Railway administration was asked by the government to present a branch line program. We examined the position and made recommendations with respect to which branch lines the administration thought should be built. We have had no such request from the government in respect to the Hudson Bay railway. The administration is prepared to carry out any request the government may make upon us in regard to recommendations.

The CHAIRMAN: May I ask what is, perhaps, an embarrassing question? Have you ever investigated yourself the possibilities of the Hudson Bay as a railway proposition—not as a colonizing scheme, but as a proposition with regard to whether it will pay, or whether it will be a source of loss to the country?

Sir HENRY THORNTON: No, I have not. I know in a general way, of course, the discussion that has gone on in connection with the Canadian National Railway system, but I have refrained from expressing any opinion on the subject whatever, nor do I intend to express any opinion until I am given a mandate to that effect, and then it will be only after a searching examination.

Sir HENRY DRAYTON: I think at one time your Board recommended the lifting of the rails.

Mr. STEWART: Let us fix the responsibility for that.

Major BELL: Sir Henry Thornton was away at the time, and I was in the Chair. We had about one hundred miles of rail going to pieces; the ties were rotting, the rails were twisting, and it did not look as though we were going to be able to do anything for a year or so. Rail was urgently needed in the west, and the Board at that time, without either approving or disapproving of that policy of the Hudson Bay railway, recommended that that rail be lifted in order to save it and use it in the west, and it could easily be replaced later. It was not used for operating purposes; we were only running to Mile 214, and it was to save that rail that the order was issued. I think it would have been good business if we had done it at the time, because some of that has never been reclaimed.

The CHAIRMAN: You have no opinion to offer as to the propriety of building the Hudson Bay railway, and you would not do so without making a further examination?

Sir HENRY THORNTON: It is too large and too important a subject to express an opinion on without very careful examination. We all have certain suspicions and certain views, but there is a great difference between suspicion and conviction.

Mr. STEWART: I was not trying to obtain either an expression of a suspicion or a conviction or an opinion as to the merits of the road, but I was trying to find out just where the responsibility lies as to the originating of any action that may be taken in the near future.

Sir HENRY THORNTON: I think the Minister will bear me out when I say that insofar as the administration of the Canadian National Railway System is concerned to-day, we have no responsibility other than we are the trustees of the property as it now stands, and it is our business to protect it as much as we can.