

Let Us, The People of the West, Build, Own, and Operate a Hudson's Bay Railway

Can We Build It?

THESE are really no insuperable, physical, financial or political barriers in the way. There are, moreover, many very weighty reasons why a tremendous effort should be made to do so. It is merely a matter of desire and determination. Given the desire—unless we are unworthy descendants of our sires—the determination will not be lacking so soon as it be made plain that the task is capable of accomplishment.

The Physical Difficulties

The reports of government engineers have demonstrated that a road can be built from the settled portions of any of the three Western provinces to the ports of Nelson and Churchill on the Bay at a very moderate cost per mile. The natural conditions at these ports are such that fine harbors can be secured without any very great outlay. There is known to be absolutely no barrier in climatic conditions to vessels entering or leaving these harbors, or lying at anchor therein, at any time throughout the year. The Bay and Straits are known to be open all the time, the only conceivable check to continuous navigation of these waters being due to floating ice during the summer months, that is to say, during the months which have been commonly spoken of as the time most suitable for navigation.

Those who have been most interested in delaying the opening up of this route have enlarged upon the obstructions due to floating ice, and have taken advantage of the fact that late summer navigation has been interfered with to some extent by reason of it to draw the entirely unwarranted inference that during the fall, the winter and spring the Straits are impassable, when, as a matter of fact, during these seasons the ice is fast to the shore, so that navigation is entirely without obstruction.

The waters of Hudson's Bay are warmer than those of Lake Superior and Superior never freezes over, while the fact that the water is salt and the further fact that there is a tide, makes the formation of any considerable barrier of ice at the ports impossible. It is known that salt water requires thirteen degrees more frost to freeze it than fresh water, while the salt in solution constantly tends to disintegrate the ice when formed, so that the action of tides and waves were always sufficient to prevent any very formidable or long continued obstruction to navigation on such a coast as that on which Nelson and Churchill are situated, even before the invention of the improved ice-breaker made ice-bound sea-ports obsolete.

The Hudson's Bay company feared off settlement from the North-West Territories for many years to protect its fur trade, by misrepresenting the climatic and soil conditions of that great fertile land. In the same way and for similar reasons, the conditions surrounding the navigation of this great Hudson Sea and Straits, have been described with a wealth of imaginary terrors by the great financial institutions whose vested interests are imperilled by the opening up of this route.

The Financial Difficulties

As has been stated above, the building of a road to the Bay and the development of the harbors thereon, would not be found to be a very costly undertaking. One engineer has stated that \$8,000.00 per mile would construct the road, including the laying of the steel. The route runs past a succession of waterfalls, which would furnish all the power necessary to operate the road by electricity. If 100,000 persons in the West could be found who would, on an average, invest \$100.00 each in the development of this route, which means so much to their individual prosperity, the total amount would be considerably more than half the cost. The remainder of the cost could easily be provided for by the sale of bonds, even supposing that government should decline to guarantee them.

One can scarcely suppose that the Dominion government would decline to

do as much for a company composed of many citizens striving to accomplish a great work for the common benefit, as has already been done for private individuals, or corporations acting from purely speculative motives.

There has been accumulated from the sale of Western lands a sum approximating \$20,000,000, which, it has been stated, the government propose to employ in the construction of the Hudson's Bay road. This sum would be available to be loaned to the People's Company for the building of the road at a rate of interest corresponding to that which the government pays when borrowing. The money could be advanced from time to time to keep step with the work of construction, while government engineers could be employed to see that the cost of the work on which payments were based, was not in excess of physical value. The revenue which the government would receive from this money would be available, say, for the endowment of higher education in the provinces in which the lands were situated from the sale of which the funds were derived.

Were the government to take this view of the matter, it would prove a very great boon to the people of the West, whose educational equipment is entirely inadequate to the needs of a progressive population.

If, however, the Dominion government should decline to aid directly, in this way, or indirectly, by the guarantee of bonds, the construction of this road by a joint

operation of these, as in the case of the Hudson Bay, would fail to be effective, but would succumb to the baneful influences of the interests which control the great majority of transportation facilities. They also believe that a company composed of the same people who will have to pay the freight would keep the cost of construction low and the cost of operation low in order that freight charges might be kept low. The delegation to Ottawa, while en route, made it manifest that they saw much to mistrust in the proposed government operation, and would welcome the creation of a joint stock company ownership in which they might take part, provided such limitations were placed upon the voting power as would prevent capitalists from obtaining control.

If the enterprise should need assistance from the provincial governments, and no doubt these would be asked to supply at least tributary lines running North and South, it is possible for an awakened people, by their organized voting strength, to make such governments entirely responsive to their will. It was the fact that the people of the West could dominate the legislatures of the Western provinces but could not control the federal parliament that made many who favored provincial ownership and operation or tri-provincial operation, unfavorable to federal operation of a purely Western road.

Reasons why a Determined Effort Should be Made to Build and Operate the Road as a Popular Joint Stock Company Enterprise

Anything short of governmental operation under an independent commission would not be tolerated by the Western people, if we are to judge by the demands made at Ottawa by the late delegation

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The Attempt to Own Our Means of Transportation Co-operatively

In accordance with the wish of a number of the delegates, a committee was formed to make an attempt, to create the nucleus of a joint stock company to build, own, and operate the road. This committee which was named on the 17th, consists of the following—David Railton, Sr., of Sinaluta, T. W. Knowles, of Emerson, and E. A. Partridge of Sinaluta. Some 300 delegates had already on the way to Ottawa declared themselves in favor of such an attempt. A considerable number signed the following subscription form:—

"We, the undersigned, in the event of the federal government failing to undertake the speedy construction of the Hudson's Bay railway and its operation through the medium of an independent commission and from the viewpoint of the interests of our Western population in the matter of efficient and cheap service provided throughout the year, desire to express our faith in the feasibility and desirability of the Western people, with suitable government assistance, building and operating the road for themselves as a popular joint stock company enterprise, by placing a subscription of \$10.00 each at the disposal of an organizing committee, and agreeing when at least 500 signatures and subscriptions be obtained, to sign, if requested, the memorandum of association and take at least \$100.00 stock in the proposed company."

The cool reception, which the demand to have the road operated under an independent commission, received at the hands of the premier, induced the formation, of the above named committee, with instructions to make an appeal without delay to the general public for subscriptions and thereafter if the subscription sheets were widely subscribed to, to proceed with the organization of a company, otherwise to return the unexpended portion of his subscription to each subscriber and abandon the attempt.

It has been learned from apparently authentic sources that some of the ministers are not averse to this proposition made by some of the Western delegates. This being so, the sooner that a respectable body of persons pledged to the enterprise can be organized, and the government approached in the matter, the better the prospects for success. The committee are, therefore, appealing to our Western people whether professional men, merchants, artisans or farmers, to sign the subscription list, and send their subscription money to the manager, Home Bank of Canada, at Sinaluta, to be deposited to the credit of the "Hudson Bay Subscription Fund," and to be at the disposal of the organizing committee.

Numbered subscription forms with spaces for 10 names each, will be sent to secretaries of the Grain Growers' associations, United Farmers' unions, secretaries of the boards of trade, and to many individuals personally known to the committee.

The committee desire it to be clearly understood that the executives of the Provincial Farmers' associations are not behind this movement, in fact, some of the members regard it as premature, God bless their careful souls!

It is hoped, however, that many local associations and unions, various other



Farm House of E. J. Fulton, Oak Lake, Man.

stock company of Western people embracing many thousands in its membership, it is unthinkable that such a company could not persuade the several provincial governments to guarantee its bonds.

The Political Difficulties

It is believed that the first intention of the Dominion government was to permit Mackenzie and Mann to build the road under contract, and afterwards to operate it under lease, but that the manifest repugnance of the West to such a deal has induced them to decide that no existing Canadian transportation company should be entrusted with its operation.

It is reasonable to suppose that a company composed of many persons directly interested in the economical and efficient operation of the road, should have preference over a group of financiers concerned only in the making of dividends or the exploitation of the natural resources contiguous to the route; otherwise it is time more representative and public-spirited men were elected to parliament.

It would appear to be only necessary to organize a joint stock company of large dimensions and subscribed to by a class of people whose industry and energy are the sources of Western development, in order to secure a charter without delay, and such monetary assistance as would enable them to speedily accomplish their purpose. And if the government decided to build but not to operate, why would they not be glad to intrust the operation under lease to such a company?

It is pretty generally understood that our public men are opponents of public ownership and operation through the fear based upon past experience, that

of farmers. They declared that anything short of absolute public ownership and operation would defeat the purpose for which the road was advocated, and without such operation by an independent commission they preferred that the building of the road should be indefinitely delayed.

There would be no guarantee, however, of continued independence on the part of a commission appointed by a government who were not in search of independent men. Also the same sinister influence which effect governments might affect the members of a commission. There is no desire on the part of the great majority of persons living in Canada to see a road to Hudson's Bay successfully operated. The West alone is anxious for this; the East is either indifferent or hostile to the enterprise. None but residents of Western Canada will be benefitted by such successful operation, while many interests in the East will be adversely affected.

The people of the West want a cheap, constant, and efficient service. They desire that every effort should be put forth to render the route safe and serviceable throughout the year. They have been and are still exploited without mercy by the great transportation companies which have rested like an incubus upon them for over a quarter of a century, and they now have come to the conclusion that the best safeguard and assurance of an escape from the transportation monopoly that has long oppressed them, lies in building a road and operating it for themselves. Many persons who are firm believers in the desirability of government ownership and operation of all the transportation facilities believe that partial

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