

*Hudson Bay Railway*

the conclusion in so far as a country can express a conclusion, and come to it more than once and at the hands of both great parties.

The Senate of Canada has rendered a special service in this connection. Committees of that body have deliberated, listened to evidence, listened to professional opinion, have delved to the very heart of the question on more occasions than one. I think the most thorough inquiry was at the hands of the Senate committee of 1920. There were those of the Upper House who viewed most pessimistically the feasibility of the navigation of the Hudson straits and who doubtless sought to bring before that committee the weightiest evidence that could be adduced against the practicability of that transportation route. Notwithstanding this, notwithstanding every effort, after very patient and prolonged inquiry the Senate committee reported favourably, and so far as the report shows, it was unanimous.

The Senate committee may be wrong. I know it is impossible lightly to pass aside much that is now brought forward and has been all through these years tending to establish very considerable peril and to lay in the mind doubt as to whether, after all, there may not possibly be failure. Consequently, I would not base my support wholly on the certainty with which any person or any bodies can arrive at a decision on that phase of the question. I think the weight of evidence, the weight of the verdicts that have been given by competent bodies, is in favour of the route.

Then what else is there to be said? On the question of the utility of the road, outside of its utility as an export and import transportation means, there is testimony of a convincing character. I do not say that if it totally fails as a transcontinental means of transport, if it totally fails in its primary purpose, its usefulness for these other purposes would justify its construction were we at the point of determining whether we would undertake it or not but its usefulness for these auxiliary purposes is a real factor and is established beyond all question. The mineral development has been great. The mineral development has so far exceeded all reasonable expectations. That it will increase, there can be no question. In gold, in copper, in ivory, in many lines of minerals there is undoubtedly going to be great production in that region. As well there is prospect, indeed there is certainty, of substantial agricultural development, though by no means is that prospect as bright as it is for mineral development. There is also the exploration of the whole fishery resources of Hudson bay. That

[Mr. Meighen.]

these will amount to something there can be no reasonable question. What it will amount to is problematical as yet. As well for the transport of western coal into the heart of Ontario, there is sound reason, not fantastical at all, to hope that a feasible and a practicable route will be found along the Hudson bay. The extension of the Ontario government road up to Moose Factory will form a means of connection by which there can be transport from Nelson to Moose Factory by water over Hudson bay, and over these government roads by land, very much shorter and undoubtedly cheaper than in any present means of transport. Of course there will be ice difficulties there, but by no means of the character or moment of similar difficulties to the north through the straits.

On account of these other services that the road renders, a second very powerful argument can be adduced in support of the project. But I do not rest on these two arguments at all. Indeed, I can quite understand the mind that resting on these two alone would feel that at this time we should not undertake such a venture. I base my position upon other ground upon which I place more importance than on anything I have said so far. We are not at the commencement of the venture. We are well on toward the conclusion of the venture. This country is committed to the project. This country has been committed to the project for at least fifteen years. This country has made a contract with many citizens that the road will be built, and it is a matter of good faith with a large portion of our population that the covenant of the Dominion be kept.

The history of the undertaking is long; the history of the subject is very long, but passing over the early period when perhaps it was the sport of political adventurers, and coming up to 1908, the Conservative party at that time became committed to putting through the Hudson Bay railway. The Liberal party about the same time—I am not certain about the priority of dates, but I know that both parties made it a portion of their platforms about that year. I know that prior to the election of 1911 the government of the day made a contract with a firm for the construction of a large section of the mileage, I think 187 miles. I do not think any practical work was done. I think the hon. gentleman who just sat down did them credit overmuch in this respect. I fancy that if the Minister of Railways turned the first sod, he turned about the last sod too under Liberal administration, but upon the change of government the contract was for the time being suspended in