

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: May I interrupt just a moment? I have in my hand the report of the speech made by my right hon. friend in Toronto. Reading from the Mail and Empire account, the words are as follows:

On the suggestion of the president of the Canadian National Railways the committee recommended that certain matters be inquired into. . . .

The committee did not recommend that; the committee recommended—

Mr. BENNETT: I have read what the committee recommended, and that is what I said in Toronto. I feel sure that what my right hon. friend has read is not in quotation marks.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I am sorry to interrupt; it is a very small matter, but it is in quotation marks, and evidently the speech was given to the press.

Mr. BENNETT: I am happy to say not only that the speech was not given to the press, as is the custom of my right hon. friend, but that the speech had not been prepared at eleven o'clock in the morning. The notes I made were prepared on the paper of the Royal York hotel at eleven o'clock of the day on which I delivered the speech, and those notes are available to the right hon. gentleman if he desires to see them.

However, this is unimportant; the fact is that we gave the matter our serious consideration and, having done so, we endeavoured to secure a commission. I may say it was very difficult to get the men we desired. The British investor, with his millions and hundreds of millions of dollars in our Canadian railways; the American investors, with their hundreds of millions of dollars also, and the Canadian investor, all had to be considered, and there you have the situation. We sought the leading expert we could obtain in Great Britain; we sought as high an authority as we could secure in the United States, and I think it will be agreed that we selected as chairman one who for breadth of knowledge, fineness of intellect and judicial qualities stands unrivalled in the English speaking world. That I can say with frankness.

Under those circumstances we do feel that the only method that can be successful in dealing with the matter is to enable the members of the commission to understand the problem in all its bearings. I have under my hand reports of instances when time after time the right hon. gentleman, his former Minister of Railways, Mr. Dunning, Mr. Crerar and others said it was not in the public interest that the business of these railroads

[Mr. Bennett.]

should be made known either to the public or to their competitors. There were matters that had to be made known to these men that could only be made known to them by the method I have mentioned, and these means were followed to enable the commission from time to time to become informed with respect to the problem with which they had to deal. They themselves, not the government, decided that. Do not for a moment think, sir, that this government gave any instructions of any kind whatever to the commission with respect to that matter. The members of the commission, as judges, as railway men, as business men, decided to what extent they should make their hearings public and to what extent the necessary information should be communicated to them in private. It would be ruinous and destructive to the very interests that were to be served if this evidence with respect to the internal administration and the finances of the railways were to be communicated one to the other. The Drayton-Acworth report was obtained in the same way, and no man in this house but knows that you could not reach anything like finality based upon adequate testimony or knowledge unless it were done in that way.

Then hon. gentlemen suggest that there is some sinister motive behind it. I can only say that as far as the government is concerned it has as little to do with it as any hon. gentleman opposite. This commission has been appointed. It has not been instructed beyond presenting to it the order in council, leaving to it the duty of endeavouring to solve a problem which was not created by a Conservative government. Bear that in mind; the problem arises through a Liberal administration creating two transcontinental systems and subsidizing each to destroy the other. That is the position, and you cannot get away from it; when you think of the problem never forget that fact. I have not seen any Canadian business man in modern times who has been able to suggest why it was done. There are men living now who wish they had taken the advice of Mr. Blair, who left the government on that account. There are men living now who realize that there was no firm basis of judgment exercised in endeavouring, with a population of less than eight million people, to fasten three transcontinental systems upon this country. But it was done, and this government has to deal with the problem.

I wonder, sir, if hon. members of this house have any idea of the magnitude of the task that rests upon us in this respect. When I hear men denouncing the government and