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An Empire Project

Mr. Andrew Knox, M.P. for Prince Albert, is to move in the House of Commons on Monday that the Hudson Bay Railway have priority over all other projected lines in the government's construction program. One may doubt his wisdom in thus forcing the issue when there is reason to hope that supplementary estimates will contain a vote for completing the road. However, his motion will at least provoke a debate.

What sort of debate will it be? Shall we have a piffling discussion in the terms of parish politics, a discussion in which such banal phrases as "the need for economy" are of frequent occurrence? Or can we hope that here and there an indifferent or hostile member will catch a glimpse of the real significance of the Hudson Bay Railway?

The Hudson Bay Railway is no backyard project. It is not a glorified spur line.

It is a railway of world-wide importance. It may be the most important railway of this century.

The North American continent is pierced by three water routes. There is the Mississippi-Missouri river system, starting not far from Lake Superior and flowing south to the Gulf of Mexico. These rivers lie wholly within the United States. There is the St. Lawrence, connecting the Great Lakes with the Atlantic Ocean. This is an international waterway, shared by the United States and Canada.

Lastly, there is Hudson Bay. Hudson Bay is the only all-British water routes from the heart of North America to the Atlantic Ocean. This is not a trivial fact. It is vastly important.

Not only is Hudson Bay the sole all-British water route from this agricultural region to the Ocean, it is the shortest and it is the most easily defended. From Saskatoon to Liverpool by way of the Bay is a journey 1,000 miles shorter than from Saskatoon to Liverpool by way of Montreal. This is a point which needs no arguing. It is well known or should be. It is obvious on any map, particularly on a globe.

The ease with which the Hudson Bay route could be defended is an advantage to which not so much attention has been paid. It is known that Great Britain has negotiated with Denmark for the purchase of Greenland or a part of it. A base on Greenland would make the route from Hudson Bay ports to English ports absolutely impregnable.

If the Hudson Bay Railway were completed, and a base were established on Greenland, Great Britain would be connected by a quite unassailable route with limitless supplies of bread grains.

The possibility of starvation in Great Britain seems remote in peace time, not so remote in war time.

The opening of the Bay route will not only permit Great Britain to tap, by the shortest channel, the Empire's granary, it will provide a new and all-British alternative to the Mediterranean-Suez route to the Far East. At the present time a journey from Liverpool to the Far East by way of Canada involves a wearisome five-day train trip across this continent. With the railway to the Bay finished, the ocean trip to the Dominion will be half a day longer and the train trip will be three days shorter.

When the railway is built, when the Imperial value of the trade channel it opens is universally understood, no Canadian public man or newspaper will enjoy being reminded of failure to give the project support.

Dispatches from Ottawa indicate that the proposal to complete the railway will be resisted in the way which has been popular for over forty years with myopic, chicken-hearted and selfish Canadians. Since 1884 and earlier the Hudson Bay Railway has been a subject of public discussion in Canada. When it was first proposed the objection was that the route could not be used. Since that date there has been exhaustive inquiry into the navigability of the Bay and straits. The possibility of building the railway (which, incredible though it may seem, was at first denied) has been proved by the simple process of laying the steel.

Yet the shopworn objection is still being reiterated. There is not the slightest doubt that when Mr. Knox's motion is put before the House next week, honorable members from Quebec and Ontario, as ignorant of the Bay route as they are of the Hottentot language, will rise and declare: "It is not feasible."

The fact of the matter is that the Bay route is open at least as long every year as the Great Lakes and probably much longer. The Bay itself is navigable the year round. If the straits are ever closed, that will be an exceptional event.

Another objection to finishing the railway, it is suggested from Ottawa, will be that Port Churchill is a superior port to Fort Nelson, the terminus to which the line is at present directed. This is a subtler argument than the iceberg fable. It has the appearance of impartial criticism. In truth it is merely an unscrupulous effort to cause dissension among the advocates of the route. Fort Nelson was picked as the terminus after careful and prolonged inquiry. Port Churchill, beyond doubt, has an excellent harbor but there is no question at all that Fort Nelson, on the equipment of which \$6,000,000 have already been spent, has compensating advantages. There is nothing to prevent it becoming one of the world's great ports.

The triviality of the objections to finishing the Hudson Bay Railway, of which only 92 miles remain to be laid, is very striking. It appears all the more so when the immense value of the Bay route is considered. No single stroke of policy could do more to cement Canadian unity and encourage Canadian progress than completion of the line. And apart from that, the Bay route is destined to be one of the great highways of British commerce.