

*Hudson Bay Railway*

I listened with very great interest to the speech this afternoon of the hon. member for Lunenburg (Mr. Duff) and I was pleased to note the warm feeling of sympathy that he manifested towards the western farmer. I have noticed before that a number of members on the government benches are willing to show us very great sympathy in some of these projects which are of such importance to the farmers of western Canada, but I would say to them that a little practical help is worth a great deal of sympathy, and at this time if they will support this project which we believe will help to solve the agricultural problems of western Canada, it will perhaps be better than showing us quite so much sympathy.

The statement has been made on the floor of this House a number of times this year that when the economic chaos in Europe rights itself once more, the price of our agricultural products will be enhanced. I cannot subscribe to that doctrine. I do not think the price of agricultural products will go up in Europe, and consequently they will not go up here. Wheat in the Old Country markets is above normal value. Beef and meat products are away above normal value in the Old Country markets. Butter is 100 per cent above normal value at the present time, and if our agricultural products are to compete in the European markets we must reduce the cost of production and the cost of transportation. The question before us is the question of reducing the cost of transportation. We have to compete with the other nations of the world who are not under the physical and geographical handicap that we settlers in western Canada have to contend with. We are in competition with the Argentine with its peon labour, with its short railway haul, and no expensive handling system. We are in competition with India, with practically slave labour, and no long railway haul. We are in competition with Australia, with its fringe of agricultural land around the coast, and with a twelve months working season. We have also to compete with Denmark and other European countries which are rapidly coming back to normal, and I say that if we are to build up in this country a permanent agricultural policy which will leave the farmers something over the cost of production, then this question of the Hudson bay route is of vital importance to us.

I am not going to talk about the feasibility of the route for very long, but I should like to bring to the attention of hon. members a report which was issued by the Manitoba government in the year 1884. I am taking that year because in those days the various

[Mr. Davies.]

aids to navigation in the matter of buoys and so forth, the depth of vessels and their strength, were not nearly so perfect as they are to-day. If, as far back as 1884, practical men who had great experience in navigating these northern waters said that the route was a feasible one, how much more feasible should it be at the present time in view of the perfection that has been reached in the construction of ocean-going vessels? Now, I want to read a few extracts from the report to which I have referred. Dr. Bell, director of the Canadian Geological Survey, who made five voyages through the straits, stated that the straits are: "Navigable from middle of June to middle of November. Captain Chisby, of New London, Conn., who has had fourteen years' experience in these waters, stated that "the straits are navigable for four months and often five." Captain William Kennedy, who accompanied an expedition in search of the remains of Sir John Franklin, and who had had eight years' experience of the straits, declared that the straits are navigable "from June to November."

Captain William Pritchard, who was in the Hudson's Bay Company's service for 39 years, reported as follows:

The straits never freeze; there is no reason why steamships should not navigate at any time.

He also said:

The icebergs seen in Hudson's straits in August and September would form no great barrier to navigation, nor do those met with off the straits of Belle Isle, nor were they more numerous in Hudson's straits than they frequently are off Belle Isle.

Further on in his evidence, he stated:

Steam has now effected a complete revolution in ice navigation and the most advantageous time for pushing on is when the ice is loose.

Under similar circumstances a sailing ship would be utterly helpless. It is therefore only reasonable to infer that what has been performed regularly and year after year by sailing ships can be accomplished with greater regularity and certainty by well-constructed steamers, especially built for ice navigation and provided with powerful machinery.

The legislature of the province of Manitoba appointed a select standing committee in 1884 to procure evidence and report upon the practicability of establishing a system of communication via Hudson bay. After taking the evidence of a number of men, with thorough knowledge of the subject, the committee say in their report:

Many of the gentlemen examined have had personal and extended experience as officers and servants of the Hudson's Bay Company at their ports on Hudson and Ungava bays. No evidence has been given that goes to prove that Hudson straits and bay proper freeze over or that the ice met with in these waters is sufficient to prevent navigation at any time of the year; that consequently the period of navigation is defined