

*The Address*

place, but that now they are acquired the proper policy to pursue is to get rid of them at the earliest possible day. Some would turn them over to the Canadian Pacific—even among those whom I see in front of me, hon. members supporting the Government. Some would sell them for a dollar—they have so little use for them.

An hon. MEMBER: Hear, hear.

Mr. MEIGHEN: "Hear, hear" from the hon. member opposite; but he is going to be asked to support what is described as, and promised to be, a fair trial of government operation. I venture to suggest that government operation would have received a much fairer, a much more useful and much more successful trial at the hands of those who were its friends and wanted it to succeed; at the hands of those who in the difficult position in which they found themselves after years of railway blundering, took the best and the only course this country could take in its own interests and for its own protection in the acquirement of these roads.

Mr. CANNON: And you made a lovely mess of it.

Mr. MEIGHEN: Pardon me? I did not hear: The hon. gentleman will not repeat. I looked opposite during the speech of the hon. member for North Winnipeg, I heard his references to the railway history of our country. I heard him say that the late government found on its doorstep bankrupt roads—found there railways that he described as starved and emaciated foundlings; as he spoke, on the faces of some I saw a smile, at least a gleam of approval, but on the faces of others I saw a scowl of resentment. I thought I would like to hear some of the private conversations between the hon. member for North Winnipeg and others when he went outside and beyond the pale of this House. But he spoke the truth. The late government found itself the recipient of all the penalties, the heir to all the railway blunders of this country. The late government found itself with four or five thousand miles—yes, nearly six, of prematurely constructed railway mileage. The late government found itself the mortgagee of railways that were ill-conceived, that were constructed to a grade far beyond the requirements of the country and at a time far in advance of the country's needs. The late government found itself administering the affairs of a nation over railroaded by four to six thousand miles, and as such mort-

[Mr. Meighen.]

gagees—private ownership of that mileage having irretrievably failed because of the blunders of the projectors, in which the government that preceded the Laurier government were coadjutors and co-operators—in order to protect our position as mortgagees, to protect ourselves as the inevitable owners of a large and almost barren mileage—a mileage that we could not help becoming possessed of—and in order to make that mileage possible of ultimate success through the acquisition of the systems that it was built to be a complement of, the late government took the course that it did. Now, this country has got upon its back an impossible mileage of railways, railways that never could be made to succeed run by the government or by a company as single separate systems. We have something which, now that all are collected, possesses in Eastern Canada an excellent gathering system, and that possesses in Western Canada the finest gathering system there. We have an immense mileage, but it is a system that is complete,—burdened, I know, with large transcontinentals built long before their time; burdened, I know, with transcontinentals that should never have been projected, to which the country was irrevocably committed by the government that preceded us and necessarily doomed to deficits for years to come on that account. But we have a system that is a system. We have a system to-day in which the people of this country can take pride, in respect of which they may have hope, and which they know can reach the day of solvency and of surpluses sooner than it possibly could have reached that day had any other policy been adopted.

Hon. gentlemen talk about handing it back to private ownership. Let them come forward with their proposals. Hon. gentlemen opposite are elected by the forces opposed to public ownership in this country, by the forces opposed to public operation in this country, and they know what those forces are. They know who were around them in the late campaign. They know that the interests that they pictured day after day and night after night as having their hands on my neck and as dictating the policy of the late government—they knew at the very moment in which they spoke those very interests were backing them in the contest, determined to secure their election. They know they sit opposite me now elected by the powers they have denounced. They know that some of the heads of those in-