

Grant to the provinces of Canada for the purpose of assisting and encouraging agricultural instruction, grants to be made on a proportionate basis. 1923-24, \$900,000; 1922-23, \$1,100,000.

Mr. GRAHAM: My hon. friend need not think he can get away with that. That is after the appropriation ran out under the statute.

Mr. MEIGHEN: It is the year before it ran out. Both years are in the estimates.

Mr. GRAHAM: He read them both.

Mr. MEIGHEN: Both are in the estimates. One was for the year 1923-24, \$900,000; the other for the year 1922-23, \$1,100,000, voted every year and debated on the floor.

Mr. GRAHAM: I should like to see it.

Mr. MEIGHEN: I will send it across.

Mr. GRAHAM: I know about this one.

Mr. MEIGHEN: The minister does not want to see it now.

Mr. GRAHAM: Oh, I know about this one.

Mr. MEIGHEN: I have no objection to a bill going through in respect of any line that is essential, and the minister knows that. The minister does not need to insinuate to the House that I am an enemy of the National Railways; he could not get a soul in Canada, however innocent or partisan, to believe that.

Mr. GRAHAM: A good many people believe it now.

Mr. MEIGHEN: All I ask is that the government shall do what we did. When the late government passed an act it was not afraid to come to parliament annually in the constitutional way and have the necessary money voted. We came to parliament for every dollar we required. Whatever we needed by statute or otherwise for the National Railways we included in our estimates every year, and there is no more need to do otherwise under Sir Henry Thornton than under Mr. Hanna. There are no more rights accruing to the present directorate than to any former directorate, and the necessity then is precisely the necessity now, neither more nor less. So that all this talk about having to plan ahead and the like of that is just so much political moonshine. The hon. member himself has fathered bills that contemplated expenditures extending not over two or three years but over ten years, and he has come to parliament for the money year by year to be voted; and parliament in deciding to vote the money took into account the fact that it was in

[Mr. Meighen.]

pursuance of a programme which the government had laid down. I do not know why parliament cannot be trusted to do in any year what it decides to be in the interests of the country; and there is nothing to hinder the railways from laying down their programme. It is merely an attempt to avoid the constitutional review each year at the hands of parliament of the estimates demanded by the government from the representatives of the people.

Mr. GRAHAM: Not at all.

Mr. CHURCH: No one is more anxious than I am to see the National Railways made a success in order that the great burden which is bearing down upon the people of Canada at the present time may be lightened. It is the desire of every good citizen in the country to give to the heads of the system a free hand to administer it to the best possible advantage. But when an attempt is made to convert parliament into a sort of rubber stamp it is time for objection. There is no railway system in the world today that is being carried on in the way the Canadian National Railway system is being operated at the present time. As the hon. member for St. Lawrence-St. George pointed out yesterday, a sum of over \$2,000,000,000 is tied up in our railways, and the capital cost of these 1,000 miles of branch lines, \$28,000,000 as estimated, may yet go to \$50,000,000 or \$60,000,000 when the lines are constructed. Is this the right time to build in a period of high prices having regard to the high cost of labour, the expensiveness of material and various matters of this kind, and when in the present state of affairs there is imperative need for retrenchment rather than unnecessary expenditures.

What will be the effect of the construction of this thousand miles of railway in relation to the questions of lessening transportation costs, freight rates and the balancing of the budget? In the budget speech last year the Minister of Finance expressed the hope that some curtailment would be effected in connection with the operation of the railways. There was a deficit on the National Railways of some \$70,000,000 at that time, and the necessity for retrenchment is more insistent to-day than it was then. Where is this money for these branch lines to come from? It will not come like the dew from Heaven; it cannot come out of the earnings of the road. We shall have to go into the market for this \$28,000,000 or \$30,000,000 capital and borrow it, and we shall have to pay a high rate of interest on it. With things as they are in the country to-day in the cities