

SUPPLY

HUDSON BAY RAILWAY

The House in committee of Supply, Mr. Duff in the chair.

Railways and Canals—Hudson Bay railway—construction and betterments, \$3,000,000.

Mr. CAHAN: I realize, Mr. Chairman, that a member representing one of the Montreal constituencies, when he rises to discuss before this committee the question of the completion of the Hudson Bay railway, cannot expect a very sympathetic hearing from a certain section of the House representing those western constituencies which undoubtedly regard the completion of this railway as a matter of supreme importance to them and to the grain trade of the constituencies which they represent. I wish to state, however, at the outset, that I am personally not conscious of any prejudice against those who represent the constituencies of the middle west, and I came to this House actuated with a sincere desire to ascertain the views of those gentlemen upon all the important public questions of the day, and with the desire to assist, so far as I could, in what I believed to be the national interest in carrying their views to a successful application and issue. One who represents an eastern constituency, however frequently he may pass through from the eastern ports to the western ports of the continent, staying over a few days here and there in the cities and towns of the middle west, coming in contact only with acquaintances who reside in those towns, with an occasional automobile ride into the country to see the progress of the wheat crop for the time, does not, I am sure, become completely acquainted with the views of the more rural sections of those districts, and, therefore, I have found the House of Commons something of a training school in the five months or more which I have passed here. Contact with the very able and intelligent representation of the middle west in this House has certainly modified my own views to a considerable extent, and therefore I trust the gentlemen who compose it will give me a patient hearing for the short time in which I consider the question before the committee.

The city of Montreal has no jealousy whatever with respect to development of other ports as grain ports of this Dominion. When it was ascertained, after the completion of the Panama canal, that the grain trade could successfully be assisted and its interests promoted by the shipment of grain from Alberta to Vancouver, and then by sea through the Panama canal to the ports of Europe, I be-

lieve the leading commercial men of the city of Montreal were as gratified by the fact that that venture was proving successful as if it had meant an increase of the grain trade through the port of Montreal itself. And with respect to the possibility of developing a grain trade through Port Nelson or Fort Churchill through Hudson bay and Hudson strait to Europe, I feel assured that if the interests of the middle west could be promoted by the development of this proposed route, the amount of trade to be done through either port would not to any appreciable extent affect the interests of the port of Montreal, and that the successful carrying out of that project would be received with almost unanimous approval in that city. The fact is, however, that with regard to the development of the route in question the people of the east wish to know, wish to be informed in some reliable and satisfactory way, that it is a commercial project that can be carried on upon ordinary business lines, and that the results in giving a lower grain freight from the middle west to Europe will be such as to justify not only the expenditures made in the past but the expenditures which must be contemplated in view of the completion of the railway—the provision of terminals, the provision of ships and the possibility of those ships operating for such a time and under such conditions as to lower the grain freight rates from the middle west to Liverpool below existing rates over the present routes.

In that connection there is a feeling that we should not, at the present time, enter upon projects involving large capital expenditures and increases of the obligations of the country unless and until Canada as a whole is quite fully persuaded that the projects contemplated are not only feasible but likely to prove profitable. I do not wish to enter upon any side issue but the fact remains, and every elector of the eastern provinces is conscious of it, that the railway obligations of the Canadian National Railways have increased from approximately \$103,000,000 to \$2,120,000,000 since 1911. That is an increase in the long term obligations of the people with respect to railways of nearly \$2,000,000,000. We know, of course, as stated by the hon. member for Hants-Kings (Mr. Foster) last evening, that the net national debt of this country represents \$2,442,000,000, and that in addition to that there are outstanding securities of the National Railways which are now the obligation of the Canadian people, to the amount of \$931,000,000 odd additional, increasing the net national debt—if we include the National Railway obligations, which are owing to the public, in the general debt