

patronage with public ownership. Both sides of politics in Canada have done that, but I have faith enough in the present Government, and in future governments, to believe that hereafter the two ingredients mentioned will be eliminated from the compound—that politics and patronage will be done away with in connection with the administration of Government railroads, and that we shall be given public ownership in its best form. To my mind the debate on the abstract question of public ownership is entirely beside the real question at issue: no matter what may transpire during this debate, as to the good points or bad points of public ownership, the fact remains that we possess in Canada to-day nearly a billion dollars' worth of publicly owned railroads, so that debating the abstract question does not help us at all in the matter. Furthermore, if we take over the Grand Trunk railway, which is very likely to happen in the future according to my reading of the trend of events, then we shall have a billion and a half dollars' worth of publicly owned railroads in this country.

One other observation I wish to make is this, that under those circumstances, considering that we have that billion dollars' worth of publicly owned railways, I consider that any blow at public ownership leads us distinctly towards national financial suicide. Transportation by railways in this and other countries is as truly a tax on the people as is a customs tariff. Railways are the highways of the country. In other words, in the old days the ordinary roads were the highways; to-day the railways have taken their place. Except in the remote past we did not permit the ordinary roads to be controlled by private interests, and to my mind it is just as much to the interest of this country that the railways, which are now our highways, should not be controlled by private interests. So that I do not hesitate to say that at least theoretically I am a public ownership man. I do not go to the extent of saying that we should to-day take over the Canadian Pacific Railway, as was stated by the hon. member for North Waterloo. I would not take that step until we have proven that we are capable of managing in a capable manner the billion dollars' worth of railroads which we now possess free of politics and patronage.

I have no horrors of public ownership in general, and one of my reasons for entertaining that opinion is that a year before the war I had the pleasure of travelling over publicly owned and controlled railways

[Mr. Manion.]

in France, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, Germany and Belgium, and outside of Italy I saw no inferiority in the handling of the traffic on those railways with the handling of the traffic on the privately owned railways in England. Therefore there is no reason in the world to my mind why we should not make good in the handling of our own railroads.

There is one other point I wish to make before I sit down, because I do not intend to take up the twenty minutes allotted to me. The question has been brought up as to these forty-four charters enumerated in Section 20. It appears to me that Mackenzie and Mann kept those charters open because they were convinced there was some value in them. If so, why should we refuse to take back those charters for the benefit of this country? I cannot see for the life of me why we should refuse to do so for the reason that some private corporation may wish to build in future through the territory covered by those charters. Supposing it is true as suggested by some hon. members that land in the neighbourhood of the lines to be built under those charters is owned by Mackenzie and Mann or other private interests, because most of the land in the West has been alienated into private hands by various governments from time to time, that is no reason why any government which controls the destinies of this country should not use its best judgment in regard to building any of those projected lines. The granting of a charter does not constitute an order to build the railway mentioned therein; if it did we would not have so many private corporations looking for charters. In my opinion the taking over of those forty-four charters is simply handing back to the people of this country what belongs to them. I listened very intently to the different reasons advanced by hon. gentlemen, but I fail to hear a single legitimate reason why those forty-four charters should not be taken back by the people of Canada as their own property.

The conclusion I have reached is that it is the duty of every Canadian to stand up and support public ownership to the best of his ability, for the reason that if he does not do so he is hitting at a railway business controlled by this Government of the value of at least one billion dollars.

Mr. POWER: The hon. gentleman said no Canadian would be against this Bill. Does he consider that the two million of us in Quebec are Canadians?