

## The Nationalization of Our Railways

The President of the Canadian Pacific Railway in an address given recently before the Fifth Sunday Association — a body of workers composed principally of railroad men—took up the subject of nationalization of Canadian railways. As the head of one of the biggest private corporations in the world, Mr. Beatty spoke as an interested and consequently biased party, yet as he placed the issue, as he saw it, squarely before his audience with a frankness and clearness that could be well copied by our public men, one could not help but be impressed with his common sense logic. What the speaker asked the people of Canada to do before allowing themselves to be committed to any policy leading to the country buying up the remaining privately owned railroads was to watch the experiment now being tried in the United States of governmental control over the railroads, and also to see how the system of public ownership works out on the present government railroads in Canada. There is much in Mr. Beatty's argument for Canadians to think about.

Public ownership of all public utilities, which include transportation companies, is sound economics and no doubt as our democratic institutions

become more perfect our railways, steamship companies, telegraph and telephone systems will be state owned, as will all local utilities be municipally owned, but we in Canada have a long way to go before we can say that we are ready to take over and manage huge corporations, such as the C. P. R., with its billion and half assets, that have been successful only through exceptional industry on the part of extraordinary men. Men who would not work for any government, at least under our present system.

The past experience of Canada in railway ownership, has hardly been happy. It has been a somewhat costly experience for the ratepayer. In the building and maintenance of her national railways and in the acquisition of other railroads her leaders have not always shown good judgment or good administrative ability. The "wait and see" policy may after all be the best, particularly with the two experiments of public ownership and administration mentioned above now before us. If there is so much money in the country as will buy out the C. P. R. and Grand Trunk systems, we believe it could be used for better purposes at this time, when the biggest problem is to find employment for our returning men.

## Municipal Officers and Commissions

We recently received the following inquiry:—

"Can a Clerk, Treasurer, Secretary-Treasurer, Engineer, Road Superintendent, Road Foreman or other person who receives a salary from a Municipality in any Province of Canada legally accept commission on material or supplies purchased by him for the Municipality?"

We believe the Secret Commissions Act, 1909, which "Act shall be read as if its provisions formed part of The Criminal Code of Canada," prohibits all such persons accepting commissions as aforesaid. Are we correct? If not, in the interest of purity of public life, and in fairness to both ratepayers and competing manufacturers, what can be done to prevent it?"

The reply of our legal advisers is to the effect that "the practice of municipal officers receiving commissions is criminal and comes under the Secret Commission Act of 1909 as suggested by question.

On investigating the reason for the questions we find that it is the practice in certain districts for some municipal officers to take commissions on orders and contracts that may be given out by or through such officers. And the strange part is that these men claim that as they are not required to take the oath as required by mayors and aldermen who are elected by popular vote, the acceptance of private commissions from contractors and manufacturers is their legitimate right.

Such an absurd reason for bribery is hardly understandable, much less the idea that intelligent men can so easily soothe their consciences by such sophistry. Of course, not all municipal officials

who take bribes, or commissions, fool themselves into the belief that they are strictly honest men. To what extent Canadian municipal officers accept commissions we do not know, but we believe that the practice is limited, but limited though it may be it is a blot on the standard of honesty of our municipal officials. As a matter of fact, the average official is a man of integrity, with a high sense of his duty to the community that employs him, and it is a pity that such a standard should be lowered by a few grafters.

One of the principal excuses put forward for the pernicious system is the small salaries paid to municipal men. When we think of the miserable salaries paid in some municipalities to its officers we wonder why they are so honest. We know of qualified engineers giving the whole of their time to the service of the community for \$1,200, and secretary-treasurers and clerks with families for even less salaries. Our questioner asks: "In the interest of purity in public life and in fairness to both ratepayers and competing manufacturers, what can be done to stop illicit commissions?" To our mind the answer is clear. First, pay the public servant a salary sufficient to enable him to keep his self-respect, and second, put the criminal law into force, when needed.

This may be plain language, as it is intended to be, but we know that it is our duty to condemn as strongly as possible the practice of commission giving and receiving. It is dishonest, and it is mean. What is more, it stultifies the usefulness of the officer for his everyday work. We hope that now we have drawn the attention of all municipal officials to the illegality of the practice, that it will be stopped.