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Moose Jaw Times Mon. Oct 30/22

The Conservative Point of View

This Department of The Evening Times is conducted by Frank Wright, formerly Editor of The Daily News (amalgamated with The Times), in the interests of the friends and supporters of the Liberal-Conservative Party.

JUST GOOD
COMMON-
SENSE

An interesting interview with Sir Henry Thornton, the new head of the Canadian National Railways, has just been received from London. There is a certain breeziness in it and an enthusiasm that will be specially appealing to Canadians. In fact from his statements one would think he was about to explore another unknown region of the Canadian fastnesses of the north. It is quite redolent of the old-time pioneer spirit; he is out to conquer or be conquered. One can almost hear him say: "Death or Westminster Abbey." And he seems to have quite made up his mind that if he is left to do his work in his own way, and without the pin-pricking of the party politicians, it will be "Westminster Abbey." It is difficult to imagine his allowing any attempt on the part of politicians to interfere with him; it is not difficult to realize what will happen if they do, it will be "so much the worse for the coo." That, at least, is the impression one gathers from the interview referred to. It will be interesting to note the attitude taken by the Hon. Mackenzie King on the railway question. It is true that he has made the definite promise that there shall be no political interference. Yet one cannot forget what happened to promises made during the election campaign; they, after the election, were not to be taken too seriously. The question is, will Mr. King look on promises made before the appointment of Sir Henry in the same manner.

Sir Henry Thornton says that his task is of a fourfold character. He will have to weld the whole system into an entity, he will have to secure competent men and suitable officers, he will have to prevent the system from being a financial burden on the Dominion, and he will have to make it the means of developing the country more rapidly. It is to be sincerely hoped that he will succeed in that task. To do so, however, he must be permitted to work on his own lines. By such means only will the national system have that "fair deal" that has been promised for it. From the viewpoint of Sir Henry, the last object is the most important, though most people would have considered that the first was pre-eminent, as the last three of his aims are dependent upon the first. It was that on which Mr. Meighen laid special stress.

When he refers to the need for competent and suitable officers, Sir Henry states that he did not mean that such an object would necessarily involve the removal of present holders of positions, but, he says, and rightly, that "obviously, in this and any other business, anyone who cannot pull his weight in the boat must give way to some one who can, but every man will have a fair run for his money." Then he pays a just tribute to the work that has already been carried out under the most difficult and troublous circumstances. "I have only admiration for what the officers of the various component parts of the C.N.E. have done," he declares.

It is to his fourth object that the new head of the National Railways looks for the means by which the deficits of the lines are to be eliminated. "As we develop the country more rapidly," he says, "we shall reduce the deficits. Success of the railways depends upon the general success of the country, and the success of the country depends on the efficiency of the railways. That has been the history of every country. It was so in the States; it is going on in South Africa. You have to open the country to traffic by the construction of arteries of transportation. A bushel of wheat is no good if you can't get it to market at a reasonable cost. Transportation is the art of conveying a commodity from the person who has it to the person who wants it." He further contends that there must be an encouragement of immigration of the right sort—"mind you, of the right sort." And then he goes on to point to the necessity of extending and developing the present system. "There will have to be construction of branch lines and feeders wherever conditions justify," he declares. That statement is enough to make the Hon. Mr. Crerar open his eyes widely in astonishment. He would have had many of the feeders of the main lines torn up. Sir Henry says, no. He goes on to say, in effect: Provide the lines and "induce people to expand their efforts and increase production." That is entirely a different thing from what Mr. Crerar has said concerning the elimination of the railway deficits and the successful operation of the roads.

Labor will also note with interest what Sir Henry has to say in regard to the interests of the employees of the National lines. In this he also shows a sure business acumen, and strong commonsense. His policy, he declares, was to give every individual wages on which he could bring up his family in comfort and decency. "Otherwise," he remarked, "you are creating unrest and inefficiency, and producing an oncoming generation of Bolsheviks. Then there must be scrupulous honesty in dealing with the men who work for the railway. Further, there must be a quick adjustment of complaints. It's easy to deal with any labor questions if you get them while they're plastic. If you wait till it is a festering sore, it freezes and is exceedingly difficult to deal with. With that kind of treatment I have never found men of any country unreasonable."

There is a sound business-like ring in the statements made by Sir Henry Thornton, which will but add to the already strong feeling of confidence expressed throughout the country in himself and his work. It would be unfair to him to expect an immediate fulfilment of the promise held out by his appointment. He will have to be given time to bring his work to fruition, and he will have to be given a free hand. Only thus will he be successful.

MEIGHEN PAPERS, Series 3 (M.G. 26, I, Volume 135)

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