

GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP OF RAILWAYS.

THE FIRST OF A SERIES OF FOUR ARTICLES REVIEWING THE POLICY PURSUED BY CANADIANS TOWARD RAILWAY CORPORATIONS, WRITTEN WITH THE CONVICTION THAT GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP IS FEASIBLE AND DESIRABLE.

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TO discuss the transportation problem of the Dominion within the compass of four magazine articles, and in doing so to afford readers anything like an approximate insight into so important a question, is a task requiring much greater skill than I pretend to possess. However, if I can succeed in presenting two or three phases of the question in a manner sufficiently lucid to stimulate public interest, and, in addition, can demonstrate that there is a remedy within our grasp which could be speedily applied without creating any disturbance, national or commercial, I shall be more than compensated for my trouble.

In the Province of Manitoba, where I have long resided, public opinion has been so aroused in regard to the sacrifice of the people's interests in connection with railway transportation, that the question of Government ownership has become the dominant issue in provincial politics. The new Government, led by Hon. Hugh John Macdonald, adopted the principle of Government ownership in the platform upon which it carried the country last fall, and at the present writing we find the honourable gentleman's Government carrying on negotiations looking to the construction of railway lines necessary for the accommodation of the settlers, these lines to be constructed out of public funds, and to be owned and controlled by the Government in the interests of the people.* Whether

they shall be operated by the Government or leased to existing railway corporations, and by them operated on a rental basis is, I understand, a question so far undecided, although I incline to the belief that they will be so leased, the Government taking care that the freight rates thereon are reasonable, and retaining the ownership in order to insure just treatment for the settlers.

I mention this for the purpose of emphasizing the value and potency of an educative campaign. It is only about four years since the question of Government ownership was first discussed in that province, and yet within that brief space the people appear to have grasped the issue, to have recognized the remedy, and to be perfectly ready to apply it.

Realizing what had been accomplished in so brief a time in the Prairie Province, and recognizing that public opinion throughout the Dominion is rapidly crystallizing in the direction of a radical reform (I am convinced that the people are in advance of the politicians in appreciating the true bearing of the problem), I suggested some months ago to a number of eastern friends the desirability of inaugurating a platform educative campaign throughout the provinces east of Lake Superior; for I was, and am still, convinced that all the people require is to have the facts placed before them, and they will see to it that the remedy is applied. The difficulty in this case, as in all others, is that the public neither know the facts, nor understand the real nature of the issue. A great many of those whose duty as leaders

* These papers were prepared at Ottawa in May last. Since then Premier Macdonald has announced that, owing to crop failure, he has delayed the carrying out of his Government railway scheme until next year.