

*Supply—Hudson Bay Railway*

he can do it. Nor do I mind him glorifying Mr. McLachlan on the proper occasion. But let us deal for a moment with the notorious McLachlan report. Personally I do not want to detract from the ability of this engineer. I think it is conceded that as an engineer he is foremost in his profession; but I want to remind the House that not a word in this report comes from Mr. McLachlan in his capacity as engineer. I would point out that this famous letter deals with phases of the problem which lie entirely outside his capacity as a port engineer; and if you will read all that Mr. McLachlan has ever said about Port Nelson you will find that on no occasion has he ever attempted to detract from that port. So far as Mr. McLachlan is concerned, the problem is not an engineering one at all, because Mr. McLachlan will be the first man in this country to admit that the engineering problems have been solved, and I think he would be prepared to admit that they have been solved by a very clever engineer. Of course I give due weight to the opinions of Mr. McLachlan as expressed here on the problems of navigation. I suppose he has as much right to an opinion as anybody in this House on navigation; and also we must attach some weight to his opinion given on matters of transport. This letter is composed of two sets of opinions; one based upon his view of the navigation difficulties, and the other on his view of the transport problem. He speaks in the first instance as a navigator and in the second instance as a freight expert, but not as an engineer because if he had spoken as such he would have described Port Nelson as one of the best ports of its kind on the face of the globe, as it surely is. The beginning of this letter always strikes me with a certain amount of amusement:

Many a time during the past four years I have been on the verge of coming out in absolute condemnation of the undertaking.

I think it sheds a ray of light, if I may say so, on the temperament of Mr. McLachlan. It seems that he had his ups and downs. At times he felt that the enterprise was going to be a success. At other times he was down in the dumps, so to speak, and he felt sure, almost to the verge of admitting it, that it would not be a success. I am afraid that Mr. McLachlan, although he is an expert engineer who has carried a great work to the point of success, is in his disposition somewhat a little bilious and a little inclined to waver. Let me point out that my hon. friend from St. Lawrence-St. George has built up the edifice of his argument on this somewhat strange, outlandish document of Mr.

[Mr. Bird.]

McLachlan. The hon. member mentioned what Mr. McLachlan said in the following paragraph:

Port Nelson was this year blocked with ice on August 29.

Now all newspapers opposed to the Hudson Bay railway have based leading articles on that one paragraph which stated that in midsummer Port Nelson was blocked with ice. Our friend from St. Lawrence-St. George emphasized that. I have the report before me, and if hon. members will turn to page 19 they will find that Mr. McLachlan wrote a letter dated August 30, the day after the port was supposed to be blocked with ice, in which he says:

As I write this letter, the ice is still in clear view in the vicinity of the Alette. Yesterday as it was a very fine day, I seized the opportunity and went out in a gasoline boat to a point about five miles beyond the Cearence.

He went fifteen miles down the estuary in a gasoline boat the day he reported the port was blocked with ice. I think this periodical appearance in the Nelson estuary of floating ice in summer is just as understandable as the appearance of floating ice in the estuary of the St. Lawrence. These phenomena arise precisely from the same cause. Mr. McLachlan admitted that it was an extraordinary year. It may occur in midsummer of any year that there may be a field of floating ice going as far south as the estuary of the Nelson just as it gets as far south as the north Atlantic shipping route in certain years. That goes without saying, but it is another matter to base on that an argument against the feasibility of the route. Mr. McLachlan's report is based solely, not upon his experience as an engineer, because his experience as an engineer relieves the Hudson bay route entirely from any doubt. I say that Mr. McLachlan would be the first man to admit that Port Nelson at the present time, up to the point he left off working on it, was a real success, and that nature and human ingenuity had come together and had made a feasible port in that estuary. Too much importance can be attached to these point blank statements we have listened to this afternoon. If you look at any project from the beginning, it is easy to conjure up imaginary difficulties which, in 5 p.m. the popular view, will condemn it. Suppose such a process had been followed for instance in regard to the port of Montreal, or in regard to any great world ports, that would be sufficient to condemn it in the minds of some people. I have