

differ and one which is engaging more attention every day. We are in our scheme opposed to the principle of government ownership in the fullest sense of the word. We are opposed at all events to the principle of government operation for reasons which we will explain; but if my hon. friend the leader of the opposition is prepared to take ground fairly and squarely in favour of government ownership and operation of the railways of this country, I admit at once that the question is a big one upon which a line might be drawn and new parties perhaps be formed. But my hon. friend has done nothing of the kind.

ONLY A FLIRTATION.

I said a moment ago, he (the conservative leader) has been carrying on a flirtation with this question of government ownership from the beginning of the session. In his earlier amendment he had vague, general allusions to government ownership, but he did not bring down a straight square amendment declaring in favour of the principle of having the railways of this country owned and operated by the government. Again I say, though we might differ from my hon. friend on that question, yet it is a great question and would be well worthy of being the basis of reorganization of parties in any country. But, what do we find? The hon. gentleman has drawn his amendment in a very ingenious way. He spoke of the insidious clauses of the Grand Trunk agreement. There is nothing in the Grand Trunk agreement so insidious as the words in which he has dealt with the question of government ownership. He first describes the scheme that is before the House as an inexpressibly bad scheme; it is expensive, wicked—no language that can be used within Parliamentary privilege is too strong to denounce the scheme. Then the hon. gentleman says that, rather than have this desperately wicked scheme, it might be well to consider whether we should not have government ownership. It might occur to my hon. friend that some people who are interested in the question of government ownership might be inclined to say: We do not necessarily tie ourselves to this scheme. We are in favour of the government ownership as a principle and are prepared to assert it at all times, from this time forth we are in favour of government ownership—no more subsidies of soulless corporations, no more grants to any body; we are going to stand up for the great principle of government ownership, we are going to have government of the people by the people and for the people in the matter of railways. But the hon. gentleman does not say that. He has drawn his amendment in such a curious form that all he asks his people to decide is, that rather than this desperately wicked scheme of the Prime Minister it might be well to have government ownership. The amendment says:

The House is of opinion that instead of ratifying the proposed agreement, it would be more in the public interest—

Observe. Not that on the merits it would be worth while, not that government ownership is right or sound, but that it is a little better than this Bill:

—it would be more in the public interest that the Dominion should assume the whole obligation necessary for extending across the continent the present government system of railways, thereby completing a transcontinental railway, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, entirely owned by and under the control of the people of Canada.

PUBLIC WILL NOT BE MISLED.

Still I venture to say, those people in the Dominion—and one can respect them highly—who entertain strong opinions on the question of government ownership will not be misled by the terms of that amendment, especially, in the light of the record of hon. gentlemen opposite on the question of government ownership to which I would ask the privilege of calling attention.

I have found, Sir, that the idea of government ownership is a popular one in some respects. There is something attractive in the idea of the municipalization, or, in the larger field, the nationalization of great public utilities. There is a growing feeling in that direction. Services that, years ago, were dealt with by private corporations, are gradually being absorbed by the state, and I presume that that will go on. But I am satisfied that public opinion in Canada has not reached a point which would justify us in saying that the people of the Dominion are prepared for a general policy of govern-