

Selkirk, for 5,000 acres a mile. That alleged offer, that mythical offer, seems to have had an extremely disturbing effect upon the mind of the hon. gentleman (Sir Charles Tupper). Well, it will probably have the effect of relieving the hon. gentleman's mind when I tell him that this alleged offer is a figment of the imagination of some of our newspaper friends, and that no such offer was ever made to this Government or to any member of the Government. Therefore, the comparison which has been made in the press, and to some extent in the House, between the project we are now discussing, and the offer alleged to have been made, is not at all in point, for as I have said no such offer was ever made. I desire to make that statement very clear, because in the most extraordinary way, a way that seem to me is not at all creditable to some of the newspapers which have taken it up, it was at once taken for granted that this offer had been made. When the Minister of Railways made his statement and nothing was said about any such offer having been made, it might have at least been taken for granted that the Government ought to have been interrogated on the subject, and some definite information secured, before it was assumed that such an offer had been made and refused.

Mr. FOSTER. May I ask my hon. friend a question?

The MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR. Certainly.

Mr. FOSTER. The Minister of Railways when speaking stated definitely that other persons were conferred with, that other contractors, or companies, or corporations were mentioned; several of them. Now, my hon. friend (Mr. Sifton) is no doubt perfectly acquainted with all the steps in the negotiations. They appear to have been carried on by word of mouth, but at the same time I think he will agree that it is the right of the House to have a full explanation from him, as to all such parties who conferred, and what was the purport of their propositions, and what was the purport of the conferences that went on. It would be very gratifying to the House to have that knowledge.

The MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR. It is perfectly correct to say that there were verbal discussions, but it is not in any sense of the word correct to say that any offer was ever made to the Government for the construction of any railway on any of the routes mentioned, except what are described and set out in the papers laid on the Table this afternoon.

I would like to repeat that statement for the purpose of making it more definite if I can. I repeat that the papers which were laid on the Table this afternoon, contain all the offers of any kind whatever that were ever made to the Government in connection

with the building of railways to the Yukon, so far as I am aware. I may say upon that point—not in material qualification of it, but simply for the purpose of avoiding even the slightest possible inaccuracy, that as the House will perfectly well understand, there were conferences and informal drafts of memoranda discussed between the Government and Messrs. Mackenzie & Mann when the negotiations were going on; but there was nothing even then in the shape of a formal offer and from time to time these drafts were amended and changed until eventually the contract was agreed upon between the Government and these gentlemen. The proposals that were submitted, were made in the terms set forth in the letters, of which copies were laid on the Table of the House this afternoon, and the House is therefore in possession of the fullest information on the whole subject.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to say just a few words in regard—not to the railway project—but to some circumstances leading up to an intelligent understanding of the subject with which the Government has had to deal. I said, and I repeat: that I do not think it can be laid to the charge of the Government that there was one moment's delay in connection with the administration of the affairs of the Yukon district that could possibly be avoided. Every step was taken just as promptly as it could be taken; and it was taken under the very greatest difficulties and under the most disturbing and harassing circumstances. When it first became evident to the Government that special measures had to be taken in connection with this district, the House will understand that there was no officer in the Department of the Interior—with the exception possibly of Dr. Dawson who some years before had made a geological exploration trip through that district—there was no officer in the Department of the Interior available for the purpose of consultation who had a personal and accurate knowledge of that district. And, in the steps that were in the first instance taken and everything that was done until I met Mr. Ogilvie at Vancouver on the 1st of October, until that time, we had to depend upon the vaguest and most indefinite information. We had the survey, we had Mr. Ogilvie's report, but I can tell hon. gentlemen opposite, that as to information which would enable us to intelligently do the work which we had to do, these reports were not of very much assistance to us. For instance, we found it was absolutely impossible to find out definitely and positively at what time and at what period the lakes and the rivers in the lower part of the district were frozen. We found it was impossible to discover what the state of the Passes was likely to be at that time of the year, and all we could do was to send on our mounted police, let them take their supplies, send them over the Passes and let us know the result of their efforts.