

have impelled the Government to the particular line of action they have taken in this matter. In this I may be departing from the usual course on the first reading of a Bill, but I think that the gravity of this subject and its general importance, will afford sufficient justification for my course; and I think it will be admitted that such a departure should rather commend itself to the House, having regard, first, to the urgency and next, the very great importance of the whole subject. Hon. members of this House will recollect quite clearly that before the close of last session, evidence was pouring in upon us of the immense discoveries of gold that were taking place in the Yukon district, and returning parties from that remote region were bringing us the most fabulous accounts of its mineral deposits. No one who is at all interested in public affairs could fail to realize that very important questions were likely to arise in that country in connection with these great gold discoveries. The Government had, therefore, as soon as the session of Parliament was over and it was possible for them to give attention to the matter, pressed upon their consideration the solution of—not one problem alone—but various problems of very great magnitude. We had to devise some means of solving the question as to how civil government should be effectively established and carried on in that region; we had to provide for the protection of life and property and the general preservation of public order, and we felt that in a great measure involving these was the question of providing proper transportation facilities into and out of that country. It became clear to us that we should immediately address our attention to dealing with these problems in a manner which would be most effective and best promote good government and the general welfare and prosperity of the country. In obtaining information with regard to the probable influx of people into that country, we were led to believe that the number of people who would be likely to seek the Yukon region during the present year would be exceedingly large. I believe that agents of transportation companies, who have the means of acquiring accurate information and forming a pretty fair judgment, advised—at least some of them did—that as many as 250,000 people would be finding their way into the Yukon country during the present year. Others connected with transportation companies also did not form so high an estimate of the probable numbers, but a large proportion of them, at all events, put the figure at 100,000, and none, so far as my information goes, put it as low as 50,000.

Now, what does the influx of such a number of people mean in transportation requirements? Why, the statement is made by officials of the Department of the Interior, speaking from actual knowledge, that it is

Mr. BLAIR.

unsafe for a man to go into that country unless he has assured at least supplies to last him a year, and the estimate is that a year's supplies will average in the neighbourhood of a ton per man. Now, supposing only the smallest number estimated seek to enter that country during this year, supposing there should only be 50,000 going to the Yukon, what would that involve? Why, it involves the transportation of 50,000 tons of supplies of all kinds. That is the information which I have from official and other sources. Well, the Government had to consider this difficulty—the getting of 50,000 tons of freight into that country to meet the demands of 50,000 people, with the facilities at their disposal absolutely inadequate for the transfer even of a considerable proportion of that quantity of tonnage. I dare say that some hon. friends opposite may think people are not likely to go into that country unless they are equipped sufficiently for such an expedition. But that is not the result of the observations of the officers of the Government. People will go there—indifferent, careless or thoughtless as to what will be their condition when they get there. Each will go in the hope, perhaps, that there will be no scarcity of provisions, at any rate, that there will always be a little margin for a few people, without stopping to think that there may be others in precisely the same case.

Now, Sir, if this information given to us is accepted—and, as a responsible Government we could not do other than accept the information we had received—what was the duty of the Government? I ask, Mr. Speaker, what was the duty which devolved upon the Government and what course ought we to take under the circumstances? With such a probability staring us in the face, could we afford to allow any time to be wasted; could we allow months or even weeks to go by which should be utilized if we were to meet the demand for transportation facilities? However desirous we might be, as we all would naturally be, to consult Parliament on this subject, to take the opinion of the representatives of the people and to ask authority before we had in any degree committed the Government to action, could we, I say, under the circumstances in which we were placed, realizing the responsibility that devolved upon us, do otherwise than we have done? I put this strongly, I desire to put it strongly, because the facts admit of our doing so. Under the circumstances, with the facts we had before us, with the knowledge we possessed, no course was open but that of prompt, immediate and instant action. If we had failed—let me put that to hon. gentlemen who surround me—if we had failed in acting upon our knowledge and convictions in this regard, should we not have been unworthy of confidence? Life, property, order, the prestige, the credit, the honour of Canada—these were