

When the First Minister was discussing the transportation question in the last session of parliament, with all this information in the hands of the government—because doubtless there is no information of more recent date than that they possessed last session—with all the information at his disposal with all the knowledge the right hon. gentleman has been able to obtain as First Minister for the purpose of solving the great transportation question during all the time he has been in public life, during the seven years he has been Prime Minister of this country, I say with all this information, the right hon. gentleman stood up in this House last session and said that the carriage of wheat from the west would be a failure as a commercial enterprise. I do not quite understand what change has come over the hon. gentleman's views. Surely the rocks that were there last year are there still; this rugged country that he referred to last session is still as rugged as ever. The hon. gentleman has not given us any information more recent than that. And yet the First Minister is prepared to say now that a road can be constructed through that country that would be of commercial value. It does look as if some unknown person had stepped in to the counsels of the government and demanded a speedy solution of this question in the interest of the Grand Trunk Railway. I do not quite understand what the right hon. gentleman means. We are expected as a Canadian parliament to conduct our business in a businesslike manner. The government of Canada, by reason of owning and operating the Intercolonial Railway has the advantage of knowing something about the cost of railway construction, inasmuch as it has expended an enormous sum ranging from seventy-five million upwards upon government roads in this country.

It has been expended, not by private enterprise, but by the government themselves. The government of this country, year after year, have been expending vast sums in the purchasing of cars, and of steel rails, and of locomotives, and of railway ties, indeed, in the purchase of everything that enters into railway construction, and the government, therefore, should have been able to lay before the people of this country a fair estimate of the cost before they would undertake such a gigantic work, notwithstanding the government has this advantage, they are now in the railway business themselves, notwithstanding that they have been equipping the Intercolonial Railway by taking down the old bridges and replacing them with newer and up-to-date bridges, notwithstanding that they have told the people of this country that they have practically equipped anew the Intercolonial Railway by the construction of better roadbed, by the purchase of better freight cars and better passenger cars—notwithstanding all this, the people of this country are asked to pay this enormous amount of money;

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without the Railway Department coming forward and laying upon the Table of the House a statement of what, in their opinion, would be a proper estimate of the cost of this road. Further than this, it would not be an unreasonable request for the people of Canada to ask some leading railway man, either in this country, in the United States or in England, some man who has a reputation as a railway expert, who has constructed railways in this country, like Sir William Van Horne, to give an opinion upon the cost of the building of that road before we are asked to vote the money. As it is, we are asked to do so, without having the opinion of any great railway man in this country excepting that of the hon. member for North Norfolk (Mr. Charlton), and I noticed the other day that the right hon. the First Minister rather shoved him aside and did not put quite so high an estimate on him as a railway expert as when he introduced the Bill.

Hon. Mr. ROSS (Victoria, N.S.). Has the hon. gentleman read Sir Sandford Fleming's report?

Mr. BLAIN. I may say to the hon. gentleman of many years, that I have read Sir Sandford Fleming's report, and that it has been read in this House over and over again in the absence of my hon. friend during this discussion. Sir Sandford Fleming's report, in so far as it refers to the province of New Brunswick, and that gentleman states that the northern part of the province of New Brunswick, where this government propose to construct the road, is a very rough country, so rough that he would not recommend the government of earlier days to construct the Intercolonial Railway there. That is what he said in the report which is in the possession of this House at the present time.

Just one word in conclusion in respect to the country through which this railway is to pass in the province of Ontario and in the province of Quebec. My hon. friend the Minister of Justice (Hon. Mr. Fitzpatrick) made a statement in this House the other day that there was a very large area of good land in the northern part of the province of Ontario amounting to millions of acres. If that statement be correct, and perhaps it is correct, then I say that the people of this country would expect the government to tell them within twenty or thirty or fifty miles, through what part of that country this railroad will be constructed. Why do they not tell this to the people of Quebec and of Ontario and of New Brunswick, because the electors in these three great provinces are interested in this matter, as they will have to pay some portion of the taxes of this country like all other citizens—and they are not complaining on that point—but they do expect that the government will lay before the people of this country data sufficiently accurate to enable them to judge within 100 miles where this rail-