

3. The work is being carried out under the usual terms and conditions embodied in the form of contract adopted by the department.

4. The date for the completion of the contract is December 31, 1903. Yes, the work is being satisfactorily prosecuted.

TELEPHONE COMPANIES IN THE MARITIME PROVINCES.

Mr. CLARKE asked :

1. What telephone companies are operating in the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island ?

2. Who are the shareholders in the said companies ?

3. What is the par value of the shares of the said companies, and what is their present market value ?

The MINISTER OF RAILWAYS AND CANALS (Hon. A. G. Blair). The government has received no official returns from the telephone companies referred to. These companies are organized under provincial charter and make no returns to us. We are not supplied with lists of their shareholders, nor do we know what their stock is selling at or anything of their business.

THE RAILWAY ACT, 1903.

Bill (No. 21) to amend and consolidate the law respecting railways, was read the second time.

The MINISTER OF RAILWAYS AND CANALS (Hon. A. G. Blair) moved that the House go into Committee on the Bill.

Hon. JOHN HAGGART (South Lanark). Before you leave the Chair, Mr. Speaker, I would like the hon. minister (Hon. Mr. Blair) to state whether he intends to refer this Bill to a special committee for the purpose of giving the railways interested an opportunity to state whether the Bill is acceptable to them or not, and to offer any suggestions they may desire to offer. I would also like to know whether he has received any representations from the different railway companies throughout the country or from boards of trade and others with reference to the scope and nature of the Bill ?

The MINISTER OF RAILWAYS AND CANALS. I did not contemplate making any motion to refer this Bill to a special committee, at this stage at all events. I have not heard from the railway companies. I put the companies in possession of copies of the Bill as soon as it was printed and introduced in the House, and gave them to understand that I would be much pleased to receive from them their views with regard to any of its provisions. There was an understanding that they would meet to discuss the question and put their views in writing. They had hoped to do this before now, but they have not been able to hold the meeting yet. Still, I think we are in a position to make considerable progress with

the Bill, in relation to those portions of it that may not be contentious, reserving, if need be, for later consideration, any clauses in which the companies or parties interested state they desire to be heard. They may be heard in the form I mention—that is, they may communicate their views in writing as I suggested they should, and these communications could be printed and distributed for the use of hon. members on both sides. It is not customary to refer government Bills to a special committee or to a general committee for that matter; and nothing has yet appeared that makes it seem desirable or necessary to make an exception in this case.

Hon. DAVID TISDALE (South Norfolk). I presume that the hon. Minister of Railways and Canals (Hon. Mr. Blair) would not object to my stating what the proceedings were in relation to the last consolidation of the railway law in 1888. Mr. Pope was then Minister of Railways, and, if I remember well, Sir John A. Macdonald was acting Minister of Justice, or, possibly, it may have been Sir John Thompson. The Minister of Railways and Canals and the Minister of Justice met at different times with the counsel of the railway companies; for, after all, while parliament controls all legislation, yet, there are none so largely interested in any proposed changes in railway laws as are the railway companies. A discussion, taken part in by the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Railways and the representatives of the railway companies, would boil down, to use a common expression, all disputed points. As a matter of fact, the procedure followed in that case expedited the progress of the Bill very materially. This Bill is a great deal broader than that of 1888. That was simply a consolidation with certain amendments—quite numerous—and the introduction of the system of the Railway Committee of the Privy Council. The changes in the present Bill are not only in regard to the establishment of the Railway Commission itself, but that commission is given powers far beyond anything for which we have a precedent in our legislation. So, it seems to me, it would relieve the House a great deal and ensure more rapid progress if the minister would follow out some such plan as a preliminary step. Of course the Bill would have to come again into the Committee of the whole House to be fully considered here. Not only did the procedure in 1888 lessen the labour of dealing with the Bill, but the minister was in a position to give us information as to any objections which had been raised, and he was able to refer to the Minister of Justice where necessary. It is true that the Bill of 1888 was not referred to a special committee. But it is also true that since that time we have generally sent amendments of the railway law to the Railway Committee. The scope of the present Bill is so large that I would not, for my