

the land? We did not propose to give any money to the enterprise; we proposed that the Yukon territory should pay for the railway. How could we tell the value of the land; how could we tell in advance and fix for purposes of a tender the value of a land subsidy? One man would regard a million acres as worth millions of dollars and by letting his imagination have full play, that it contained untold quantities of gold. Another man, more canny, careful and conservative, might think there might not be a thousand dollars worth or a whole dollar's worth of the precious metal in the millions of acres offered. Thus, one man would take one view, another man another. We could not tell what value to place on the land, and no body of men, I do not care whether they possess the wisdom of Solomon, could decide what would be a fair and reasonable estimate to put on the land. It rests on chance, on conjecture wholly.

An hon. MEMBER. It is a gamble.

The MINISTER OF RAILWAYS AND CANALS. Yes, it is absolutely a gamble, nothing more and nothing less. Therefore, we could not publish to the world that we would give 5,000 acres per mile, less 5,000 acres might not catch the fancy of persons wishing to undertake the construction of the road. We could not offer 50,000 acres, for it might prove too much, and while a less amount might suffice to induce capitalists of a speculative turn to enter into a contract. We could only do as we did: when we found men willing to negotiate on a reasonable basis and enter into a contract, then to push forward the work with all reasonable speed and expedition. I do not think it would be possible to make a more irrational, a more absurd, a more utterly childish proposition than that in such an undertaking and in a great emergency, we should ask for tenders on ten day's notice, and ask the price at which contractors would be prepared to carry out the work.

As to Mackenzie & Mann, they called on the Government. Other gentlemen called on us as well—they were not the only people who called.

Mr. FOSTER. Who did?

The MINISTER OF RAILWAYS AND CANALS. We had quite a few people. I was not in Ottawa much at that time, and I am not as well informed with respect to those minute particulars and details as is my hon. friend Mr. Sifton. He will take occasion to enlighten the House fully on the matter. I know there were others. There were others who said they represented large amounts of capital and had untold means behind them and were willing to talk railway. But none of this large capital ever materialized; and, as far as I know, we did not get our eye on

Mr. BLAIR.

the credentials to establish how solid and capable these people were to carrying out the undertaking. However, we did have two gentlemen to make us an offer, we had Messrs. Mackenzie & Mann, and I suppose my hon. friends opposite will not sneer at their capabilities. They had been looking this thing over, and I believe they made overtures to my hon. friend as to the construction of this railway, or, to be correct, perhaps I should say, not as to the construction of this railway, but as to the construction of another railway, namely, the Chilkat Pass Railway, which naturally business men would much prefer to construct rather than the other. The result of their approaching the Government and of the negotiations which took place between us, was, that they were induced to drop their Chilkat enterprise and to take up with the Teslin line.

Mr. WALLACE. Would the hon. member (Mr. Blair) permit me to ask him if the Chilkat Railway is what he called No. 2 line?

The MINISTER OF RAILWAYS AND CANALS. The Chilkat Railway would be No. 2 line. It is a line, I may say, which we could not build under any possible circumstances in less than two years, and which, therefore, would not answer in the present emergency. We knew Messrs. Mackenzie & Mann, and anybody who knows these gentlemen, knows them to be responsible men, to be capable, strong, experienced men, to be men who have carried forward large enterprises of this same description, and who could not be bettered by any men in Canada. I am not going to say they are the only men in Canada who would be capable of carrying this work out, but I am going to say that they were the only two men in Canada that we knew of who were willing and capable of contracting to carry the work out. Therefore, after the negotiations, which covered a number of days after the most careful consideration by the members of the Cabinet, as a whole and individually, after every member of the Cabinet had studied the question, impressed with its great importance and with the immense desirability of making an arrangement that could be defended—after all this, and after my hon. friend the Minister of the Interior (Mr. Sifton), in the most indefatigable manner, had given his continued labour to the bringing about of a proper solution of these negotiations, we came to an understanding with Messrs. Mackenzie & Mann, and the contract has been entered into which is now before you.

Whatever may be said with regard to the features of this contract, we have, at all events, the satisfaction of knowing that the men we have entrusted with its carrying out, are men who are admittedly on all hands competent to do it, and who will do it if it is in the power of con-