

work is not to be commenced until next spring. There is, therefore, no ground for depriving us of our power to deal with this question, and I trust that the contracts have not yet been executed, or, if executed, that they are to be laid upon the Table and made subject to the sanction of the House. There are two distinct grounds on which I claim this right. First, the authority for these contracts was an authority given as part of a general plan and policy, a material portion of which was that the Government were to obtain English assistance for the construction of the railway in British Columbia; and, if that policy has not succeeded, if they have not obtained that assistance, they are bound to give Parliament the opportunity of determining whether they will sanction the execution of these contracts and the commencement of this work, without that assistance. I say that it is an entirely changed state of things, on the assumption which we are entitled to make, in the absence of any announcement in that Speech from the Throne which tells us so many other things, that no favourable consummation of that policy has at this time been reached. We are entitled to assume that the foundation upon which Parliament was asked to permit these contracts to be let, has not been formed by those who asked us to allow them first to build the foundation and afterwards to erect the superstructure. I venture, though doubtfully, to hope that they have not erected the superstructure before they have built the foundation. There is another reason which is equally serious. The hon. gentleman stated that he endorsed the sound principle that, wherever it was possible, these contracts should be submitted to Parliament. He pointed out that the case was exceptional because it was absolutely necessary to take steps to begin the work in British Columbia in the season of 1879. Failing in his expectations, unable to commence the work in the last season, unable to conclude the contracts and execute them, at any rate until within a short time of the Session, it is quite obvious that, having regard to the reason which he gave, and, I have no doubt, honestly gave, to this House, namely, that he expected to begin work during recess, he would have been wanting in his duty if he used the authority which he obtained by virtue of that reason, when the reason had failed.

Having arranged for these contracts so late that the work could not be commenced till spring, and it being thus possible, contrary to his expectations, to submit the contracts for the sanction of this House, the hon. gentleman should—and I shall hope, until he negatives it, that it has been his course, as it was his duty—have completed the execution of the contracts only upon the usual condition that they would be subject to the sanction of this House. What did the hon. gentleman from Lambton (Mr. Mackenzie) do in similar circumstances? In the Session of 1874, upon the same statement, made in the same way, he obtained the same special authority to let the contract for the Georgian Bay Branch without the sanction of Parliament, but, as the hon. gentleman was not able to let it until the approach of the Session of Parliament, having found that the purpose for which he had asked the special authority had failed, having found that it was possible for him, without grave public inconvenience, to give the House an opportunity of pronouncing upon the contract, he did not avail himself of the authority, which he had so obtained, but held it to be his duty to make these contracts subject to ratification, and to lay them upon the Table for the free action of the House during the second Session of that Parliament. Therefore, we have the hon. member's own statement as to the rule; we have his own statement as to the reason of the exception; we have the fact that the reason has failed; we have the precedent of the Georgian Bay Branch contract; and for this second reason I hope that these contracts have been or will be made subject to our action, and, if, as the Speech indicates, that is not the present intention of the Government, I hope that, after considering what I have said, they will modify their views and alter their course. For my own part, I believe that, assuming what I have assumed already in respect to the English mission and its results, and even on the contrary assumption, no graver material question is now presented to the consideration of the Parliament of Canada than the question of what, in the present circumstances of this country, and its future outlook as to its trade, its revenue, and its taxation, should be its policy as to the construction of the Pacific Railway. And, that being