

Mr. FOSTER. I hope my hon. friend will not think I am interrupting him, for this matter is, by his own admission, one of very great moment. As those four routes were thrown aside by the Government because of that consideration, has the Government taken the precaution of getting an authoritative statement from the law officer of the Crown on that point?

The MINISTER OF RAILWAYS AND CANALS. I have not, Mr. Speaker, obtained any opinion from the law officer of the Crown on that subject.

Mr. FOSTER. Or has my hon. friend, or any member of the Government, got from the United States Government their contention and claim as to what would be their rights under such circumstances?

The MINISTER OF RAILWAYS AND CANALS. I cannot inform the hon. gentleman what information any other member of the Government may have received upon this subject. I am stating the case as it appears from my own knowledge and my own information with regard to it.

The situation, then, is this: vessels laden with freight for Telegraph Creek and the Yukon country may come to Fort Wrangell and many unship. If for the time being it may be necessary to go through some formality with the United States customs authorities, the difficulty would be very slight and far less onerous than elsewhere, the expense would be exceedingly trifling and the other conditions would be very much more favourable than could possibly exist if they had to travel over a long stretch of foreign country, involving the attendance and payment of the United States officers, as we have been doing for some months past in connection with other routes. The Stikine route was decided on by the Government largely because it afforded the nearest approach to an all-Canadian route that was possible under the circumstances; and it becomes possible, or will become possible, if in the future there should be found to be any difficulty whatever in the way of the use of the Stikine River or the approach to it, as suggested by hon. gentlemen opposite—for the Government to have a railway connected with the railway known as the Stikine and Teslin Lake line, extending from Telegraph Creek south, and there brought to an ocean point which is purely and exclusively in Canadian territory, and thus guarantee us for all time against any possible contingency as regards our Canadian line.

Mr. CHARLTON. What would be the additional mileage?

The MINISTER OF RAILWAYS AND CANALS. It would add about 200 miles to the Teslin line, and this is the scheme which the Government has been promoting,

and it is mentioned in the contract which I am now submitting to the House.

We have, as I have said, concluded that the railway must be built; we have concluded that it must be built this season; we have concluded that the proper site for the railway under all the circumstances is from Telegraph Creek or from Stikine River to Teslin Lake. With those preliminary conclusions arrived at, I will now direct the attention of the House to the contract itself. The Government knew, or at all events we thought we knew, what was wanted in this direction. Then came the question as to how we could get what we wanted, and upon what terms could we get what we wanted. Some people have said: You ought to have advertised for tenders and asked contractors for what price they would build it. We had not time; it would not be possible to do so under any circumstances. It was not possible within the short time of ten days or a fortnight, which was about the limit of time we had available, to issue advertisements and receive tenders; it would take about that length of time to get out the advertisements alone, much less to receive offers and consider them as many people offer, ignorant of the difficulties surrounding the situation and without knowing the character of the undertaking, would have offered to enter into a contract. This is not a class of undertaking in which you would advertise for tenders. We have never done so, it was not done by our predecessors, and I presume it will never be done by any Government. The reports and information which those officers to whom I have referred furnished us, were to the effect that a railway by the Teslin Lake route could be built and got into running order by the 1st of September next, if we acted with promptness and expedition. If hon. gentlemen agree in the conclusions at which I arrived, that it was our duty to act, to build this line, that the proper route under the circumstances has been selected, and that railway communication is indispensable in view of the conditions existing or likely to exist in that country, the further conclusion is irresistible that we should act at once, without a moment's delay. If the people of the country realized as strongly as we do the imperative duty resting on the Government, they would think that we were making a laughing stock of ourselves by inviting tenders for this contract. That is the view I take in respect to this measure, and that is the view of the Government in deciding to grapple with the situation at once, and trust to the good sense of Parliament and the country to say that we could take no other than the course we adopted. Some hon. members also say that it was our duty to invite tenders on the basis of a grant of a smaller quantity of land. How could we estimate the value of