

Mr. MONK. I base that allegation on the fact that the government failed in its supervision.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. What evidence has the hon. gentleman on which to make that statement? The fact is that immediately after this fatal accident took place, the first thing we did was to appoint a commission to investigate this very fact.

Mr. MONK. After.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. Of course after; how could it be before? The responsibility for this accident rests somewhere. It may rest upon the government, and we will see that in due time. It may rest upon the plans, as being faulty and defective; it may rest upon the supervision. But the responsibility rests somewhere, and at the present time a commission of competent engineers, competent men whose efficiency has not been questioned, is engaged in finding out where the responsibility rests.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN. Would the right hon. gentleman inform the House just what supervision there was on the part of the government?

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. I believe there was ample supervision. The hon. gentleman wants to make a point that the government had no engineer there. I do not know, I cannot say.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN. I do not know whether there was one or not.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. I can say that Mr. Hoare was the engineer appointed by the Quebec Bridge Company. The Phoenix Bridge Company had one or two engineers on the spot also, whose business it was to supervise from day to day the work of construction. I do not know what more supervision could be had even if there had been no engineer there on the part of the government. The Phoenix Bridge Company, with two or three engineers on the spot, had every interest to see that the work was properly done, and so far as I know, the work of construction was very well done by the company; that is so far as the material was concerned. Then the engineer of the Quebec Bridge Company, Mr. Hoare, was a competent man. All these engineers were there from day to day to see that the work was properly done. The hon. gentleman said he was not sure whether the plans had been approved. Why, Sir, neither any member of this government, nor the hon. gentleman himself, had he been a member of the government, could pass any opinion upon a plan when presented to him. What can you do in a matter of this kind? The hon. gentleman stated very properly that an ordinary engineer, a railway engineer, would hardly be able to pass upon plans prepared for a bridge of such magnitude. This was a special work. Well, we do know that

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every one of these plans had been approved by Mr. Cooper, who, as the hon. gentleman said himself, is a man of recognized ability and an authority upon bridge construction. It will be shown later on, that the plans prepared by the engineer of the Phoenix Bridge Company had been submitted to Mr. Cooper and approved by him. Now it will be shown whether or not the engineers made a mistake.

Mr. HAGGART. Were the plans drawn up by Mr. Cooper?

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. My information is that they were not drawn up by Mr. Cooper, but by Mr. Szlapka, and were afterwards submitted to Mr. Cooper and confirmed by him. That is the information I have, but, of course, as to that I speak by hearsay; I do not know, but we will know presently when we receive the report of the commission. That is all I have to say on this occasion as to these matters. It seems to me that nothing could be more unfair, nothing could be more unjust—

Mr. MONK. May I ask my right hon. friend if Mr. Cooper was acting for the government or for the bridge company?

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. Mr. Cooper, as I understand it, was acting for all parties. He had been the recognized authority, and he was certainly acting for the Phoenix Bridge Company and also for the Quebec Bridge Company. That is all the information I have on this subject at the present moment. The hon. member for Hamilton (Mr. Barker), a moment ago, taunted me because I did not answer a certain question at the moment when it was asked of me by my hon. friend the leader of the opposition (Mr. R. L. Borden). Does he expect me to carry in my mind all the orders in council that I have ever signed? It is simply absurd, and I repeat what I said a moment ago, that nothing could be more unfair or unjust than the attempt which has been made to cast a slur upon the government when the hon. gentleman or no one else knows anything in particular about this case.

Hon. JOHN HAGGART (South Lanark). Mr. Speaker, a new doctrine has been laid down in this House by the Hon. the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding) and by the right hon. Prime Minister (Sir Wilfrid Laurier), who have just spoken, and that is that an item which is mentioned in the King's speech, and in which attention is drawn to some particular subject, is not a fitting question for discussion because a royal commission has been appointed to inquire into it. That certainly is a new doctrine. The King's speech draws attention to the catastrophe that happened in Quebec, to the fall of this bridge and to the loss of life that resulted. We are within our strict rights in discussing