

out is that I take it for granted that all fences are not of equal value. Because Mr. Smith asks \$500 for a fence and Mr. Brown \$200, it does not necessarily follow that they are offering the same article. The essence of this question is that there is no deal and no fence; there is no contract and no offence.

Mr. SAM. HUGHES. And no defence.

Mr. FIELDING. There is no need of a defence because there is nothing to defend. It is pointed out in the correspondence which the Prime Minister has read that the Department of the Interior had for some time under consideration the question of erecting a fence at the boundary, or in the vicinity of the boundary, between the United States and Canada.

Mr. LAKE. Might I ask the Minister of Finance to tell us the height of the fence, the number of posts, &c.

Mr. FIELDING. I am afraid that my knowledge of fences would not enable me to supply that information.

Mr. LAKE. What was stated in the contract?

Mr. FIELDING. There is no contract, and therefore I cannot give the information.

Mr. LAKE. In the tenders I mean?

Mr. FIELDING. I do not know if the tenders were given in letters which my right hon. friend read. If they were, they will be found in 'Hansard.' I am not arguing that the price of the fence is a fair one. I do not offer any opinion on that except to suggest that the prices of different fences might properly vary. But the principal point and after all the essence of the whole thing was this: that there was under consideration in the department a project for erecting a fence along the boundary line or a portion of it. The Minister of the Interior appears to have attached so much importance to it that he submitted an estimate to this House in order that he might obtain an appropriation. In the meantime the minister had been making inquiries as to the cost of these fences and as to the terms upon which he might obtain them, and the record shows that he invited a tender, according to the documents which the Prime Minister has read, from a concern. Whether or not he should have invited tenders from others is a fair question of debate, and if a contract had been made then undoubtedly that would have been a proper subject of discussion. But the deputy minister points out that after the resignation of the Minister of the Interior he had to deal with this matter, that he was collecting the papers together in order that he might submit them to the successor of the Minister of the Interior, knowing that the new minister would be obliged to submit them to Council.

Mr. SPROULE. Might I ask then who submitted the papers to the Department of Justice to draw up the contract?

Mr. FIELDING. The information furnished by the department is that one of the officers of the Department of the Interior sent these papers over to the Department of Justice and asked that they might be advised as to a form of contract.

Mr. LALOR. Let me ask why it was that the Page Wire Fence Company were notified that the contract had already been given?

Mr. FIELDING. It is evidently a mistake. The Prime Minister has read the letter of the deputy minister who states distinctly that that was a mistake. How that mistake could arise has been explained, namely, that the secretary of the department, being aware that a draft of contract had been sent over to the Department of Justice, had assumed, erroneously, that the matter was settled, and he so informed the Page Wire Fence people.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN. Has the right hon. gentleman any explanation as to why that incorrect answer given to the company and to his honour the Speaker as well, was not corrected during the interval between the early part of March and the present time?

Mr. FIELDING. No, it may be that the secretary himself did not become aware of that. I cannot answer that question. There seems to be a misunderstanding between the deputy minister, who perhaps should have known of these matters, and the secretary who wrote that letter. But whatever the cause of it was, there is the fact that the contract was not awarded, no contract has been signed, not a penny of the public money has been pledged, nothing has been done beyond collecting the information which the deputy minister says he desired to place before the new minister, so that it might be dealt with in the usual way. Meanwhile the Department of Justice, in considering the draft of the contract submitted to them, reported that the matter properly belonged to the Department of Public Works. There the whole matter ends. Nothing further was done, no steps were taken, no contract was awarded, nobody has the fence, nobody has the deal, there is absolutely nothing whatever beyond collecting the information to be dealt with at the proper time through the incoming minister.

Mr. DAVID HENDERSON. Possibly I owe an apology to the House for a statement which I made yesterday. Speaking from recollection, I stated that I did not believe that an estimate had ever been passed by this House to provide for the expense of this fence, and therefore I thought it was not a proper transaction for the government to enter into, not having received the sanction of parliament for the expendi-