

discussion. The motion before us is very broad, and is just such a one as, I think, ought to be adopted by the Conference, because it leaves the question of route entirely open; and none of us can say, at the present time, where such a cable should go. At the same time, there are circumstances which ought to be taken into consideration; and these I shall briefly touch upon, as the mover of the motion has indicated what route should, in his opinion, be adopted. The colonies of Queensland and New South Wales, who have, as you were informed at the last Conference held at Hobart, entered into a guarantee with a company for the laying of a cable between New Caledonia and Queensland, have been found fault with by the Press for their action. They have been accused of being selfish, of taking into their own hands matters which ought to have been considered by all the colonies conjointly, of binding themselves hard and fast to a foreign company, and of I do not know what other sins and crimes in connection with the matter. So far from receiving any blame from the other colonies, I think they ought to pass a vote of thanks to Queensland and New South Wales for having entered into negotiations which will open up traffic between New Caledonia and Australia, and for having done it at their own expense. The proposal that was made to us involved the comparatively small guarantee of £2,000 per annum from each colony, the Government of France contributing £8,000 per annum towards the service. If we had not accomplished anything more than the opening up of means of communication between New Caledonia and Australia, that in itself would be worthy of recognition. All sorts of erroneous and misleading statements have been made in reference to the future cable extension through New Caledonia. I may say at once, without hesitation, that we have entered into no agreement which at all binds us to extend the cable through that particular company, beyond New Caledonia. We have certainly accepted the offer which was made to construct this cable, which was to form the first link of the cable to Vancouver; and the company bound themselves, if we adopted this, to proceed further with the matter, section by section, but we have not bound ourselves to contribute anything towards the rest. We have simply said that we would contribute to the first section, and whenever the company was ready to make further proposals we said that they would be entertained in a proper manner, not only by ourselves, but by the whole of the colonies and by the other countries that are interested. We told them, "If you can manage to get up the guarantee you require, we shall be very pleased to contribute our share, provided your proposals are reasonable." Then, again, we have been charged with granting the exclusive right of landing a cable in our territory to a foreign company. Nothing could be more void of truth than such a statement. We have certainly made an agreement with this company, allowing them to land a cable on Queensland shores, but we are not precluded from allowing fifty other companies a similar privilege. We are at liberty in that as in every other direction, and we shall be very pleased to join in any proposal that will give us a cable entirely independent of the present company. That is the object we have had in view for the last eighteen years or more, and provided the terms are fairly reasonable we are ready and willing to make a sacrifice in order to get what we consider is an absolute requirement for the Australian colonies. A lot of extravagant remarks have been made about this "foreign" business—about the cable passing through "foreign" territory, and all that sort of thing. Where has our cable business been done hitherto? Has it gone exclusively through British territory? Why, from 1860 to 1875 the whole of the business was done through Java. Then the cable was laid from Port Darwin to Singapore, and our business has since been done along that line. But is the line even now all in British territory? Does it not pass through Egypt and through Persia; and when the line is interrupted do not our cablegrams go through Russia? Are not these all foreign countries? I may be allowed to quote what I said at Hobart last year. On page 97 of the report, when speaking of the proposal to lay a Pacific cable, and referring to the line to New Caledonia, which we had then in view, and which we have still in view, I said: "But whatever route was adopted, the cable would have to pass through some countries where the British Government was not supreme. The route proposed for the Pacific cable would pass first through New Caledonia, which was a French possession; then Fiji, a British possession; then Samoa, which was under the joint protectorate of Great Britain, America, and Germany; then to Honolulu, which was under the joint protectorate of Great Britain, France, and America; and then the Fanning Islands, which were British." That is the only route which can possibly be adopted if you want a Pacific cable. You must go through foreign territory. And where is the harm in going through foreign territory? We have a treaty which protects us. I also referred to this at Hobart when replying to the alleged danger of having our cable communication interrupted in the event of war. I am reported as follows: "He did not think they need trouble themselves much about that question, because, first of all, they had seen how territories frequently changed hands, and as far back as 1884 they would find a treaty of nations by which they bound themselves that all cables in time of war should be considered as neutral." In passing, I may say that during the last week or so I noticed in one of the cables from England that in the House of Commons the British Government were asked if they would make some arrangements for obtaining possession of New Caledonia, and there is a possibility in the air that New Caledonia may some day be got in exchange for some British possession, just as Heligoland was recently parted with, and as other places have been parted with. There is nothing to lead us to believe that New Caledonia is for ever to remain a French possession. The international treaty I referred to is still in existence, and no matter where the cable goes that treaty will protect it. The present proposal is to start from Queensland for some place in New Zealand; but let me point out this to you: I look upon the section to New Caledonia as an accomplished fact, because I am assured that it will be laid by the 1st of August. The distance from New Caledonia to Fiji is 695 miles, while the distance from New Zealand to Fiji is 1,240 miles. Now, there is no company in the world who will construct over 545 miles of cable at an average cost of at least £300 a mile, if they have nothing to gain by it. In addition to this, the Hon. Mr. Ward now proposes that a cable should be laid from New Zealand to Queensland, which is 1,400 miles more, making in all 1,945 miles additional cable to be laid if we discard the section to New Caledonia. It is utterly unlikely that 1,945 miles of cable, at a cost of £300 a mile, will be laid when it is not at all necessary. The arrangement between New South Wales and Queensland and the company is a *bonâ fide* one, and I am in a position to say that by the 1st August the section will be completed to New Caledonia, so that that distance will not have to be laid again. Of course, if it is desired to lay a cable between Queensland and New Zealand, that is another matter; but no company is likely to be willing to proceed to Fiji by a route which would entail the laying