

price for the duplicate cable; the other matter was the guarantee to the Company against the Company's receipts falling lower than £237,000 in the first place, and £227,000 in the second. Both the guarantee and subsidy would run out in October of next year; so that in October, 1899, all parties would be at perfect liberty. If the Company liked it could, of course, take up its cable and carry it away, but he had no doubt the people and the Company would be quite able to make satisfactory arrangements without the governments interfering. Still, there was this peculiar feature, that this was the only cable communication between Australia and Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, and without going the extreme length he had indicated, there was no doubt the Company might raise their prices to such a prohibitive figure as to practically shut the colonies off from the outside world. That was not a position in which the people of Australia should be placed, or allowed to remain in for any length of time, and the Company ought to be bound down on some terms that they should not charge those dealing with them more than a reasonable business rate. Failing this the colonies ought to be prepared to encourage competition, or, better still, to undertake rival lines themselves. That was the position that struck them all some time ago. A patriotic sentiment arose in Canada, and a strong desire to be linked with the Imperial Government and Australia. The Canadians came forward and offered to bear one-third of the cost of constructing a totally new line of cable across the Pacific, if Great Britain—who, by the way, he would say, had never behaved fairly to the Australian colonies in cable matters—would also pay one-third. That project was entertained very fairly, and at one time it seemed as though the line would be immediately constructed. But, for some reason or other, a blight had come over it, and they did not now hear of it. To his mind, if the Imperial Government would come forward and act more justly towards Australia than hitherto, and Canada would come forward and contribute her quota, as she had already intimated her willingness to do, we in Australia ought to be very glad to contribute our quota and have an all-British line, along which all those cabling would get messages at reasonable rates. (Hear, hear.) There was no object to serve but to secure for the public the cheapest and best service they possibly could. He would now say that he favoured a Canadian-Pacific scheme. What they wanted to get in Australasia was cheaper communication with the old country, and if possible an all-British one; but at any rate they did not want to give a monopoly to any company, however wealthy and effective that company might be. They required freetrade in telegraphy as well as in other matters, and as the Governments, both in Great Britain and in the Australian Colonies, had taken over the land lines, they should also have the oversea services as well. For these reasons he hoped the all-British Pacific cable scheme would come into great prominence. A new scheme had just dawned upon them, which they had never thought of before. The Eastern Extension Company, who already had a monopoly of the cable business of Australasia, agreed with the Imperial Government to a line by way of St. Helena, Ascension Island, the Cape and Mauritius, and so on to India, and then they thought it would be a grand opportunity of having an all-British line to Australia by extending an arm of the cable from the Mauritius to Australia. The idea seemed to have struck the people as an eminently Australasian matter, whereas, as a fact, Australia was not interested in the line at all until it got to the Mauritius. Only from there to Australia would it give these Colonies an alternative route. And an unfortunate feature of the route was, that it would involve the taking up of the cable already existing to Roebuck Bay—there being three lines—one to Roebuck Bay and two to Port Darwin. If Australia joined in a cable from Perth to the Cape, then, under such circumstances, there would only be three lines, as at present. He saw the advantage of the project from strategic, imperial, and commercial points of view; but, unfortunately, the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company, in endeavouring to secure that route, were securing a further monopoly and preventing the Pacific cable from being made. Such terms were not calculated to benefit the people of these Colonies from a commercial point of view, for they wanted a reduction of the present charges. Australia's subsidy ran out next year, and the company was naturally anxious to continue to receive a comfortable sum annually; but if Australia was to continue to fund £32,000 a year, even if they got the new route *via* the Cape provided, the game would not be worth the candle unless the charges were reduced. (Hear, hear.) That opinion had already been voiced at the recent meeting of the Premiers in Melbourne, and he could not, therefore, see how this Conference could arrive at a different conclusion. It would be preferable to break the monopoly by having the all-British Pacific cable, *via* Canada, and the Company should not have the monopoly and the power to prevent it. If the Company would agree to a more reasonable business rate, he would then be prepared to consider a fresh agreement with considerable favour. (Hear, hear.)

Hon. J. R. DICKSON regarded it as a matter for very great regret that the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company had not placed the Conference in possession of fuller information, or submitted such proposals as would have enabled the Conference to deal with the matter before they separated. He would say at once that, as far as Queensland was concerned, the Pacific cable route was that which was of primary consideration to her; but at the same time he would have been glad to consider any reasonable proposal the E. E. Company might have been prepared to make in regard to the duplication of their line. Had their proposals been of such a character as would mean giving the public cheaper cable rates, he would have been prepared to recommend his Government to consider the same favourably. Though Queensland dissented over the subsidy, she had come in over the guarantee.

Hon. J. GAVAN DUFFY: When there was nothing to pay.

Hon. JOSEPH COOK: Absolutely nothing. (Hear, hear.)