

Mail Contracts

Mr. Bradshaw: Yet in other cases they are receiving \$400 on \$600 contracts.

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): No contractor ever lost his contract because he asked for a supplement. He might have been refused, or we might have offered him less than he asked; but no one has lost his contract because he has asked for a supplement.

Mr. Miller: That is one of the bones of contention, namely that no indication was given to these contractors that they could make application and have their claims for bonus considered. That complaint has been made every year this has been considered. I still think it is poor business for the department to close this off as of March 31, 1949, after which no applications for bonus can be considered.

In my view the department would be well advised to send notices to all couriers who have contracts and who might be entitled to make application for bonuses, and the deadline should be extended beyond March 31, 1949. This would give every man a fair chance, instead of his having to learn about his entitlement through the grapevine method. They would be notified by the department, and each man would have an opportunity to have his contract reviewed.

A moment ago the minister said that no one had ever lost his contract by applying for the bonus. That may be so. But at least on several occasions when applications have been made to the minister's department for bonuses, notices have been sent out telling the couriers in question that if they did not like it they could surrender their contracts, and that the department would advertise for tenders. I maintain that is practically tantamount to telling them that they can either take what they get or throw up their jobs.

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): No.

Mr. Miller: As I said, the fair procedure would be to canvass all the contractors.

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): I should like to know of one single case where such notice has been sent out.

Mr. Miller: I will give you two, and bring the letters to you.

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): I want to see them.

Mr. Miller: They are from Portage la Prairie.

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): I would like to see them.

Mr. Miller: And I will bring them, because I have them. Will the minister consider extending the deadline and sending out

[Mr. Bertrand (Laurier).]

notices to these couriers so that all contracts may be reviewed by his department?

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): This is the first time such a proposal has been made. I believe we have been criticized for giving too much money to the people.

Mr. Hackett: Not too much—just to too few.

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): Well, I am talking with some of the lawyers who know very well the law of tender. I believe it is the same in all the provinces. After all, these are still tenders, although because of special circumstances they have been modified in the last two years.

The tendency today is to go back to normal conditions. The hon. member must know what would happen if on March 31 we were to say, "We cannot renew these contracts with the bonuses you had last year"—and which in fairness they should have this year. Otherwise we would have to ask for tenders in eight or nine thousand cases.

I cannot send notices to six or seven thousand contractors who are satisfied, asking them if they want to make application for the supplement. Surely that would not be businesslike procedure.

Mr. Shaw: Within the coming year a number of contracts will terminate, in the sense that the period of the contract will have expired. I said when I spoke earlier that it is unfair to a mail carrier who has carried the mail for many years to permit him to lose his contract by virtue of someone having underbid him by an amount as small as \$5. I was told of one individual who had carried the mail for twenty-nine years, even in those early days when he had to use a boat to cross the river. Yet he was underbid by \$5 and lost the contract. I am not saying that was the only reason; but I would stress the fact that if there were other reasons—and I think there were—one such reason certainly was not inefficiency. If we were doing our duty we would call for information with respect to every contract terminating in the coming year, where bonuses are paid. I do not want it to be thought for one moment that because we are approving the principle of this bill we are approving every bonus that has been authorized by the government. When the estimates are before us I am sure that we will have an opportunity of going into the tenders that have been let. We do not desire to delay the consideration of this measure, but let me emphasize that by supporting it we are not giving blanket approval to all the supplements that have been paid or that are going to be paid in connection with contracts renewed during the forthcoming year. We realize that there are many contracts which