

Mail Contracts

Those facts, unfortunately, have aroused a great deal more feeling with respect to the awarding of this contract than otherwise would have been the case. The successful tenderer is not a veteran. The Williams Lake legion feels that the interests of veterans have been prejudiced. It is all very well to say that the contract must be awarded to the lowest tenderer, but in this respect I would point out two features to the Postmaster General. The first is that the previous holder of the contract was a veteran who had placed himself in a position to fulfil the contract by purchasing equipment by means of loans. He knew the conditions, knew what it would cost to perform a twice weekly service. The second point is that those in the area, members of the legion and other responsible citizens, tell me that the bid of the successful tenderer was for an amount considerably less than that for which he can actually perform the service. So not only does the veteran who formerly held the contract now find himself out of that work and with an unpaid loan on his hands, but it is very doubtful whether the present tenderer can perform the contract at the rate specified.

That raises the question whether he is to be allowed to apply for a bonus. I have no hesitation in saying that it would be quite improper to award a bonus in that case, when the contract has been given the present tenderer at a rate lower than the previous contract. I suggest that the Postmaster General should look into this case, because there are surrounding it features which to say the least are questionable. There is the leakage of information—

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): What is the name of the contract?

Mr. Fulton: It is the Williams Lake-Horsefly mail route. I conclude by saying that the case should be reviewed and the opinion of those on the spot should be sought as to whether in fact the present contractor, the lowest tenderer, can carry out the contract at the amount of his bid. I believe the whole matter should be reviewed and possibly a chance given to re-submit tenders; and that the award should be made having in mind all the facts of the case and the cost of carrying out that contract. I hope the Postmaster General will look into this before anything is done.

Mr. Wright: I want to bring just one other point to the attention of the minister. I believe the discussion has shown the great diversity of conditions throughout Canada as far as rural mail routes are concerned. In our area our position is the opposite to that of the hon. member for New Westminster. Ours are long routes with few people on them, and we find that from most post offices only

one rural route is being operated, and that on the basis of two deliveries a week. The man who has the contract must keep a car for summer deliveries and a team of horses for the winter. He can only use his car and his team twice a week, which means that his costs are very high. If on the other hand there were two or three routes operating from each of these post offices he could bid on two or three contracts; he would be able to perform them at a lower cost, and still make a reasonable living. I wish the minister would take that point into consideration, because in the area from which I come some of the routes are being closed simply because the men who have the contracts are not getting enough to cover their expenses. If such a contractor had two routes, which would give him four days' work a week, the routes could be maintained, and in my opinion that is the only way we are going to be able to continue these routes in some parts of Saskatchewan.

Mr. Miller: A few moments ago the Postmaster General said that bonus applications would be received up to March 31 of this year. My recollection of these things from year to year is that there has been a deadline every year these matters have been before the house. What I want to know, Mr. Chairman, is this. How long, during the calendar year of 1948 and the calendar year of 1949, has it been open to contractors to apply for this bonus or payment supplementary to his contract?

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): It was permissible for the contractor to apply each year in which it was permissible to give the supplement. Last year permission to grant the supplement was renewed on June 30. In the previous year, by paragraph 3 of subsection 4, no supplementary payment could be authorized under the act later than sixty days after the commencement of the next session of parliament following the coming into force of that act. That was in 1947. In 1948 the power to grant supplementary payments was renewed until the 31st of March of this year. While the law was in force any contractor had the right to submit his request for supplementary payment.

Mr. Miller: Might I call the attention of the Postmaster General to the contractors in my own constituency of Portage la Prairie. Last year I sat here and heard speaker after speaker commend to the Postmaster General the couriers in his constituency, as being entitled to increases by reason of the snow. In no part of the country are there couriers who have more difficulties in winter than the couriers in the prairie provinces. I have no recollection, Mr. Chairman, of any occasion on which any of them have applied from my