

Supply—Public Works

was really supplied for this job or a different job. I know the suggestion was made by my hon. friends with the best of intentions, but the job would be overwhelming for my department with the staff I have.

Mr. Green: It is quite clear from the minister's answer that his department accepts no responsibility for seeing that these payments which are made to the general contractor are used to pay off the subcontractors.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): I did not say that. Suppose we had received claims from people before the man went out of business or stopped work. The officials of the department would have taken notice of that, but not of a claim made two months or three months after the man is out of business. People come along and say, "He owes me money". This poor man says he does not owe him. Am I going to be the judge? No, not now.

Mr. Green: I will tell the minister what his department could do and what they should do in all fairness to everyone concerned. Let him have his inspectors require the general contractor to produce a receipt for payment in connection with the materials. Then when that receipt has been obtained, let the department pay the general contractor. If that is done no one will have any further complaints. This is particularly necessary in the case of a government contract, because the people who supply the materials and earn the wages are not entitled to a mechanic's lien which is their great protection in the case of a contract by a private firm. In the second place, it is particularly important with a government contract because a person, in supplying materials to a man who has a contract with the government, would naturally believe that everything would be done in a businesslike way. I suggest to the minister that he instruct his departmental officials that from now on they make payment only after receipts have been produced for the materials supplied.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): Mr. Chairman, I am ready to take the suggestion made by the hon. member and study it. If I had a copy of the contracts we sign with these contractors—I have not a copy here—or of the form of our contract covering nearly 60 different sections—I would show it to the hon. gentleman and say, "Here is what the law provides for, not only the general law but the law between the parties, and we follow that law to the letter." I think I am fulfilling my responsibility and duty when I follow up the contract we have signed, that has been approved and that has been maintained by all the courts of the land for years.

[Mr. Fournier (Hull).]

I sympathize with the poor man who sold some material and was not paid for it. But I cannot sympathize with him much more than I would with the storekeeper who sells to another contractor on a private contract and loses. I would not have time to do my work if I were sympathizing with everybody who loses money in the contracting business. When you look up the list of bankruptcies in the country you see that a good many of them are contractors. Although they think they are going to make money when they sign a contract, they lose money. I am ready to continue this discussion on my estimates, on the first item and in the general discussion; but I do not think at this stage I would change my mind as to our contracts. I may suggest to my officials if they have the staff to run around—

Mr. Diefenbaker: You have staff enough.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): What does the hon. member know about it? How many have we of staff? Has he any idea?

Mr. Diefenbaker: In Regina there is staff enough so that if they had been efficient, they could have protected people.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): How many architects, draftsmen and superintendents are there? How many have we? The hon. gentleman is a good lawyer. Why should he assert things like that? I told him to read the blue book before.

Mr. Diefenbaker: You are the minister.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): Certainly; and I know far more about it than does the hon. member.

Mr. Green: We would hope so.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): If the hon. member wants to go into these details, let him prepare his case better, because I think I would need more staff to do the work hon. gentlemen opposite are asking to have done. I may ask treasury board for more staff, and then I will ask for an increase in my estimates to pay that staff and the estimates of the country will be increased; and if I pay these amounts to the people who sold these materials, I am going to ask for more money in our supplementary estimates and we will bring up our estimates to a higher figure.

Mr. Fulton: May I ask the minister a question?

Mr. Fournier (Hull): Certainly.

Mr. Fulton: Will the minister explain why it would require an increase in his staff if he required the contractor to produce a receipt? It seems to me that the suggestion which has been made does not impose any greater duty or burden on the minister's staff. It merely