

*Supply—Public Works*

do? I can show you files of letters from members in all parts of the house and people throughout the country. They know about construction work. Everybody has put up something at some time and they can tell me how it should be done. I have been at it for ten years; I do not know if I am a little dense or did not learn enough, but I get advice from all over the place and I become bewildered with some of the advice I receive, sometimes even from members of parliament.

**Mr. Higgins:** That is the grandest piece of shadow-boxing I ever saw. All the minister has to tell me is that he will not answer and I shall sit down.

**Mr. Fournier (Hull):** I will answer you anything you wish but do not make me answer something I do not know about. If you ask me why Mr. So and So said such a thing then I would not be prepared to answer because you would be putting me in the position of interpreting what he had said and giving my judgment on it.

**Mr. Higgins:** Let me put it to the minister once again so I will not be misunderstood. Premier Smallwood made the statement that any request that came from me for works to be done in my district would not be granted unless the Secretary of State agreed.

**Mr. Fournier (Hull):** I have put it clearly once. When you make a request to public works my engineer or my architect down there is the first man consulted. He investigates and looks over the situation and makes a report to my deputy and myself. We study it with the staff at headquarters. We make our decision one way or the other. If I need money to do the job I have to submit the matter to my colleagues. I cannot get a vote put in the estimates without the matter going before treasury board and the cabinet. If that is what is meant by saying that I am under the thumb of Mr. So and So in these things, well, I suppose I need cabinet authority to proceed. I do not think I can run the whole show myself, but beyond that I do not follow any other procedure. I can give the hon. member my word about that.

**Mr. Higgins:** Then it is the whole cabinet that decides the matter.

**Mr. Fournier (Hull):** Certainly.

**Mr. Higgins:** I can tell Premier Smallwood he is wrong.

**Mr. Fournier (Hull):** You can tell him what you please, but do not make me tell him.

**Mr. Herridge:** I have a suggestion or two to make to the minister, and I trust he will be patient with me for two or three minutes. Before doing so, I want to say that I know

during my long experience of over forty years that the senior officials of the Department of Public Works have been held in very high respect in my district. I have personal knowledge throughout the years. I had some experience with the construction of wharves and docks before I was a member of parliament. I know the very unusual problems they have to deal with, legal questions and matters involving property, matters between individuals and communities and problems involving materials and labour. I have always found that they have dealt very fairly, and as a result they are held in high respect throughout the district. The people I represent appreciate very much the work being done by the Department of Public Works.

I might also say that the local staff, the foremen and those who do the repairing, are very good men indeed. The captains on the lakes appreciate very much indeed the close co-operation they get from the captain of the dredge with respect to the dredging of narrows, spots which become shallow after every high water and things of that sort.

I want to make one suggestion. In the post-war period a few small tenders have been let for the building of wharves and other structures running from \$15,000 to \$35,000 or \$40,000. I think the department would have been well advised to have the work done by day labour under the supervision of their local staff. I brought this matter to the attention of the department on one or two previous occasions and I was informed that it was not the policy of the department. But I can give the minister one or two illustrations of cases—and it was not the fault of his officials or anyone in his department—where tenders were granted to people without experience and without the necessary capital. In addition they did not have a knowledge of the district and met unusual difficulties and circumstances. As a result one community waited two years to use a wharf after the contract was let because of delays occasioned by a contractor who did not have sufficient capital and experience to proceed with the work properly.

The local foremen and the small skeleton crew you have would also be provided with permanent employment. It is becoming increasingly difficult to get skilled men for this type of work. Twenty or thirty years ago you could get axe men, men used to building wharves, driving piles and things of that sort, but today you cannot. Men accustomed to that type of work are getting scarcer and scarcer. I suggest it would be good policy on the part of the department to build some of these smaller structures, say from \$60,000 down, by day labour and keep their permanent men employed. I am quite sure they would