

Public Works Act

I should like to say very clearly that one of the functions of government is to maintain those principles that have been advocated and carried on in municipal affairs. No one wants to see excessive powers placed in the hands of any department of government, and I am sure the Minister of Public Works will reconsider this bill for that very reason. We realize that it may cause some delay to ask for tenders on some of those contracts, to wait for them, to open them and so forth, but I say, sir, that the spotlight of the people of Canada shines very brightly and searchingly on the government and on parliament. In order to maintain the good will of those people again I say I cannot support this legislation. I trust it will be reconsidered by the minister.

Mr. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon): Mr. Speaker, when this debate began this afternoon I must confess that I was somewhat disarmed by the very genial manner in which the bill was presented, because on my first reading of it I had come to a conclusion on this piece of legislation somewhat similar to that expressed by other members of the opposition today. Of course I must admit that, being comparatively new in the house, I am not familiar with political wiles to the extent that some of the older members of this house might be. However, I soon had my original interpretation of the bill reaffirmed as I listened to the excellent presentation by the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra (Mr. Green) first of all, and those who have succeeded him in the discussion this afternoon.

In view of the very genial atmosphere prevailing in the chamber, at least up until just a few moments ago, I was going to take the risk of deviating from the dominant theme this afternoon and rather go off the track momentarily on behalf of the three prairie provinces, and Manitoba or western Manitoba in particular. But perhaps the tone of peacefulness prevailing thus far is to a certain extent disappearing, so I think I will not take the risk of presenting the case I had in mind.

I should like to speak not from the standpoint of any practical implications, that might arise from the proposed change in the act. As I have said, I come from the prairie provinces. The intent of the bill does not concern us too much because there are so very few contracts awarded in the prairie provinces. Actually we have no ulterior motive and no political intent, so far as this bill is concerned.

In the few remarks I shall make I should like to speak briefly about the principle involved. One of the problems that occupy

the attention of students of political science in these days is that of the difficulty of maintaining parliamentary and representative democracy in a day when our parliament is forced to assume more and more power in order to operate the affairs of state. This has been particularly noticeable since the functions of parliament changed from those basically political to those of an economic nature. This bill concerns itself with the economic functions of parliament. The question with which the learned scholars occupy themselves has to do with exactly the thing represented by this bill. Is the executive assuming, to an increasing extent, more and more of the functions of the legislative part of parliament, the functions of the representatives of the people?

Recently a colleague of mine sent a letter asking me, now that I am actually engaged in the rough and tumble of political activity, whether it was true that such is happening. The theory is abroad that there is a very subtle trend toward this whittling-down process that has been referred to this afternoon. That inquiry was made at the beginning of the session. At that time I had not had enough practical experience to give many examples. But I suggest that during the last few weeks I have discovered many examples without any difficulty. We see one here this afternoon, and there was another in connection with the civil service legislation yesterday afternoon.

I have come to the conclusion that politics is an art, not a science. But I think if this bit of political artistry goes through this afternoon it will have the learned scholars, the learned political scientists, shaking their heads and speculating upon the possible fate, the possible future of our democratic parliamentary institutions.

I heartily support everything that has been said by opposition members this afternoon, and along with the others I suggest that the best recourse at this time would be for the minister to withdraw the bill. In closing I must say that during this session I have appreciated the words of encouragement offered to me, as a new member, by the Minister of Public Works (Mr. Fournier). Along with other members I have come under his gracious and charming influence. When I began my remarks this afternoon I was somewhat disconcerted for the moment, because of the benevolent manner in which this noxious bit of legislation has been presented.

I am sure after everything that has been said this afternoon the only reasonable