

Supply—Public Works

bankrupt. You have a claim against him, so why come to me? I am using the money parliament voted to build this building, and I am going to build it.

Mr. Green: May I ask one other question on this point?

Mr. Hosking: I should like to take part in this debate. I do not think it is right for a lawyer to stand up in this house and criticize the architects and engineers for the part they played in the building of this structure. There has been no word of criticism in regard to the design. There has been no word of criticism in regard to the safety of the construction. Those are the responsibilities of the engineers and architects. For a lawyer to stand up in this house and suggest it is an evil thing, is not proper.

I hope the hon. member takes the position that the government should let the contract to the lowest tender. The minister says that was done.

Then the hon. member made one very startling statement which did not balance up with the rest of his statements. He said the suppliers were placed in the position of dealing with a company without assets. Certainly it is the suppliers' responsibility to see they get paid. I have every sympathy with the local people who supplied the materials, but they are the only persons who are able to keep a check on the person with whom they are dealing. At the first sign of anything wrong they should inform the department that they have not been paid. If this had been done right away the necessary precautions could have been taken to prevent them losing any money.

It is all very well for any member who has not the responsibility of government to stand up and say the government should do all these things because of someone else's mistake, but this government is trying to keep costs down. They cannot do that if people do not accept their own responsibilities. It is not economically sound for any member of the opposition to stand up and say the government should pay this money because the local suppliers, who could check on the contractor with whom they are dealing, were not paid. These local people should know better than anyone else whether or not the contractor is going to pay his bills.

Mr. Green: There is one other question I should like to ask the minister in connection with the practice followed by his department. He has said that the department does not require the general contractor to show receipts before payments are made. Apparently all that is required is an affidavit from the contractor, and on that affidavit payment

is made. I pointed out a few moments ago that I thought that was a poor procedure to follow. It is not the procedure followed in ordinary civilian life by a person having a building constructed. In that case the architect makes the general contractor produce his receipts before it is possible for the contractor to get payment. At any rate that is the practice followed in British Columbia. The architect does not have to rush around to the hardware store to follow up each item. The contractor produces his receipts, and the architect can tell pretty well whether or not the goods that have gone into that building have been duly paid for.

Now, I think the department is wrong in not making the general contractor produce receipts. Let us go on from that point, however, and for the purpose of argument let us say the practice the department is following is correct. I do not think it is, but let us go one step further and say that the practice is correct. When the department does get this affidavit payment is made to the general contractor, who is supposed to pay off the subcontractors. Does the Department of Public Works make any attempt to follow that money in order to see that these subcontractors are paid out of the money which has been put up by the department, or does the Department of Public Works wash its hands of any further responsibility?

Mr. Fournier (Hull): Let me put this question to my hon. friend. I buy an overcoat or anything else, and I pay for it. I get the overcoat. Do I follow up the payment to see if the storekeeper has paid the wholesaler for that overcoat? I put it on and pay for it. In public works when contracts are given, am I going to follow up the contractor in his private business? You cannot ask that of the department, nor of the officials. Bankruptcies occur in normal business, and this is in the normal course of business. If someone has any claim against the contractor, why bring in the government? We got the building and the contractor received the goods and supplies. If I were to follow these suggestions I would turn the department into a collection agency, an accountant's agency and an inspection agency.

This man may have contracts outside of the government, with private enterprise. Are we to follow him in the purchase of all his materials? Really, I want to be fair to the argument of the hon. gentleman, but if you try to put that into practice you will not be asking me to run the Department of Public Works, you will be asking me to run all these branches of a collection agency for every man who sells material. Then I would have to follow it up and see if this material