

Mr. MacNICOL: That is what I understood the minister to say. Of course during the war the minister had to have extraordinary powers. The war had to be prosecuted; we had to win the war. To lose the war would have meant perhaps the loss of our whole country. Naturally the minister did award all sorts of contracts for the construction of factories and so forth for the prosecution of the war. The public supported that. But now we are in peace time. During the last couple of years I for one, and I suppose there were others, have been persuading the government and the minister, because his name was mentioned as Minister of Reconstruction, to have plans and specifications ready to proceed with what should be done. In my fondest hopes for rehabilitation I never expected that any department would itself carry on the work. For instance, I inferred that under this bill, which is said to be a rehash of the war bill, the department could carry on such a work as an irrigation project in the west, engage all the men to do the job and everything connected therewith. Well, I would not support anything like that in peace time. I will support the minister in awarding contracts, after tenders are called, for the works to be done. I will not support the government itself doing the work, engaging employees to do the work, and itself building the various work they may have in mind. I want to lend my support as strongly as I can to the projection of works of every description to give employment. That is the main thing we all have before us. I believe my experience with labour in big projects of every description gives me some foresight in what we are facing.

I wonder if hon. members realize what this country is facing, as far as unemployment is concerned. What about the minister's own city? The acting mayor of Fort William said yesterday that there are 4,950 out of work there. He did say, of course, that many of them came from the west, and that they have no intention of going back. Well, you cannot make people go back when they will not go. He says that they will not go into the woods; and, again, you cannot make them go into the woods if they do not wish to go there.

But people must have work; they must have jobs. I had hoped that the minister would come in with a big programme already prepared with the plans and specifications ready. There was plenty of time to do so; there was plenty of time to prepare plans and specifications for scores of works, to have tenders called on them and to be ready to let the contracts. It is immaterial to me who gets those contracts, so long as they are let. Then

[Mr. Howe.]

let the contractors carry on. But if the government does the work, every job will cost twice as much as it should. I am not in favour of this, if I have rightly interpreted what the minister has said.

Mr. HOWE: I am afraid my hon. friend has not interpreted it correctly. The old Department of Munitions and Supply Act authorized the minister to place contracts for defence projects. Obviously, in preparing a new bill at this stage the word "defence" should not be there. Unless the minister loses all power to call for tenders and accept tenders on any project, that paragraph should be deleted—if it is the desire of the committee. If the minister is to have any power to call for tenders and award contracts for reconstruction projects, the word "defence" should be deleted. That is the only change made in the bill. My hon. friend seems to think the Minister of Reconstruction is going into the contracting business, and handling work with day labour. I can assure him that that is not so, and that no such authority is given to the minister by the proposed change in the wording of the Munitions and Supply Act.

Mr. MacNICOL: I have visited a great many of the factories built during the war. The factory business has been my life.

Mr. HOWE: They were practically all built by contractors.

Mr. MacNICOL: But the minister knows as well as I do, that because of the war those works had to be rushed rapidly—nobody knows that better than the minister, because he was a contractor himself. Each factory—perhaps I should not say "each factory", but in the aggregate they all cost a lot more than they should have cost, because of the speed with which they had to be rushed.

Is it proposed under this bill to carry on civilian works—what I will call civilian works or peace-time works—in the same manner, at three times, twice, or one and a half times what they should cost?

Mr. HOWE: No. Perhaps I can explain it in this way: As Minister of Transport some years ago I had certain powers to award contracts. Contracts were awarded for harbour improvements and for certain types of work carried on by the Department of Transport. This gives me exactly the same powers, but in a different field, if the government should decide that the Department of Reconstruction should award contracts for reconstruction projects. Perhaps the government will not decide to do that. However, I am not setting the policy. I am simply saying that in combining the Department of Munitions and Supply Act