

Mail Contracts

Mr. Hackett: The average supplement is approximately \$550 per contract?

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): Yes, I suppose so.

Mr. Brooks: I wonder if the minister could give us the total number of contracts by provinces and the number of contractors who have received bonuses in each province.

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): I have not that information here. But I could, with pleasure, make it an order for return. I have given to all hon. members a list of the contracts in every district, and I was glad to do so because I wanted to give all possible chance to hon. members—even those in the opposition—to criticize us.

Mr. Brooks: That was given last year?

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): I will make that an order for return and give hon. gentlemen this information. I will table it in the house some day later.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I do not wish to raise any objection to the ruling you made at the time the hon. member for Queens was speaking, Mr. Chairman, but I should like to point out this circumstance. Section 1 of the bill reads:

The supplemental payments authorized under the Mail Contracts Supplemental Payments Act, chapter eight of the statutes of 1947, in respect of a mail contract expiring on or after the first day of April, nineteen hundred and forty-nine, may for the purposes of renewal of the contract under section seventy-seven of the Post Office Act be incorporated with payments required to be made under the contract.

In effect, what your ruling does, Mr. Chairman, is to place us in the position of approving bonuses that have been given and others that have been denied of which we have no knowledge and on which we are not allowed to question the minister.

The hon. member for Queens, I think, raised a proper question, subject to your ruling, Mr. Chairman—

The Deputy Chairman: Oh, no; I could not follow my hon. friend in that statement. All this section does is to embody the bonus in the payments under the contracts. The matter that the hon. member is now referring to would not be relevant to this clause at all.

Some hon. Members: Carried.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I do not want to waste the time of the committee by an appeal. The matter is not important enough to ask you, sir, to bring it to the attention of the Speaker with a view to appealing against your ruling. But before you make a final decision I should like to point out that you are placing us in the position of approving, carte blanche, what the minister and his

department have done irrespective of the merits or demerits of some of the bonuses that have been granted.

The Deputy Chairman: Oh, no. I hope the hon. member is not trying to argue that I am putting them in that position. As a matter of fact, this is the amendment before the committee; and all that is required of the chairman is that he put the amendment before the committee. I am not putting my hon. friend in any position.

Mr. Hackett: At this juncture might I just say that contracts can be legally let only by tender. As a result of this amendment these contracts will be let, some of which were never submitted to tender. Taking the average, if we accept the statement of the minister, as I do, at least thirty per cent represent a supplement or addition which the minister, within the exercise of his own authority, has made to the original contract without any opportunity for competitive bidding. To that extent it escapes from the general rule and philosophy of the act.

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier): I must tell the hon. gentleman that one section of the Post Office Act allows us to renew any contract in existence for not more than four years, without having to ask for tenders. That is a wise provision, because when a poor fellow has had a contract for four years and obtained—

Mr. Hackett: The equipment.

Mr. Bertrand (Laurier):—everything that is necessary, if he gives satisfaction to the Post Office Department there is no reason for asking for tenders and perhaps ruining him to a certain extent. Last year I was authorized to add something, for reasons that everyone knew, namely, that the cost of living was increasing so much. Some of those contractors who had contracts that had been let, let us say, two years before, could never have foreseen the high cost of living. In order to help them, with the consent of the house we passed a law which allowed us to give a supplement. I am giving the total figures with regard to these supplements. The percentage is 30.78. I do not think it is outrageously high and it is certainly not too low. I would gladly answer every question that could be asked about one particular contract or about ten particular contracts; but we have twelve thousand contracts and I cannot remember the names and particulars in connection with every one of them. But I feel that certain questions that are asked are asked in good faith and are justified. I could go out of my way and have printed a list of all these contracts with the supplement that was given in each one. I could do that and table it in the house.

[Mr. Bertrand (Laurier).]