

work done by the department; that is, it is not obligatory on the department to do the work by day labour when the expenditure does not exceed that maximum, but if it is thought in rare cases that it can be done more conveniently or expeditiously by day labour, then the minister may, up to \$5,000, make such arrangements. But it would appear to me that the tendency is to do as much as possible by day labour. I would deprecate such a tendency for I think it is an error in policy, whether it be done by this or any other government. I think the department itself as a matter of continuity of practice should be

9 p.m. kept as closely as possible to the contract system. We have just passed two or three of these votes in the last few minutes indicating a tendency to do the work by day labour. It may be that the minister is spending only a part of this particular vote, but all we have before us is this item of \$7,000 to be spent by day labour. If the minister can make some further explanation which will correct that impression, we will be glad to receive it.

Mr. KING (Kootenay): My explanation will be the same as for the previous item. In the repairing of these structures—and most members have a knowledge of their character—we find that as a matter of practice it is very difficult to prepare specifications unless the structure is in ruins and has to be removed and reconstructed; but where the engineer finds timbers decayed here and there he makes up his mind that for, say, \$7,000 or \$8,000 he can effect the necessary repairs, the work is carried on by day labour. The experience of the department is that it is more economical to do such work under the direction of its officials rather than call for tenders and pay the contractor's profit. A contractor figuring on work of this character will fully protect himself in regard to his price. He will take into consideration every contingency that may occur, and his price will be one that he thinks will pay the cost of reconstruction and give him a profit. Now that is saved under a proper organization, and we have officials in the various districts who are carrying on very properly. It has been the experience of the department that the work can be done more economically in this way.

Mr. STEVENS: I appreciate the minister's explanation, but I do not agree with him, and I will explain why. I am going to discuss the question of policy; I think we might as well have a frank discussion of that matter. Let me just draw the minister's attention to the item. I have not before me, of course, as he has, exactly what is required for this

work, but it is for a breakwater, beach protection, repairs and reconstruction. The breakwater, for instance, may require the bringing into place of scowloads of rock; I presume it would. Now my point is this: Where a job like that is required to be done, tenders should be called for if that portion of the work costs only one or two thousand dollars out of the seven. The work will also require a considerable amount of piling to be driven. You should get a crew there with a piledriver to do that work, but when you have men doing the work by day labour, they are going to drive very few piles. If you give a couple of contractors the chance to tender for the driving of one or two hundred piles—I am merely taking that figure because I have not before me just what is required, but it will apply in a general way—they will drive those piles far more cheaply than will the day crew hired by the department, and my point is that the department is exhibiting a tendency to drift away from the very sound policy of competitive bids.

Another point which I wish to bring to the attention of the minister and the committee is this: Wherever it is thought desirable to do the work by day labour or on the estimate of the department's engineer, I think the engineer ought to bid against the contractor, on his own estimate. That is a course that is followed very often in connection with very large works in municipalities. It is followed in the city of Vancouver. The engineer bids against the contractors, and if he does not come within his own estimate he would be subject to reprimand or possibly dismissal for incompetence. Now it is no protection to the government, it is no protection to the party who pays out the money, whether it is the government or a private individual, merely to say to the engineer: Here is a job; do the best you can with it. There ought to be some check, some safeguard on the expenditure of these funds. I have had some experience on this class of business, and I know from my experience that you can waste more time on this particular class of work than perhaps on any other class of construction and not have it discovered, not be able to bring it home to anyone. Let the engineer of the department, no matter how efficient he may be, but turn his back and the work will slow up. A good deal of it is under water, and the engineer may have a general idea of what is going on, but he is not able to put his finger on the weak spot. So I again point out that, to my mind, at least, we should have a rigid adherence to the policy of asking for tenders for every conceivable piece of work where it