

ledge has any change been made and the officers of the department report to me the same. I may say that I did not know there was politics in it in any respect. I thought the shop was being conducted as nearly as possible on business lines, and that when I took over the department the men in charge were men who were worthy of the confidence of the minister. If there is any information to the contrary I would like very much to have it.

Hon. Mr. TARTE. I do not in any way impugn either the ability or the good will of the officers of the department; very far from it. But I invite my hon. friend to administer the shops at Sorel not from a political standpoint, and I weigh every word I say now because I have passed through the mill. There are reasons which are not desirable to state in the House, why I say what I am saying, and if the minister carefully looks into the matter again with his officers—I know that the officers of the department are not going to say anything else than they say now; they have to be loyal to their department—but I am very much afraid that a change has been made in the way of administering patronage in Sorel. I happen to have a certain number of friends there and I believe I am right in saying what I say now. I have very strong reasons to know that a change has been made in the way of administering that part of the department of Public Works. I do not wish to say any more except this: that shipyard has cost a large amount of money and it is a credit to the government and to the country, and it would be a great pity indeed if that shipyard be destroyed through improper administration of patronage in Sorel. All those who know the state of affairs in Sorel—I am speaking within the hearing of several members of parliament who know what I mean—all those who know the way things may be at times managed at Sorel will agree with me that it would be a great pity indeed. I am very sorry that the dredge is not ready. The port of St. John and other ports badly need that dredge, and for the life of me I cannot understand why it is not ready at the time I know it should have been ready. I have given my personal attention to that work; I have inspected the shipyards over and over again, and well—all I can say is that it is a great pity that such delays should take place when a work of that importance is on hand.

Mr. BARKER. I wish to ask the Minister of Public Works a question, not from a political but from a practical standpoint. If there is anything more than another that the present Minister of Public Works prides himself upon it is that he is a practical man. Here the minister is asking for a vote of \$30,000 to repair twenty dredges. He asks a blanket vote of \$30,000 for general repairs on these twenty dredges. The hon.

Hon. Mr. SUTHERLAND.

gentleman knows perfectly well that no public company, concerned with such a matter as this would give a blanket appropriation of \$30,000 to its management. I do not understand that the practical affairs of this department are to be treated in any different way from that in which business corporations carry on their business. I say that it would be considered an absolute absurdity for the management of any corporation to ask for authority in a blanket form to expend a round sum of money over so many dredges. One dredge may require \$5,000; another \$1,000, and not until two years hence will the parliament of this country know how this \$30,000 has been expended. At the end of that time we may find that what would only require \$1,000 to repair, will have \$5,000 spent on it, while another that requires a very large repair has not had one dollar expended on it, but the latter will come up later for a very large expenditure. I think it is almost useless for the opposition to attempt to criticise the estimates unless we are informed more fully than we have been in the past what the minister proposes, not as to twenty dredges in bulk, but as to each of them. I do not ask him to state in the printed estimates what he is going to do, but he must have from the officers of his department a report as to what each dredge requires, and I think we are entitled to that information.

The MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS. There are twenty dredges and perhaps sixty tugs, barges and scows. The estimate is of course made upon the experience of past years, and we must depend considerably on the ability and honesty of the engineers and other officials. No person can foresee the damage that may occur to plants such as this. It is to be hoped that the money will be expended under proper supervision, and only when it is required. This vote is taken for general repairs which may be urgently required, and we are depending, as any business man must, who has a plant of this kind, on the integrity and ability of the officers in charge. I cannot imagine that it will be of any benefit to any of the officials to expend any of this money on the plant unless it is really required. While I cannot speak personally on the matter, the chief engineer of the department informs me that this is the usual vote. I shall be very pleased, when I have an opportunity, to look into the matter and see if any change can be made to advantage. At present I do not see that anything can be saved.

Hon. Mr. TARTE. Does the minister intend to expend part of this \$30,000 on repairs to the dredges employed on the St. Lawrence channel works?

The MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS. No, it does not apply to the St. Lawrence fleet at all.