

Public Works Act

think the minister should either withdraw this bill or hon. members on all sides of the house should vote against second reading.

Mr. Solon E. Low (Peace River): I hate to have to speak in opposition to my friend the Minister of Public Works. I believe at any rate his intentions are good, but I cannot feel otherwise than that if this house passes this bill it will be derelict in its duties. The tender system was designed originally to protect the taxpayers and their interests. I think the Minister of Public Works knows that; but the amendment to the Public Works Act, as it is presented to us now in Bill No. 26, not only throws the tender system out the window, as was said by the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra (Mr. Green) but—I want to emphasize what someone else interpolated at the time—it also throws the window out with the tender. Consequently if this bill is passed nothing will be left in the Public Works Act to protect the interests of the taxpayers of Canada.

I would not object to a change in paragraph (c) of clause 36 of the old act, raising the amount to say \$10,000, to bring it more in line with modern valuations and costs; but I certainly object to going as far as this bill proposes to go.

I think the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggar (Mr. Coldwell) made a sound proposal. I believe the Minister of Public Works ought to withdraw this bill and not present it in this form again. In the light of the evidence that was brought before the house this afternoon by the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra, it seems to me that we ought to be tightening up the tender system instead of loosening it, as we are doing in this legislation. We oppose it most strongly and we urge the minister to withdraw it. If he does not—well, we are bound to vote against it.

Mr. George A. Drew (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I think there are reasons why this amendment should be re-examined by the minister that perhaps have been covered very well by the speeches that have already been made, but which I think perhaps gain further emphasis in relation to some of the other acts that are before this house. One of the things that perhaps make it difficult for some of the members to illustrate the dangers in such an amendment as this as forcefully as they otherwise might is that the minister who puts forward this bill, by his very geniality, disarms criticism at the outset. In that regard, not being absolutely certain that we might not be called upon to address him in some other capacity at some other time, and that someone else might be occupying that office, we must examine this not from the point of view

[Mr. Coldwell.]

of the individual who administers an act of this kind at the time but from the point of view of a public act which may be administered by anyone at any time, depending on the change of time and circumstance in public affairs.

This represents something more than the minister has put forward. I would say that from the point of view of the presentation of legislation, if the government wanted unsatisfactory legislation put forward, they should always have the Minister of Public Works be the advocate, because in this house you might describe him by the title of a book that I recall, namely "The Pilgrim of a Smile". He smiles his way through the greatest difficulties and differences, which makes it equally difficult for those on the other side to use as vigorous and as severe terms as should be applied to a bill of this nature.

An hon. Member: How true.

Mr. Drew: But I propose to approach this simply on the basis of an examination of the legislation itself. The minister has stated that this is a reaffirmation of a great principle.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Drew: Then he says in effect to the members of this house: we believe in this principle, but we ask you to disregard it and leave the continuity of the principle in the future to the discretion of the members of this government, or of any succeeding governments in the days ahead. I ask hon. members to look at this as something more than an amendment that merely affects those of us who are here today; and I do not mean those who are here this particular Saturday afternoon, but those who are now members of this House of Commons.

The Minister of Public Works has properly stated that throughout the years respect for public administration has largely rested upon the acceptance of this basic principle in awarding government contracts. There have been instances where there have been justified criticisms. There have been cases where that criticism goes to the extent of really bringing into question some of the details of this department and of other departments that have been put forward in this house this afternoon. But I would like to suggest reasons why there should be no suggestion of extending the provisions of this act now. I ask the Minister of Public Works to consider the advisability of withdrawing this legislation at this time, and not simply to move forward with the knowledge that in the ordinary course of events no voice is likely to be raised on the other side of the house no matter what the thoughts of the members on that side of the house may be.