

Public Works Act

Today contracts are not small; they are large. What a seductive piece of legislation this will be for the political friends of the government, who will be able to approach ministers of the crown and show how impracticable it would be to award a contract by tender, with the power granted by parliament to award it without tender. As far as I am concerned, I should like to see some of the members supporting the government speak on a matter such as this. Is it not strange that, as we sit here in parliament, only those who are opposed to the government oppose this kind of thing. This is a retrograde and dangerous step. I for one—I care not how long this session will last—will do everything I can to oppose being made the law of this country this bill which will place the public service at the mercy of the patronage friends of the government, and will place the ministers in a position to see that from now on contracts will be awarded without tender.

Mr. D. S. Harkness (Calgary East): Mr. Speaker, I rise because I believe I would be failing in my responsibility as a member of parliament if I did not condemn this bill in the strongest possible terms. As a matter of fact I am amazed at the government bringing in such a bill. I am amazed because it is such a barefaced attempt to bring back the patronage system and make it the only system operative with regard to government contracts.

The fact that this bill was introduced and brought before us at this stage of the session, when most of us had reservations and expected to be on our way home or to be going home shortly, certainly leads one to think the hope was that it would slip through without too much opposition. As has been indicated by other hon. members who have spoken, I think probably any hope the government had of that kind is now dashed.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): This bill has been on the order paper since November 23.

Mr. Diefenbaker: And was held up.

Mr. Harkness: Yes.

Mr. Fournier (Hull): It could not be proceeded with before the other one was dealt with.

Mr. Harkness: I have not heard one good reason advanced by the minister or any other member of the government, or any member of the party supporting the government, as to why this bill should be put through. Not one good reason has been advanced for it; and certainly all kinds of reasons have been advanced by members on

this side of the house as to why the bill should be defeated, withdrawn or amended. I would certainly hope that action would be taken along one of those lines.

Even under the system we have today under which, generally speaking, all contracts are let by tender, a large number of contracts have been the subject of criticism. The case cited this afternoon by the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra was, to say the least, a bit unsavoury, in my opinion. There are all kinds of other contracts about which there has been a considerable amount of talk; and I do not think all that talk was without some just foundation. The way in which many of these contracts were renegotiated after the tender was let, and the amount paid to the man who got the tender increased considerably, is one of the—

Mr. Howe: Will my hon. friend name one? He is talking in wide generalities about renegotiating contracts upward. I would ask him to name one.

Mr. Harkness: I would ask the minister if in fact a large number of contracts were not renegotiated.

Mr. Howe: Renegotiated downward, but never upward.

Mr. Harkness: Does the minister say that no contracts have been renegotiated upward?

Mr. Howe: Quite right. Does my friend know of any? My hon. friend is talking about renegotiating contracts. Does he know anything to base it on?

Mr. Harkness: Yes, there were two cases this afternoon.

Mr. Howe: Two cases where work was added.

Mr. Harkness: As a matter of fact I am not familiar and cannot bring—

Mr. Howe: Certainly you know nothing about the situation, but you can keep on talking.

Mr. Harkness: I said at the moment I cannot bring out the proof, but I do know I have heard a great deal of talk about a large number of these contracts, and I do know that a large number of contracts were renegotiated.

Mr. Howe: You just said you did not know.

Mr. Harkness: And upward.

Mr. Hodgson: "Who will stop us".

Mr. Harkness: I said I could not produce the proof at this moment. I did not say I did not know.