

Department of Public Works

He said: Mr. Speaker, I will readily admit that my motive in putting this motion on the Order Paper was not to get production of the document referred to since I was already aware of its content. However, I believed it would give me an opportunity once again to shed some further light on a difficulty I have been working on over the years. I refer to the continuing duplication of efforts in various departments. This afternoon I want to discuss specifically property management and construction work as it applies to the public service.

The parliamentary secretary mentioned that the document was a cabinet paper. I might take issue with that. As far as I am aware, it never got to the cabinet table. I suspect it was just a presentation for the approval of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau). As I understand the story, this document was presented at the time of the October crisis in 1970, and as a result, it was put away for the time being. Eleven years later, we are still talking about what was proposed in 1970 and what still has not been done in 1980.

My original interest in this subject predates my entry into the House of Commons in 1972. I must admit that, as a construction man, in those days I was somewhat concerned about the efficiency, or lack of efficiency, in the Department of Public Works. I was anxious to find out for myself just what the situation was in that department. To put the parliamentary secretary at rest, I am not going to be too critical of the department this afternoon. In fact, I have been suggesting all along that the problem is that this department has not had a full opportunity to take over, as was proposed in 1970, complete control of construction activity and property management in the public service. It was not until 1975 that I started to put case files together. The more I did so, the more concerned I became.

It may be advisable to say a few words about the department by way of introduction. The Department of Public Works provides accommodation and related realty services to government departments and agencies. These services include construction of buildings, purchase and disposal of land and other real property, rental of premises and the maintenance, improvement and operation of properties owned or leased by the Government of Canada. In addition, on request the department supplies government departments and agencies with technical and construction management services for capital projects.

In his report, the Auditor General commented that there are two principal systems in planning for the acquisition of space. The planning and control system is used to plan the department's internal resource requirements based on projected work load. In order to be fully effective as a foundation for departmental planning and forecasting, the planning and control system must be linked to an extensive data base which includes cost inventory and other operating data. This data base has not been fully developed. Furthermore, actual expenditures were not being systematically compared to plans or budgets to determine the quality of the original plans, nor could changes in the level of funding be related to changes in resources required for individual projects.

The Auditor General concluded that the management of eight of nine projects examined did not demonstrate a reasonable standard of due regard for economy.

Among the Auditor General's recommendations, one can read that the role of the Department of Public Works and its program objectives should be clarified. The department commented on the recommendations and agreed with this one. For the past several years the department has been seeking approval for a modified role and mandate in the context of proposals concerning the rationalization of real property operations in the federal government. I might add that in place of "the past several years", one should read "a minimum of 14 years". In fact, in these short remarks, in which I can only lightly gloss over the problem, I shall be talking of the history of the past 17 years.

The Glasco proposals of some 17 years ago created considerable interest in reform. In 1964, a committee of senior public servants was convened to review the proposals and to make recommendations to ministers. The Glasco commission singled out for special mention the fact that real property activities had become diffused among a large number of departments. It suggested that the Department of Public Works should be made responsible for the planning and supervision of all construction required by civil departments and agencies.

As I said earlier, while I obviously have a few criticisms of the department to make, the reason I mention these and put them on the record is because I have felt all along that these criticisms are being used as excuses by other departments which have not, for various reasons, wanted to co-operate in this exercise of developing for the Government of Canada a single construction company.

Looking at some figures, we see that the Department of Transport from 1975 to 1977 carried out construction amounting to \$160 million to \$180 million a year.

In the Post Office Department—and this was looked after by the Department of Public Works—construction activity in those same years was running at \$50 million to \$75 million a year. I mention this because with the Post Office becoming a Crown corporation, it is possible that this construction workload may be taken away from the Department of Public Works.

I want to refer to the Department of National Defence; construction in those same years ranged from \$50 million to \$70 million per year. This work, of course, was carried out by Defence Construction (1951) Limited. I will say right now that if I had any criticism to make of any construction department, it would be DCL.

My reasons there are best illustrated by the construction work that was carried out at the St. Jean military base in Quebec. Construction figures for 1976-77 were \$14 million; for 1978, \$36 million; and 1978-79, \$27 million. Sixteen contractors on that site had extras or additional amounts added to their contracts exceeding 20 per cent of their original signed contracts. That construction exercise at St. Jean, as everyone knows, went considerably over budget. Whether that