

I think that, as my right honourable leader suggests, we should have this matter referred back to the Committee on Railways, Telegraphs and Harbours. I was not impressed with the long statement read by the honourable leader at this morning's sitting to the effect that when the Act came into operation the board would have no employees at all. Any legal man could draw up a document of that kind. It does not give us any information. It was not necessary for the Minister to get such an opinion from the Justice Department, nor even to have the document typewritten for presentation to this House, for we all were perfectly well aware of what is therein set out. The difficulty in connection with the employees, other than those on a permanent basis—and I suppose there are not altogether more than 150 in that class—could be overcome by inserting in the Bill a clause that the Act shall not be proclaimed until such time as the Civil Service Commission, under Mr. Bland, has classified the service. So all the objections mentioned in the honourable leader's statement are not impressive at all.

Now I turn to another matter. Having lived quite a few years and belonged to both parties, I think I know how the political machine operates, both inside and outside. I certainly should feel keenly disappointed if any Minister of Public Works, in either a Conservative or a Liberal Government, were to adopt the practice of letting contracts secretly, within the confines of his own office. The contracts that are let run into billions of dollars a year—

Hon. Mr. KING: That is not done, is it?

Hon. Mr. BALLANTYNE: Of course it is done. But during the five years that Mr. Stewart, the late Minister of Public Works, was in office, the practice was to announce that tenders for such-and-such a contract would be opened on a certain day at 12 noon. At the appointed time the Deputy Minister, Mr. Hunter, in the presence of the contractors who had tendered, would open the tenders and call them out, the contract being awarded to the lowest bidder, provided he was able to carry it out.

Hon. Mr. KING: I should like my honourable friend to answer this important question. Was there not a selected list of contractors?

Hon. Mr. BALLANTYNE: Not at all.

Hon. Mr. KING: We shall see.

Hon. Mr. BALLANTYNE: I do not want to go into details on the floor of the Chamber, but I can assure my honourable friend that

if he will go down and ask Mr. Hunter for a statement of the people to whom contracts were awarded, he will be amazed to see how many of the contractors were Liberals.

Hon. Mr. KING: But a number of contractors were not on the list.

Hon. Mr. HAIG: I know that what my honourable friend from Alma (Hon. Mr. Ballantyne) says is correct. Anyone who desired to do so could procure a copy of the plans and specifications for any proposed work and put in his tender. It made no difference whether the tenderer was a Liberal or a Conservative. I know that is what happened in Manitoba. Deer Lodge hospital was built by a Liberal—

Hon. Mr. KING: When I was the Minister.

Hon. Mr. HAIG: No, you were not. The contract was let in 1933.

Hon. Mr. KING: That was for an addition.

Hon. Mr. BALLANTYNE: The honourable leader will not claim that Mr. Janin belongs to the Conservative party?

Hon. Mr. PARENT: You never can tell to what party a contractor belongs.

Hon. Mr. BALLANTYNE: The contract for the Customs building in Montreal was given to Janin & Company. Surely we have reached the point where ministers and governments in this country should rise above petty patronage in connection with the management of such large national undertakings as our harbours. Why should not tenders be opened publicly and the contract awarded to the lowest bidder?

If the Government wants to take the responsibility of running these harbours strictly from a patronage point of view and by three men here at Ottawa, I can only say that I am sorry for the Dominion of Canada. In my opinion our export and import trade will suffer and it will not be long before the system will have to be changed.

It certainly would have been better had the Government decided to implement another of the proposals of Sir Alexander Gibb instead of this one. He did not make concrete recommendations, but he made suggestions. It would have been better to adopt his suggestion that the harbours should be continued under the control of local boards, which, however, should not have the power to incur any capital expenditure without the approval of the central board. Under that plan the harbours would be kept under local