

off. Perhaps some of those who have been driven to buying it, by stress of war conditions, may continue to use it, but there is little probability of its consumption becoming general enough to make the industry a large one. Great Britain, therefore, is not likely to make a large market for palm kernels. Germany, which wants them, will not be allowed to take them. If the Allies desire them they can only get them subject to the penalty of the export duty. Where then is the West African producer to find a profitable market for his palm kernels? Is there not a danger that in this case the weapon aimed at Germany will rebound, to the damage of the West African colonist?

The Reconstruction of the Parliament Buildings

THERE has been much discussion in the press concerning the arrangements for the reconstruction of the Parliament Buildings at Ottawa. Some criticisms have been offered in the Liberal press which, apparently, have arisen from misunderstandings. It has been alleged that the Minister of Public Works has been carrying on the arrangements regardless of the wishes of a Joint Committee, representing both political parties which has the matter in charge. Explanations recently given from Government sources seem to show that there is not good ground for this criticism. For what was done until a very recent date, whether it was wise or not, the Committee representing both political parties seem to have been responsible. But a new situation is now presenting itself and, since it appears that no contract has yet been signed, the whole matter may deserve reconsideration.

Soon after the fire a Joint Committee, representing both political parties in the Senate and House of Commons, was appointed to take into consideration the subject of reconstruction of the buildings. It does not appear from the published reports that this Committee was appointed under any formal resolution of either House, or under any Order-in-Council. There was a conversation in the House of Commons between the two leaders. The Opposition were invited to co-operate with the Government and did so. The two leaders chose the members of the Committee. There having been no formal resolution or instructions, there has been room for misunderstandings as to the purpose, duty and authority of the Committee. The architects' report went to show that, though the fire had done enormous damage, the buildings had by no means been destroyed; that the portions remaining in very good condition were of a value of about two million dollars. Under these circumstances the work was treated as one of "restoration," rather than of rebuilding. It was agreed that a well known building company of high standing should be employed to do this "restoration" on what is called the "force system," that is, the contractors to be paid for the actual outlay, plus a certain percentage for their profit. Accordingly a very large and costly scaffolding was erected for the work of restoration and buildings were erected to serve the purposes of the workmen. Subsequently there was a change of policy. An additional story was included in the new plan. The scaffolding was taken down and the walls of the main building razed to the ground. Critics have said that this was done by the Minister without the consent of the Committee. The information now before the public shows that the Committee were aware of the proposed change and assented to it. The criticism of

the Minister on that point is, therefore, unwarranted. But the change in the situation has moved the Hon. Mr. Lemieux to tender his resignation as a member of the Committee, for reasons which he has set forth in the following letter, addressed to Mr. J. B. Hunter, secretary of the Committee:

Dear Sir:—

At the meeting of the Parliamentary Building Committee on Monday, August 21st last, I submitted the following motion:

"That as the Parliament Buildings are to be reconstructed instead of being partially restored as at first contemplated, public tenders should be called for, as by law provided."

After discussion, and at the request of the Committee, the consideration of my motion was postponed until to-day, so as to get the views of all the members of the Committee.

To-day, when I again pressed my motion, it was defeated. I, therefore, beg to tender my resignation as a member of the Committee.

As I have already stated, the \$1,500,000 voted by Parliament last session, and the powers granted to the Committee, only contemplated the restoration of the building. It was then stated that the walls could be used and that with a moderate amount of money, the buildings would soon be restored.

Since then all the walls have been razed, including those of the new wing. We are, therefore, facing a new condition of things. It is no more a restoration, but a complete re-construction of the main buildings, plus a library, stock room and a power house, involving not only much longer delays, but a much larger expenditure of money.

I do not feel justified under those circumstances, and in the absence of complete plans, specifications, and an estimate of the cost, to award such a large contract without calling for tenders.

The plans, specifications, and an estimate of cost could be prepared within three months at least, according to the architects, and at its next session Parliament could determine if the cost plus percentage system, or the lowest tender, should be adopted.

In view of the altered circumstances and of the vote of last session, I feel that I have no legal authority to depart from the rule laid down in the Public Works Act, that in all contracts above \$5,000, tenders must be asked.

Believe me, dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

RODOLPHE LEMIEUX.

The matter does not take a party shape. One Liberal member of the Committee, Hon. Charles Murphy, who had been appointed during his absence, resigned when he returned to Ottawa. Two other Liberal members, Hon. Wm. Pugsley and Hon. Senator Robert Watson, are still members of the Committee.

There are two questions involved in the present state of the case. One is the propriety of the "force" system in a work of this kind; the other is the authority that should properly be responsible for the carrying out of any contract that may be made.

As to the "force" system, there is much argument that may be used in favor of it for some classes of work, and where the contractors are of high character and the supervision of the work is thorough and competent. The system probably is better adapted to works of a private character than to Government undertakings. One may well doubt whether the system can advantageously

be applied in the case of the complete rebuilding of a great public edifice that will take several years in construction and that will cost many million dollars. The system in such a case is likely to make for expensive materials and costly work generally. The public, we think, will be inclined to agree with Mr. Lemieux that for such a work the competition that springs from the system of inviting tenders is desirable. There is still time for this, since it appears that no contract has yet been made.

But whatever may be thought of the merits of these two systems of construction, there ought to be no doubt that such a Joint Committee as has been acting should not be asked or permitted to undertake the work of controlling and directing the carrying out of any contract that may be made. The existence of such a Committee would disarm the inquiry and criticism that are desirable in transactions connected with large public contracts. If the party system of government has some weaknesses it has also some strong features, one of which is that the Opposition of the day keeps a watchful eye upon large contracts for public works, and draws public attention to any departures from sound methods. If this great work is to be directed by a Committee of both parties the ordinary inquiry and criticism will be restricted, if not silenced.

It was eminently proper that there should be consultation and co-operation between Government and Opposition respecting the plans for the reconstruction of the Parliament Buildings. The structure is to be erected for the accommodation of all parties. The character of the plans, the apportionment of the space, the accommodations to be provided for the two Houses and for their members were matters in which all might well be asked to give the Government the benefit of their knowledge and experience. But there the duty of co-operation should end. The carrying out of the contract to be made, whether it be under the "force" system or after the taking of the tenders, should be clearly and wholly under the direction of the Government of the day, who alone should be responsible to Parliament and the people for the work. The Committee could not in any case exercise any intelligent and competent supervision. Its members are not at Ottawa. They are scattered over the Dominion. Their attempted supervision would be hollow and unsubstantial. They would become responsible for things over which they could have no real control.

The Joint Committee, we think, should politely thank the Government for the opportunity they have had of advising as to the most convenient arrangements for the accommodation of the Senators and Members of the Commons, and should then retire, leaving the Minister of Public Works and the Government to assume and exercise that full control of the affair which properly belongs to them.

An Ottawa grocer was arraigned in court for having on his premises hams which were unfit for food. The condition of the meat, as described by the inspector, was vile. The grocer pleaded that "it was not intended for sale, and that he always kept some scraps of eatables of different kinds to give to a poor woman who was in the habit of calling for them every Saturday evening." The magistrate, the report continues, "stated that while finding the defendant guilty of having the ham in his store, he was prepared to accept the explanation given and dismissed the case." The judgment seems to establish that while it would be wrong to sell such vile stuff to a customer it would be quite right to give it as food to a poor woman in the way of charity.

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