

Public Works Act

that is not enough enlarge it to \$15,000 or \$20,000, but for goodness sake put some limit so that the Minister of Public Works, or any other minister who is dealing with a work under the meaning of this act, can say to every lobbyist who comes into his office: "This has to be let by tender because the act says that it must be let by tender". Then all he can say is: "Good-day, you will have an opportunity to tender". But that is not what they are doing. They are inviting everybody who wants to get something for nothing to come in and see what he can get in the scramble.

As I have said many times, I have a great deal of respect for the members of the cabinet but, as I said before, I cannot understand men such as the Minister of Public Works, the Minister of Trade and Commerce and Defence Production (Mr. Howe), the Minister of Finance (Mr. Abbott), and the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Claxton), who have been administering public affairs for quite a long time, wanting to leave themselves open to the condition, human nature being what it is, that this legislation invites. Therefore I suggest to the Minister of Public Works, as others have done, that in the interests of good government and good public administration he should withdraw the bill and substitute something better for it, or amend it in such a way as to set an amount beyond which contracts cannot be let without tender.

Mr. A. J. Brooks (Royal): I should like to say a word on this subject, Mr. Speaker. Like the others who have spoken I certainly have great respect for the minister, but I do not think it is the minister we are talking about; it is his bill. We cannot have the same respect for the bill that we have for him. So far as subsection (a) is concerned, I realize that there are emergencies. The minister has not mentioned any, but I am sure a matter such as the Winnipeg flood would be such an emergency. We can also go along with the minister so far as subsection (b) is concerned. But as other members have mentioned, the striking out of the \$5,000 ceiling in subsection (c) and the failure to put in any other ceiling make it difficult for us to agree with that. In my opinion this is equivalent to changing from the tender system back to the patronage system.

When the minister spoke in introducing the bill he made some mention about the construction of the building here during the regime of Sir John A. Macdonald. I believe the idea in the back of his mind was that they were constructed more or less under the patronage system, and that was seventy-five or eighty years ago. What was done then is not good enough for today. When a previous bill was

before the house the parliamentary assistant spoke about the splendid record of our civil servants in Canada. This record grew up over a period of years. I am satisfied that if we had retained the old system of selecting our civil servants from friends of the ministers or the members we would not have the splendid record we have today. In my opinion, Mr. Speaker, the same thing applies to both tendering and patronage. If we take this retrograde step and return to the patronage system I am sure it will have a harmful effect upon this country.

I am inclined to feel that perhaps some of us come from sections of the country where patronage is a little more rampant than it is in other sections. I feel that my section of the country is more patronage-minded than some other sections. I know of patronage committees in our part of the country that would just lick their lips if they saw a subsection such as the one in this bill. They would see great possibilities in it. I hope that we shall not weaken the tender system. I have not heard the minister give any reasons why this step should be taken. He made a few remarks concerning the bill, but as yet he has not told this house why this subsection (c) is necessary. The subsection refers to cases where the minister is satisfied that the nature of the work renders the calling of tenders by public advertisement impracticable. The minister has not said whether that method will be impracticable in only a few cases or in many instances. If that section remains in the bill there may be a few cases at the outset, but as time goes on we will find such pressure that there will be more and more cases in the future. There is no comparison between the two systems, as the hon. member who has just spoken pointed out.

As has been stated, the fact that different contracting companies tender for a job means that the government is going to have the work done for less than if the contract is handed out to someone who has no competition. Then again, a contractor who is successful gets the very best man he can to help him carry on the work. From my own experience so far as government work is concerned, I know that when it is not performed under a tender system everyone flocks to the door of the man who has the work to do. If any of these people are friends of the government or friends of the party, they press their claim and receive consideration. The whole thing adds up to a greater cost so far as government work is concerned.

I feel it will be a great mistake if this bill is passed in this form, and I think the minister would be well advised if he withdrew it, as has been suggested by some members.