

Public Works Act

in a very handsome manner. They have made an amendment in line with what we advised. How wise they would be, and how much trouble they would save, if they accepted all our advice.

This is not an amendment; it is a repentance, a recantation. This is not a retreat; it is an absolute rout. We in the opposition should seriously thank the government for one thing. I do not suppose that for a long time there has ever been a case where the real function of the opposition has been so well and clearly demonstrated. Within the last few days we have been trying to persuade the government not to pursue another foolish course. We did not succeed. We shall have to let time take its course. We have to let the people become educated. There will be an education of the farmers within a few days—by reason of information given last evening.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood): Are you cautioning me, Mr. Speaker? I always defer to your slightest wish, as you know. What I wanted to say—perhaps there was a slight digression—was that the government has given us a wonderful chance to demonstrate the real function of the opposition. Within the last few days in the other case there has been some complaint that we were taking a little too much time in trying to get the public to understand the subject. In this case we stood up to the government. I want to give all the opposition credit, because they were all with us. This subject was rather simple, and it was not easy to confuse the public. The public understood, and what have they done? They have come to the assistance of the opposition and we have the results which we all know.

I do not want to waste the time of the house. It is repugnant to me to say anything which would seem like glorifying ourselves but I do say, and it is a conservative statement, that this may well rank as a classic case. I hope it may even get into the text books as a classic example of the power of the opposition to prevent injurious legislation.

It may also remind the people, Mr. Speaker, that the way of the opposition is not always easy. People do not always rate the opposition as high as they should. It may serve to give people a better understanding of the true function of parliament, particularly if the press is interested and brings it to the attention of the people.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I hope this incident may have the effect of raising the whole institution of parliament. People are often apt to talk about us as if we were just putting in time, as if there were no means whatever

of influencing the government, and are apt to say public opinion cannot do anything. I hope this case may stand in the record as a classic example, showing that public influence can still—I was going to say in the twinkling of an eye—actually in the space of two weeks, bring a great! and powerful! government to its knees.

Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and the house went into committee thereon, Mr. Dion in the chair.

On section 1—*Tenders to be invited for works.*

Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood): There is just one point I want to bring to the minister's attention. In the old act the word "or" comes at the end of subsection (a) and the end of subsection (b). I point out that in the new section there is no "or" at the end of subsection (a), and I suggest that that creates an entirely unexpected situation. Surely that will mean that (a) and (b) have to be read together, and that cannot be the intention. Does the minister not agree?

Mr. Fournier (Hull): Mr. Chairman, I shall ask my colleague the Minister of Agriculture to move an amendment to subsection (a) by adding the word "or" after the word "interest".

Mr. Gardiner: I so move.

Mr. Drew: And subclause (b) also?

Mr. Fournier (Hull): It has it.

Mr. Drew: That is right.

Mr. Gardiner: I move:

That clause 1 be amended by deleting subsection C of section 36 of the Public Works Act as it appears therein, and by substituting the following: "C. Where the estimated cost of the work is less than fifteen thousand dollars, and it appears to the minister, in view of the nature of the work, that it is not advisable to invite tenders."

Mr. McLure: Just before the amendment carries I should like to say this with regard to tenders. Last year a similar bill with regard to tendering was brought into the house, which had to do with the postal act. It gives the department too much absolute power to let contracts without calling for tenders.

Mr. Rinfret: Below a thousand dollars.

Mr. McLure: It does not make any difference whether it is below or above; the inequity is right there.

The Chairman: Order. That is not relevant at all to the present bill.

Mr. McLure: I will deal with this as it is. When you do away with tendering you are getting back to the old system of political