

*Public Works Act*

entirely away from the federal cabinet and reposing that authority wholly in the departments and offices of the ministers individually.

This is not something that can be done just by the Minister of Public Works (Mr. Fournier), who would do it pleasantly and genially; it is something that can be done by all ministers, some of whom would not do it nearly as nicely. Apparently they are all to have this power. We have the Defence Production Act which grants very wide powers, but I doubt if they are much wider than this. There are two things to remember about the Defence Production Act. First, we hope that it will be temporary, that it will end some day and, second, we realize that it deals with what we all recognize as an emergency. I do not know whether the Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Howe) has inoculated the Minister of Public Works, in the sense of contaminating him, in the sense of filling him with some desire for wide-open powers. Now I should like to read a short opinion from an independent newspaper in Toronto, the *Telegram*.

**An hon. Member:** Very independent.

**An hon. Member:** Non-partisan.

**Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood):** I understand the *Telegram* describes itself as independent, and I have no reason whatever to doubt its word. The *Telegram* has this to say, as found in the issue of November 29:

The long-established practice of inviting tenders for the construction of dominion projects will be jeopardized if parliament passes a bill . . .

And so on. I think "jeopardize" was an understatement. It would not be any case of jeopardy. It would be a case of the finish, the end. I have indicated some of my feelings about this matter. There are two other things I should like to say. Within the time available I tried to find out whether there had been any other debates on this matter, whether the question had been under discussion before. I can find nothing, and I think the reason is that it has never been questioned. It has been a part of our political thinking. It has been a part of the landscape. Nobody has ever questioned it. I have no doubt that when the minister produced this extraordinary document he must have been surprised at himself. He must have said: Well, if I get these fellows on a Saturday afternoon and treat them gently I may get this thing through. After all, let us remind ourselves that he has given us no reason yet. He has entertained us, but he has given us no reasons. I imagine he is going to give section 39 of Bill 25 as a reason and I want to warn him in advance that so far as I am

[Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood).]

concerned that is no answer at all. It merely comforts us with the thought that the great and good cabinet will decide these things, but that is not satisfactory to us. We are still among the simple people who believe that parliament means something.

I admit it is difficult for anyone outside the opposition to believe that any more, and when I say "opposition" I mean all the opposition. It is very difficult because we realize there are a lot of people in the house who feel a bit cramped in their style in expressing their views, but happily we are not cramped yet. I think that is pretty nearly all I want to say. There may be one or two other points the minister would like to hear. As I said to the minister, we have here a change which seems to me to go to the very root of the matter. It throws not only out of the window—that would not be so bad because we might go and pick it up—but down the drain what after all in any man's language who has thought about the institution of parliament at all must be, if not the cornerstone, at any rate one of the most important rights. I cannot imagine any right more important, and the minister seeks to get rid of it by this simple clause which he tries to read to us in a sort of soothing syrup manner. The base may be sweet; nevertheless the poison is there. It is 6.15, Mr. Speaker. I move that the debate be adjourned.

**Mr. Fournier (Hull):** We agree that you may adjourn the debate.

**Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood):** It is 6.15, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Fournier (Hull):** Yes, you adjourn the debate.

**Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood):** I just want to be sure that I have adjourned the debate.

**Mr. Fournier (Hull):** Yes, yes, we all agree. Just one word—

**An hon. Member:** Not to close the debate.

**Mr. Fournier (Hull):** I am not going to close the debate. I want to announce the business for this evening because I committed myself to my colleague, the Minister of Trade and Commerce (Mr. Howe), that he could proceed with Bill No. 44.

**Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood):** Do you mean to say we are not going to go on with this?

**Mr. Knowles:** Did the minister submit a tender?

**Mr. Howe:** You adjourned the debate.

**Mr. Fournier (Hull):** I looked for a chance to reply this afternoon, but we will go ahead with Bill No. 44 at eight o'clock tonight.