

Supply—Public Works

Mr. Chevrier: I should like to ask the minister a question based on some remarks he made when he was on this side of the house. In asking this question I do not want to be contentious in the slightest degree because I am sure that when the minister advanced this suggestion he was serious, just as I am at the moment.

Mr. Macdonnell: You are never contentious!

Mr. Chevrier: Thank you. I am glad to have my hon. friend confirm my statement.

When the minister sat on this side of the house I think he expressed the opinion from time to time that it might be well if the Department of Public Works were to give consideration to taking over from other departments the construction of public works in those various departments. One day when I was passing estimates here having to do with certain construction works in the Department of Transport—I have forgotten what the item was but perhaps it had to do with radio or meteorological services or something of that kind—I recall that the minister expressed the feeling that perhaps it was a duplication of services or even a waste of money that there should be so many public works branches in all the departments of government that had any works of a public nature to perform. In the light of the changed circumstances in the house and in the light of the consideration which he may have had time to give to the matter since he has been over there on that side of the house, I should like to hear his comments. I am wondering whether or not he has had an opportunity to consider this problem and whether he would care to comment on it at this time?

Mr. Green: We do most of the governmental construction work. The main exceptions are the work of the Department of Transport and the work of the Department of National Defence. Occasionally we are doing some work for each of these departments. This seems to have been a practice which has grown up over the years. I do not know whether or not my hon. friend was responsible for it when he was minister of transport. The Department of Public Works cannot very well raid the Department of Transport. This is a matter which would have to be decided by the government as a whole. As the hon. member will realize, various practices have grown up for one reason or another in the administrative field. Eventually I would hope that they would be remedied. However, there is close co-operation between the Department of Public Works and the Department of Transport. We happen to share the same office building. We have the very best of relationships with that department and we have great admiration for

[Mr. Green.]

the work they are doing. I hope the hon. member will not press me any further for my views as to what should be done on this point.

Mr. Chevrier: I would not think of doing so. I should simply like to say this. I presume there is no intention of changing the policy that has existed in that respect over the years.

Mr. Green: We are trying to improve the former government's policies in many regards. This may be one of those.

Mr. Chevrier: May I proceed to another matter, and again I hope the minister will not think that I am contentious. I want to be constructive in this matter. It has to do with a point that was raised by the hon. member for Burnaby-Coquitlam with reference to patronage. It is not my intention to open up that question today but I think perhaps briefly the minister could satisfy not only myself but, I am sure, the house in general. Could the minister say what the policy of the Department of Public Works is with reference to that question? Is there going to be an overall change in the present policy? Have any of the employees of the Department of Works in any category whatever been severed from their employment because of political activities? I think it would be well if the house were to be reassured in that respect. I know that after the election of June 10 the Minister of Public Works made in the house a statement that reassured most hon. members with reference to that matter. I should like to know from him now whether any employees have been severed from their employment since June 10 because of political activity?

Mr. Green: There was some discussion on this question during the last parliament, as the hon. member will recall, and references were made to some employees who had been dismissed. I think he will remember that there was one in the Department of Transport who had been extremely active politically. I think all hon. members will agree that civil servants should not take an active part in politics. Frankly I may say that where you have a case in which employees of any department are active organizers politically I do not think they deserve very much consideration. However, once again I should like to pay tribute to the work of the civil service. Certainly in my department I have found that they have been excellent. As I told the hon. member for Kootenay West, we are trying to run the department on a businesslike basis.

Mr. Chevrier: I was not dealing with the Department of Transport, although I well remember the case the minister had in mind