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CONTRACTORS SHOW ORGANIZING ABILITY

AT the conference of building interests held last week in Ottawa, the contractors and supply men proved their organizing ability. If the power to organize is the chief requisite for success in contracting, as is often asserted, then the men who participated in the conference last week must all be very successful citizens.

Particular credit is due to J. P. Anglin and the men who assisted him in the preliminary arrangements. We venture to state that such a well-organized, earnest, hard-working convention has never before been held in Canada.

The attendance was excellent both in quantity and quality. The association is off to a good start. It has the enthusiastic backing of some of the most prominent figures in Canada's industrial life to-day.

In scope the organization has broad possibilities, representing all classes of technical skill, labor, business and capital. It should not be long before the association attains a national position second only, perhaps, to the Canadian Manufacturers' Association and the Engineering Institute of Canada.

OPENING PUBLIC TENDERS

TORONTO has a clean municipal government. No city in America has permanent municipal officials of finer personal characteristics. "Graft," if it ever existed in Toronto, is certainly a thing of the dim, distant past. The presence in Toronto's city hall of men like George Powell, Thomas Bradshaw, R. C. Harris, Thomas McQueen and many others of equally high reputation, ensures a fair and square deal for all who have business relations with that city. But for that very reason those men should set the example for the officials of other communities. They can reasonably be expected

to do so. All of which is prefatory to a protest against the method of opening tenders now in vogue at Toronto.

Tenders for annual supplies for the city of Toronto for the year 1919 were called to be in the hands of the Board of Control by noon of Tuesday, November 12th. Those tenders should have been opened publicly at once! At Montreal the City Commissioners have a box into which the bidders drop their sealed envelopes, and at the stroke of noon on the appointed day, the box is carried into the Commissioners' room and the tenders are immediately opened and read. There is no such business-like procedure at Toronto, where the usual practice is to open the tenders a day after they are received. On the morning of November 13th, several anxious bidders, including a few "out-of-town" men, gathered in the Board of Control room to hear the tenders read. But Mayor Church announced that as November 11th had been a holiday (to celebrate the armistice) the mails had been delayed and all tenders were probably not yet in hand, so the opening would be postponed for twenty-four hours.

On November 14th the numerous contractors again gathered in the Board of Control chamber, where nothing short of farce-comedy was enacted. Controller McBride slit the envelopes and passed them, one at a time, to the Mayor. Upon removing the contents of an envelope, the mayor would sometimes mumble some quite unintelligible words; sometimes he would read the amount of the marked cheque; then again he would merely say, "This is a tender for sand"; or perhaps, "granite block tender". He did not read the tenders thoroughly and clearly. There was no uniformity of procedure, and practically no information could be obtained by anyone present.

Later in the day *The Canadian Engineer* urged various officials to give out the prices without delay, but was met with refusal on the ground that they had to be tabulated by Mr. McQueen, the secretary of the Board of Control. On November 15th the asphalt prices were given out but it was not until noon of November 18th that any information could be obtained about the many other materials for which tenders had been received.

The mayor stated that the law requires tenders to be opened in public but does not say anything about their being read. The mayor is a lawyer and we are prepared to accept his legal opinion on this point. But if that is the law, the Ontario legislature should change the wording of the Act. It may be the letter of the law, but surely it is not the spirit. Mere slitting of the envelopes should not constitute "legal opening" of public tenders.

Commissioner Harris, early in the afternoon of the day the tenders were opened, said that if the mayor had attempted to read all the prices, "he would be there yet." What of it? That is part of what the mayor of Toronto is paid \$7,500 a year to do. It has to be done only once a year in connection with annual supplies. Is it asking too much of a mayor to spend a few hours once a year in properly opening tenders for many thousands of dollars' worth of materials?

If His Worship's time is so valuable that it cannot be devoted to municipal business of this kind, he should depute the work to some other alderman or official. Any other responsible and intelligent person could do it just as satisfactorily. The bidders do not care who reads the tenders or who slits the envelopes. It is not the mayor's baritone voice that interests them, but the cold facts of whether they are likely to get the contracts.

May we repeat, for the assurance of the bidders at Toronto, that we feel positive that there was no wrongdoing in connection with the tenders after they were open-