

Supply—Public Works

\$6,400,000; the Department of Veterans Affairs, nearly \$5 million.

Whether or not that is a fair test of the extent to which the Department of Public Works is being by-passed in the construction of buildings and works, I am not prepared to say. I merely say it was one of the tests made by the finance committee of the Senate. They used that test to support their argument that whereas from the time of confederation the Department of Public Works was supposed to be the great building department of the government, in recent years other departments have been stepping in more and more and undertaking construction under one pretext or another. By so doing they have been cutting down the importance of the Department of Public Works.

When we come to the Departments of Defence Production and National Defence, the figures are much higher. The Department of Defence Production is spending \$60 million this year for buildings and works, while the Department of National Defence is spending practically \$225 million for this purpose. It might seem that most of the defence building should be done by the defence department or the Department of Defence Production but I may point out that before the war certain defence works were constructed by the Department of Public Works. We had forts built around Vancouver, and I believe they were constructed by the Department of Public Works. Furthermore the Department of Defence Production, which is spending \$60 million during this fiscal year on buildings and works, is a department which is to be wiped out eventually. It is only a temporary department, the plan being that it will be eliminated as soon as possible and its work put back into one or the other of the regular peacetime departments. I believe that work should go back largely to the Department of Public Works.

The Senate committee made this recommendation that more of the buildings and works should be handled by the Department of Public Works because they thought that would bring about a saving, that it would cut out a certain amount of duplication, and would put the responsibility for economical construction where it belonged. We pointed out this fact during the discussion of the estimates of the Department of Public Works at the last session, but I can see no sign in these current estimates that there has been any attempt whatever to give the Department of Public Works a larger field than has been the case in recent years. It would appear that there has been no change in policy in spite of the recommendation from the Senate. I would ask the minister to explain to us this

evening whether or not there has been any change as a result of these facts being brought to his attention, and the attention of other ministers, during the last session.

Then I should like to know from him also what the policy is to be in the future. Are we going on in the present way with these other departments doing a great deal of their own building and handling their own construction, or is this work to be drawn back into the Department of Public Works where we believe it really belongs? I hope the minister will explain to us when I am through just what the policy is in that regard.

There is quite a substantial increase in the departmental estimates for this year. They have gone up, I think, by something over \$5.5 million. I would ask the minister to explain to the committee, in general terms, where that increase is reflected in his estimates.

Another point is that in the second session of 1951 the house passed an amendment to the Public Works Act. No doubt the minister will recall that at that time we had quite a debate, and we finally persuaded him to cut down his request for additional power to do away with calling for tenders. I would ask him to let us have a list of the cases in which contracts were let by his department without the calling of tenders. At the present time the law gives him power to do away with the calling of tenders under three conditions: In the first place, where the work is of pressing emergency in which delay would be injurious to the public interest; in the second place, where the work can be more expeditiously and economically executed by the employees of the department concerned; and in the third place—and this is where the dispute took place in 1951—where the estimated cost of the work is less than \$15,000 and it appears to the minister, in view of the nature of the work, that it is not advisable to invite tenders.

The minister will recall that, before the amendment, that figure was \$5,000. In other words he could not do away with tenders unless the contract was for an amount under \$5,000. The amendment raised the amount to \$15,000 whereas the minister, I think, was asking the house to take the ceiling off entirely and to give him extremely wide powers to let contracts without tender. However, we saved him from that great error. I am particularly anxious to know the extent to which this new power of letting contracts for between \$5,000 and \$15,000 without the calling of tenders has been used during the last fiscal year, the year ended March 31, 1953.

The minister will know whether or not some of these requests will involve a great