

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

Mr. Speaker, when the minister says that only those who could offer financial guarantees were invited to tender, he does not help our small contractors in Hull or the average contractors in our area or in the city of Montreal or in other places in Canada, and he knows it.

Therefore, I say that there was some political intrigue in the awarding of this contract for the pulling down of the old printing bureau. And the minister went on to say:

—the government could not allow itself to wait while a contractor was looking for funds.

He can learn tomorrow of my financial standing by calling the manager of my bank and asking whether my business is profitable or not, whether I am stable enough financially to operate such a business. And as regards a firm such as the Thibault Company, I do not mean that the Thibault Company should have been awarded the contract, but that the Thibault Company, should have had an opportunity to tender as much as the others.

Such is the unfairness of the Department of Public Works, in that some Canadians and other companies have been prevented from submitting a tender under the pretext that time was short and the work had to be done so hastily.

We know for a fact that anyone of those contractors could have demolished the old printing bureau as it can now be demolished and at a lower price than the government is going to pay, out of the taxes of the Canadian people. Let the minister give us some explanation now and tell us why were not all Canadian contractors allowed to submit tenders?

• (10:10 p.m.)

[English]

Hon. G. J. McIlraith (Minister of Public Works): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has raised an interesting plea on behalf of a man in Hull. The facts about this contract are rather simple, and information is available to the public and to anyone in the industry who is interested in it. It is interesting that the man the hon. member speaks about did not come near the department to seek to bid on this matter although he knew, as did all the trade, that the building was coming down.

Public tenders were invited from six firms in the wrecking business who are doing work in this area and all of them bid on the job. I believe the names of the six firms were correctly given. One of them is in Hull, four are in or have branch offices in Ottawa and one is

[Mr. Caouette.]

in the western Ontario area. I think the bids and a knowledge of the industry will show that they are certainly not friendly to each other; they are highly competitive. As for suggesting that they are friends of mine, with the exception of two firms I do not think I know any of them; they are merely names in the business.

The situation was that the old printing bureau, which is a rather substantial building, was built very close to one of the few roads connecting Ottawa and Hull, and therefore it can only be wrecked in a certain manner and not by the simple, easy method of what is called ball and chain wrecking. It has to be knocked down and the site cleared and made ready for parking for the centennial show "Son et Lumière" that will be put on starting in the middle of May this year. This is part of getting that project ready. To have advertised the tenders in the newspapers in the ordinary way could have been done, but it would have delayed proceedings somewhat more than three weeks, from 23, to 28 or 29 days.

Mr. Caouette: Oh, oh.

Mr. McIlraith: I am sorry the hon. member interrupts. I did him the courtesy of listening to his remarks and not interrupting. Perhaps it is not too much to expect that courtesy from him in return.

We had to bear in mind the safety measures that will be enforced, which involve certain technical aspects of demolishing this building. We also had to bear in mind the time limit involved. The departmental officials picked the firms most likely to be equipped and able to provide the necessary financial bonding quickly, and invited them to bid. The six firms bid in a range from \$92,000 to \$119,000, and the contract was immediately awarded to the lowest bid.

Mr. Caouette: That is not an answer.

Mr. McIlraith: It is an answer. I am sorry the hon. member does not understand the answer. I should like to refer to the hon. member's remarks about the ethnic origin of the people bidding. The firms in this business were invited to bid, and no questions whatever were asked about their ethnic origin; and I hope that in this parliament no questions will be asked about the ethnic origin of any person bidding on a Canadian contract. I am very much disappointed in the fact that the hon. member for Villeneuve (Mr. Caouette) has seen fit to interject this note into the matter.