

*Public Works Act*

right to call for tenders on contracts we increase the possibility of criticism of the minister of any department. I hope the Minister of Trade and Commerce will not get too angry about it because I had no intention of taking him to task or inviting a debate with him. I do not want to get him into the position where he will say "Who will stop us? If we want to do anything who will stop us?"

**Mr. Howe:** Nobody is bothering to stop you.

**Mr. Hodgson:** He also said "What is a million dollars?" We do not want to get the minister into that mood; we would rather have him in his genial mood. My experience in public life has shown me that the tender system is the only system to follow. When you let contracts without tender you do not always know that you are getting the lowest price. It certainly is not in the public interest or to the public liking. Yesterday we had a case of the government taking more responsibility and authority under the Civil Service Act. In that instance I believe they were taking away the independence of the civil service commissioners. They disagreed with us; nevertheless that was the way I saw it. Today they are taking more responsibility and are asking that parliament give up certain rights which are to be taken by themselves.

I wish more Liberal members would get up on this issue and say what they really think about it. I do not like to see them sit in their seats and say nothing, and then be whipped into line to vote on the motion without having voiced their opinion.

I think the Minister of Public Works would be well advised to reconsider this bill and rewrite it so it will be satisfactory to this house and the people throughout the country. If this thing gets out into the country what will be the ultimate destination? It will be on an overland route of votes. It will not be only in the province of Ontario, it will be from coast to coast; and this government will find themselves sitting on this side of the house, in the opposition.

**Mr. J. M. Macdonnell (Greenwood):** Mr. Speaker, I think everyone enjoyed the turn put on this afternoon by the minister. He does make it hard to be indignant, as has been said earlier, but we should be indignant about this. This is nothing less than throwing down the drain a practice which has had the sanction of generations, perhaps even of centuries, in free governments. I confess that I was slow to realize the full significance of it. The first two paragraphs are fairly wide, but the third one just takes the lid off. I can see no limitation of any kind. There is nothing that could not be done under that.

You could do everything under that except make a man a woman or a woman a man.

**Mr. Fournier (Hull):** I could not do that.

**Mr. Macdonnell (Greenwood):** As I say, I was slow to realize what could be done. This seems to me by far the worst thing that has been brought before us. I am glad to note that there has been some response to the struggle which some of us made in the case of the civil service bill, but if we were correct in describing that as chiselling at the rights of parliament we would have to get some gigantic word to describe what is happening here, some word like smothering, blasting or some other word that implies the destruction of everything.

I think it was the hon. member for Charlotte (Mr. Stuart) who made the point that there would be cases of emergency or where it might be in the public interest to forgo the calling of tenders. I agree with that. We are sensible people—at least we like to think we are. There may be some concessions that should be made, and we are ready to consider them.

I like to think that I use moderate language, most of the time at any rate, but I think that this is an outrage on parliament. I have often disagreed with the government, and I suppose I shall again, but I have always been able to see some argument on their side, although it might be a bad one. But I cannot see any argument for this at all. The minister did not give us an argument. He delighted us; he entertained us; he made us laugh, but he did not give us any argument for this extraordinary change in parliamentary procedure.

I should like to refer to one or two opinions which have been expressed by those in the trade. First I should like to read from the *Daily Commercial News* a summation of the opinion of those in the construction industry, and which is exactly what you would expect it to be. I quote from the issue of December 10 as follows:

A check by the *Daily Commercial News* finds there is distinct disquiet in the industry over an amendment to the Public Works Act (Bill 26), now before parliament.

This appears to indicate an abrupt change in the long-established government policy of openly calling competitive bids on almost all federal public projects valued at upward of \$5,000.

And later:

Some in the industry say they are even more concerned about that aspect of Ottawa's almost sudden proposal to revamp the Public Works Act which, they remind fellow construction men, governs federal departments other than the Department of Public Works.

The impression is abroad that this could open the way for switching the opening of public works tenders and the letting of public works contracts