

contracts without the knowledge of the Prime Minister or the government, it reveals a most serious state of affairs, and explains many of the accusations which have been made against this government. Surely the question of an international fence, probably 800 miles in length, is one of rather more importance than the question of the amount of a contract let by this government. Surely that is a contract that should not be let without the knowledge of the Prime Minister. It is a question that has probably been the subject of negotiations with the states to the south of us; it certainly should be if it has not been. If a work of that kind can be let without the knowledge of the Prime Minister, then the door is open to all manner of very doubtful transactions in connection with any department of the government. The wire fencing along the boundary between Switzerland and Italy is regarded as so important that sentries are placed to walk up and down on either side of it. And there are hanging bells to give notice to these sentries if there is any attempt to break through this fence. Of course, I do not pretend that anything of that kind will be required with us. But it shows that it is a question of such importance that it should all be carried out with the thorough understanding of the state officers, so that there may be no question of the boundaries. And, if such a transaction is carried out by any department without the knowledge of the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister is forced to give the answer that he gave the other day, I say there is something radically wrong, something much more serious than the letting of a contract without tender.

Mr. DAVID HENDERSON. I certainly agree with everything that the hon. member for West Toronto (Mr. Osler) has said. And I will go further. I think it is very unfortunate—and the matter has occurred more frequently of late with relation to public works—that the department officials should be allowed such great latitude in deciding the expenditures to be made upon various public works of this country. Instead of taking the instructions of the minister to erect a public building for a certain sum, the officials of the department seem to be left practically uncontrolled to say what the cost of any public work shall be. I have had occasion, time after time, to draw attention to this matter. And the course I have suggested at different times has been approved, especially by the late Hon. Mr. Sutherland, when Minister of Public Works. That gentleman stated that he approved of my plan that the officials of the government should be limited to a certain sum of money for the erection of a public building, after parliament has decided that that building shall be erected. But here we have a case where not only the Prime Minister is not aware of the con-

struction of this fence, but the Minister of the Interior seems to have no knowledge of it and does not seem to have been consulted—only the officials of the department know anything about it. Was parliament ever consulted, and did it vote money for the construction of this fence? If parliament voted the money, I would like to know when that vote passed. I have no recollection of any vote of this House for the erection of such a fence. Of course, if there has been a vote, I presume, that would be a direction to the department to carry out the work. But, if my recollection is accurate—and I think it is—no appropriation has been made for this purpose. I believe, from all that has been learned from this brief discussion, that some official in the department has undertaken to concur in the desire of some contractor to get a big contract without even waiting for the appropriation by parliament to sanction it, and without the minister at the head of the department having approved of it. Whether it was in the Department of the Interior or the Department of Public Works, I do not know. I should think it would be for the Department of Public Works to erect this fence. We have nothing before us to show that the Department of Public Works was ever consulted in the matter or that it sanctioned this expenditure in any way. So far as the facts are before us, it would seem to be one of those cases where departmental officials have assumed to do something they had no authority to do, to expend public money, while we, the members of this House, to a certain extent, along with the government are held responsible. How are we to limit the expenditure of this country if an official of the government is to have power to direct expenditures beyond that of the head of the department, or even that of the Prime Minister, and without consulting parliament? I think the time has come when the Prime Minister should put his foot down on such a practice, and that he should administer a severe rebuke to any colleague of his or any official under the government who would undertake to do such a thing. Now, this is not a small matter. The hon. member for West Toronto (Mr. Osler) said it would cost \$100,000 at least. I have no hesitation in saying that if a proper fence were constructed there it would cost not less than a quarter of a million dollars. Eight hundred miles of fencing, would mean 256,000 rods. To construct a fairly good, substantial fence and provide posts such as ought to be provided in a case of that kind would cost not less than \$1 per rod. I speak of this with some knowledge of what wire fencing is worth. Here we have an expenditure of \$250,000. Now, has it come to this, that an official of the government has power to enter into a contract with a firm friendly to the government to expend a quarter of a million dol-