

but sent it at once to the Minister of Public Works whose business it was to answer it. I did not even read the letter of my hon. friend. I sent it at once to the Minister of Public Works, whose business it was to look into the matter. When the papers are brought down, the matter will bear investigation and can be looked into again. I agree with hon. gentlemen on the other side of the House—and we have shown our earnestness in this respect—that all contracts above \$5,000 should be let by tender, and not on the authority of the minister alone, but on the authority of the whole government; and the law has been amended this very session in order to provide for this in all cases. In regard to this new contract this condition will be observed. Not being an expert in this matter, I am not able to pass judgment upon the specifications which have been laid before the House by my hon. friend from Victoria and Haliburton (Mr. Sam. Hughes). He said that the specifications were intended to be in favour of a certain company. That may be true or not true. At all events, the contract has not yet been let. The matter must come before the Governor in Council before the contract is let, and whatever we do, we shall be responsible for our action. I deprecate the idea that because a certain gentleman happens to be a friend of the government, he has not a right to tender like anybody else.

Some hon. MEMBERS. A perfect right.

Sir WILFRID LAURIER. I know that Mr. Robinette is a prominent lawyer of Toronto, and I know he is a political friend of the government. I did not know before that he was also in business as a member of this firm; but all this does not disqualify this firm from tendering, if its tender be fair and if it be accepted on fair business principles.

Mr. FOSTER. I do not know whether more to congratulate my right hon. friend on the resolution he has finally taken, or to deplore the fact that he did not take that resolution some eight years ago, in 1896 or 1897, when we were informed by a flourish of trumpets that a new policy was to be introduced, that business was to be done on business principles, that the minister of each department was to have a wide range of freedom and be responsible for the work of his department; and yet from 1896 up to the present time, I think a fair examination of the records will show that this country has lost hundreds of thousands of dollars by the fatal mistake of dissolving the bond of cabinet responsibility, and allowing each man to run his own department as seemed good in his own eyes. Will the Prime Minister tell us to-day what amount of money was spent by his one-time Minister of Railways in the province of Prince Edward Island on his own responsibility solely,

without any authorization having been given by the council and without any contract having been entered into in that way? Will the right hon. gentleman tell us how many hundreds of thousands of dollars were illegally and wrongfully and wastefully spent in other parts of the Dominion by ministers without warrant of law or authorization of council? I do not think I shall be stating beyond what is true if I say that this occurred not alone in one little instance of a \$5,000 or \$8,000 contract, but in hundreds of instances. In fact, it has been raised to the standard of the usual and common in some of the departments to have work done without asking for tenders and without having the responsibility of all the ministers attached to it by their authorization. My right hon. friend is perfectly right in saying that Mr. Robinette or any other party worker has a perfect right to attach himself to a company and to tender for public works. So he has, but if there is any strong party friend joined to a concern, corporation or otherwise, who outside of public tender privately solicits work from a department or from the government, the very fact that such a person is attached to it, and the implication that favours might be done for him, should make the government all the stronger in insisting on legality being observed and public tenders being called for. It is impossible to take too much care in the matter of the expenditures of public money, and if there is one thing that this government has been lax in since 1897, it has been in not taking proper care in the expenditure of public money. What came up to-day and what came up yesterday and the day before, and what will probably come up almost every day so long as we remain in session, will be instances of this same utter carelessness as to what the law lays down, or what the proper practice of parliament has been and ought to be, taking economy and honesty of the expenditures into account. I am glad that the Prime Minister, after eight years, has had the lesson so thoroughly pressed upon him that he has made the resolve to limit these free colts in the separate departments, to put a bridle upon them, and to teach them that the collective wisdom of the whole cabinet is a wise check upon the individual wisdom of each member in charge of a department. I do not see how ministerial responsibility and the proper expenditure of public money can be carried on without that. So long as the First Minister persists in his new plan, new to the present government, he will have the whole support of this side of the House. It is the only proper way in which parliamentary expenditures should be carried out.

Mr. GEO. TAYLOR. I would like to inquire from the hon. Minister of Public Works if he is conversant with the prices paid in towns and cities for permanent