

sible ministry and not by irresponsible authority.

I would like the hon. members to consider this whole question in the calm and deliberate manner in which my hon. friend has suggested they should, and in particularly the fundamental question of government by commission or responsible government. We all know that during the period of the war the business government was very greatly increased. Cabinet ministers could not begin to give attention to many matters in connection with their departments, in connection with the work of public administration, which they would, and should, be able to give in normal times, and through the period of the war there were a very large number of new commissions created and the powers of some existing commissions considerably extended. Speaking of the experience that I have been privileged to have in the administration of public affairs during the time that I have had the honour to hold my responsible office, not a very long experience it is true, I should like to say that it has become wholly apparent to me that in many particulars the government is being held responsible by the country for certain aspects of administration over which it has no control whatever, and that as a consequence the ministry is being put in an entirely false position.

Sir HENRY DRAYTON: I would ask my hon. friend to tell us in what regard he finds himself in that position?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I will answer my hon. friend immediately. No need has been stressed so strongly in this House as that of economy. I say, without any fear of contradiction whatever, that had the government in the framing of its estimates been free to act in accordance with its own judgment in the matter of appointments it would have been able, in the case of a number of departments, to have administered the affairs of the country with fewer servants than there are in the public service at the present time.

Sir HENRY DRAYTON: Is it not the truth that the salaries are fixed by order in council and not by the commission, and that it is also the truth that the government can abolish any position they desire?

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: The question of classification, is one quite apart from the competency and the suitability of the individual who may be filling a particular position—

Sir HENRY DRAYTON: That is not my question.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING:—and the government finds itself—I speak now from the

[Mr. Mackenzie King.]

knowledge of the difficulties with which the ministers of the different departments have to contend—the government finds itself continually in the position of being obliged to endeavour to carry on the work of the country with clerks who are sent to the government by the Civil Service Commission but who do not possess the qualifications which if the minister himself were free to make the appointment, he would see were possessed by whoever was appointed.

Sir HENRY DRAYTON: Is it not a fact that under the law as it now stands the ministers can get rid of those men they do not think are competent? They are only sent there for trial.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I might point out to my hon. friend, just in connection with what he has said, that after getting rid of a clerk fresh application has to be made by the deputy minister to the Civil Service Commission. As a consequence the correspondence that is necessary to be carried on between the department and the Civil Service Commission is very considerable; in other words, there has been added to the Civil Service of Canada a not unappreciable number of employees, necessitated solely by the increased amount of correspondence that has to be carried on between the different departments and the Civil Service Commission before any appointment can be made, or before any change can be made or any particular work undertaken.

During the recess between the last session and the present, the government has made a sincere effort to effect economies in the public service. It has endeavoured to work with the existing machinery of government in the most effective way, and to make that machinery just as effective as possible. In that regard, two conferences of particular importance were held; one conference was with the Civil Service Commission itself. The other conference was with the deputy ministers of the departments, who are the permanent heads. The members of the Civil Service Commission and the deputy ministers came into conference with the government to discuss the act, and its workings, in the light of experience. At these conferences the view was expressed by both groups that the act in its present form is not as workable as it should be, that it was capable of amendment and improvement. The deputy ministers themselves have, in joint conference, gone very carefully into the whole matter, and they are unanimously of the view that the act as it stands at the present time is in some of its aspects embarrassing public service, that it is in-