

If only one per cent is saved in handling business to the extent of \$40,000,000 per year, it would represent an economy of \$400,000 per year.

Mr. MICHAEL CLARK: With efficient government, if we have too many men employed in the departments now, it is the duty of the Government to get rid of some of them, and the duty of Parliament to see that the Government does so.

Mr. ROWELL: Again, I quite agree with the hon. member, but the difficulty is that with fifteen different departments doing a similar class of work more men are required than would be the case if there were only one department. I am sure that if hon. members stop to think, they will agree with that statement, which must appeal to the business sense of the House. Not only will there be a saving in the actual cost of administration, but there will be a saving of hundreds of thousands of dollars in the purchase of supplies.

Mr. J. H. SINCLAIR: What does the minister intend to do with the present purchasing agents in the various departments? There are quite a number of capable men trained in the business of purchasing in such departments as the Post Office, Public Works, Marine and Fisheries, etc. What will be their fate after this Bill goes through?

Mr. ROWELL: These men must be taken over for the time being by the War Purchasing Commission. But as the work of the commission becomes organized I think the staff can be steadily reduced and those who are not required can be transferred to other departments. I do not think it would be right to turn out efficient men who are in the existing departments.

Something has been said about the absence of ministerial responsibility. The commission cannot purchase a dollar's worth of supplies unless they are requisitioned by a minister, and the minister must requisition the precise article he wants. It is not open to the discretion of the commission to buy anything they want. If a two dollar or a fifty dollar basket is required the requisition must definitely call for it, and if a steel cabinet or a wooden cabinet is required it must be requisitioned for. The very best prices will be obtained and the best business judgment exercised in the purchasing of goods, and this question does not affect the duties of the Auditor General one iota. He will perform his work as faithfully and as fearlessly as ever.

[Mr. Rowell.]

Mr. COPP: How long has the system under this War Purchasing Commission been in vogue?

Mr. ROWELL: I explained this afternoon that the commission was appointed in 1915 to purchase war supplies, and that it was further empowered to purchase and has purchased general supplies for all branches of the Government except the National railways since February, 1918. There are one or two other points I desire to make clear. The ministers must requisition for the supplies they need. Parliament must vote the money for every dollar that is spent; not a dollar of expenditure is taken away from Parliament. The War Purchasing Commission does what the Central Purchasing Branch of the Canadian Pacific railway does. It purchases, inspects and accepts goods, but the department must requisition for them and pay for them. The department must be responsible for the purchases, and for these reasons I submit that the Bill is greatly in the national interests and is the fulfilment of the pledge made by the Prime Minister when the Union Government went to the country in the year 1917. The people approved of the policy, which is a sound one and is in the public interest, and the Government asks the House to support this Bill.

Mr. LEMIEUX: Is my hon. friend in earnest when he says that this question was the chief issue in the election?

Mr. ROWELL: I do not say that it was the chief issue, but at every meeting at which I was present and at which the Prime Minister spoke he expressed the same sentiments as he did in the speech from which I quoted, and the policy was most cordially accepted by the people. This Bill is presented in fulfilment of the promise he made to abolish patronage in the purchase of all supplies.

Mr. LEMIEUX: What will be the cost of administration?

Mr. ROWELL: The hon. member will get all these particulars in Committee. That the cost will be very much less, is the opinion of Sir Hormisdas Laporte, than the present cost under the several departments.

The House divided on the proposed amendment of Mr. Lemieux, which was negatived on the following division:—

YEAS.

MESSRS.

Baldwin,
Béland,

Best,
Boivin,