

## IRRESPONSIBLE POWER.

### An Executive Independent of the Control of Parliament—The Aim of the Borden Administration.

THE Borden Government has sought to wrest from Parliament rights and privileges which constitute the real safeguards of a people's liberties. Its aim has been to grasp an independent control in expenditure of public moneys, and to so fashion legislation that Parliament may be ignored, instead of consulted, in the administration of public affairs. Where it has been possible to gain independent control by withholding legislation this has been done; to assist in retaining independent control, the closure has been provided as an instrument to silence criticism and prevent exposure. The design has been so deliberate and comprehensive as to constitute a conspiracy against the people on the part of those who for the time being have been entrusted with the duty of Government. The aim is to transform the Executive into a political machine, and to possess it indefinitely of irresponsible power.

In all important measures introduced by the Government there has been this distinguishing feature that they have sought to secure from Parliament the appropriation of enormous sums of money and to make the expenditure of these sums subject only to the power of order-in-council, which is but another name for the Cabinet itself.

#### The Highways' Aid Bill.

The Highways' Aid Bill, introduced at the first and second sessions of Parliament, involved the appropriation of \$10,000,000 in aid of the highways of the Dominion. Parliament was willing to vote the money for the purpose desired, provided the money was distributed among the several Provinces in proportion to their population, and administered by the proper Departments of the several provincial Administrations.

The Borden Government professed to be willing to have the money distributed among the Provinces in proportion to their population, but stubbornly refused to allow one cent to be voted unless the whole expenditure were placed under its absolute and exclusive control, and this notwithstanding the fact that the exercise of such authority would have involved a disregard of the evident intention of the British North America Act, in accordance with which the control of the highways is exclusively a Provincial matter.

By twice refusing to accept the amendment made by the Senate to the effect that the money when voted should be allotted to the Provinces to be spent by them, and in refusing to accept the proposal of the Liberals made at the close of last session, to vote for the current year the amounts set forth in the Estimates to be assigned to the several Provinces, the Government made it perfectly plain that the desire in the proposed legislation was not to further the end professed, so much as to obtain from Parliament ten millions of dollars which might be expended, without further parliamentary control, when, how and where, the Government pleased.

The introduction of the Bill at the time of the by-election in South Renfrew and the promises of government supporters made plain that one purpose

at least was that of unduly influencing constituencies at election times.

#### The Government Railway Branch Lines Bill.

The same motive is disclosed in the action of the Government with respect to a Bill introduced at the last session empowering the ministry to "construct, purchase, lease or otherwise acquire, in whole or in part, any line or lines of railway, branch line, railway bridge, railway station, railway terminal, railway ferry or other railway work in the provinces of Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island," without first obtaining any authorization from Parliament.

The Liberal Opposition, both in the House of Commons and in the Senate, were wholly agreeable to granting to the Government power to construct, lease, or purchase branch lines of railway, but it was pointed out that to give the Government this power without requiring, in the first instance, ratification by Parliament was to render the Executive independent of Parliamentary control.

In the Senate the Bill was amended by the insertion of the words, "provided however that every such lease or contract of purchase shall be laid before Parliament for ratification." This amendment, it will be seen, in no way deprived the government of the right either to lease or to purchase under this Act. The condition was a most salutary one, and involved no limiting of the powers asked for other than a recognition by the Government of their responsibility to Parliament. But notwithstanding this, an effort was made at the instance of the Government in the Senate to have the amendment ruled out on the pretence that the Bill was a money bill and that the Senate, therefore, had no power to amend it. This fictitious objection having been over-ruled by the Liberal majority in the Senate, and the Bill amended in the words quoted, the Government then refused to accept the amendment, and refused, as suggested by the Liberal Opposition, to even agree to a conference with the Senate concerning it. Rather than be subjected to the control of Parliament in any particular, the Administration abandoned the Bill altogether, disclosing, thereby, in the clearest manner possible, that the design of the Government in this measure was not so much the welfare of the public as the gaining of irresponsible power.

#### The Aid to Agriculture Act.

During the last session of Parliament, the Government obtained as an aid to agriculture an appropriation of \$10,000,000 to be expended over a period of ten years. By securing the appropriation in this form, the Government has succeeded in rendering the executive independent of Parliament so far as possessing itself of this enormous sum and avoiding the necessity of going to Parliament for annual appropriations for the succeeding nine years is concerned. It is in voting the supplies annually that Parliament gets its real control over the Executive. In the power to withhold supplies lies the measure of its control. This power as respects