

Sir FREDERICK BORDEN. I refer my hon. friend to his hon. friend who sits in front of him (Mr. Hughes, Victoria).

Mr. CLARKE. I have consulted my hon. friend in front of me on many occasions where militia affairs were in question, and I have never yet regretted having done so. He has always given me sound advice. But the hon. member for North Victoria (Mr. Hughes) is not responsible for this Bill. I think it was a reasonable request to make of the Minister of Militia when I asked him if there had been any complaint that the efficiency of our militia force had not been subserved and advanced in the highest possible degree by the appointment of a British officer as general officer commanding. Has there been any demand for a change on the part of any responsible person in the militia force of Canada?

Mr. SAM. HUGHES. As the minister has referred to me, I might point out to him that under the system whereby a British officer was appointed we were able to get rid of an objectionable man; whereas under the system as proposed we cannot get rid of him.

Sir FREDERICK BORDEN. Admitting that my hon. friend from Toronto (Mr. Clarke) has put a fair question, still I do not think it is involved necessarily in this matter at all. The question is rather: Has Canada assumed such a prominent position by her growth, by the heroic acts of her militia officers at home and in the South African war, as to entitle her to appoint one of her own sons to the command of her militia? Has she not assumed a position when at least there should be removed from the militia of this country the reflection that we cannot rear a man competent to take command of our own forces?

Mr. CLARKE. The hon. gentleman surely does not assume that the growth of the country has been checked in any way by the fact that hitherto her forces have been commanded by a British officer.

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Will my hon. friend contend that it is a reflection upon the capacity of British officers to say that Canadian officers may hereafter occupy that position? Is it necessarily a reflection upon them? What is the object of the question?

Mr. CLARKE. I am asking the minister with the greatest possible respect if there has been any complaint, any objection made to the appointment of British officers to occupy the position of general officer commanding. What is the reason for this change? I ask upon what ground is the change being sought?

Mr. INGRAM. Are we to assume that the statutes of this country can be changed without any complaint or demand for such change? Is that the attitude the Department of Militia is going to take?

Sir FREDERICK BORDEN. I am quite prepared to submit this change to the judgment of the people of Canada to say whether it is a sound change or not. I do not think I am called upon to say anything as to the service of distinguished imperial officers in this country. They have served the country well according to their lights. I have nothing to say against any of them. I have had experience with quite a number and I have not a single word of reflection to utter, but I do say that it seems to me that it is high time the provision in the Canadian statute which involves a reflection upon the capacity of our own officers should be removed. It does not follow that we shall appoint a Canadian officer at once. It will be a matter for the administration to consider whether he shall be appointed this year, or next year, or the year after, or ten years hence, but that the ban, the reflection upon the capacity of our Canadian officers should be removed from the Canadian law, seems to me imperative at this period. I may say that the imperial authorities concur in that view.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN. Without discussing, for the present, the question of principle which has been raised, I would like to ask whether the words in this section have been very carefully considered. It seems to me that it might be at least open to argument that they confine the appointment to an officer of the Canadian militia.

Sir FREDERICK BORDEN. That is not intended.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN. The Bill deals with the active militia, including the permanent force and the reserve militia, and then it says that:

There shall be appointed, an officer of rank not lower than that of colonel to be the general officer commanding the militia.

I would be rather inclined to think that the selection of the general officer commanding would be confined to the Canadian militia, with which alone the Bill deals and if you wish to leave it open to appoint an officer not in the Canadian militia, you would require to say so specially. This, however, is only a question of drafting, but still it would not be well to pass a statute in words which would afterwards be constructed to mean something that we did not intend.

Sir FREDERICK BORDEN. I shall consider that because the intention of the section is to open the command to the whole empire.

Mr. R. L. BORDEN. I understood that.

Mr. TISDALE. I did propose to and probably will say something on the effect of this clause at a later period. I did not propose to say anything to-day, but when the Minister of Militia and Defence made the extraordinary statement that he