

millions of dollars were saved to the people of this country by the course which I took in the spring of 1915. I have been in this Parliament for nearly twenty-three years, and I know something of the methods by which Government purchases have been made in the past, and I remember very distinctly the discussion and the suspicion which have frequently been aroused in connection with them. Every one who has been a member of this House, or has taken an interest in public affairs during past years, knows that the cry of unfair use of political power in respect of Government purchases was almost as strong, if not quite as strong, as the cry with respect to appointments to the public service. The principle upon which this Bill is founded. The principle upon which the Orders in Council were passed when I put forward the recommendation therefor in the spring of 1915 is precisely the same as that which has conferred very important powers upon the Civil Service Commission. That principle leads to such administration of public business as shall eliminate party political influence. The Government does not desire to abdicate responsibility; it would be absolutely impossible for it to abdicate responsibility even if it desired to do so. Whether you carry out purchases by a dozen different purchasing commissions, as has been the practice in the past, or by one purchasing commission, as is proposed by this Bill, the responsibility of the Government is the same.

A Government cannot shelter itself behind the acts of officials; it must accept responsibility for the acts of every official. If he is wrong, dispense with him, or if he is an official of the character proposed here, who can be removed only by vote of Parliament, bring his case to Parliament and ask Parliament to deal with him. In any case the responsibility of the Government continues from beginning to end.

I should be very sorry if the idea should prevail in this country that it would be better to return to a system under which beyond question political pressure and influence were put forward and utilized, and not to adhere to a system under which, so far as I know, there has been an absolute lack of any suggestion that in making public purchases any interest except that of the public was regarded. I can say this further, that to my mind it is exceedingly important that the time of members of the Government, which was inevitably taken up with such matters under the former system, should be free from such demands,

[Sir Robert Borden.]

and that they should be able to say to members of Parliament and to all others: It is the duty of the particular department in question to put forward its requisition for supplies it may reasonably require, and when that requisition is put forward, you have the assurance of an absolutely independent commission that those supplies will be purchased with a sole eye to the public interest and with an absolute disregard of whether the persons who furnish those supplies belong to any political party or class. I repeat that in the public interest it is highly important that ministers of the Crown should not have their time taken up with claims put forward by persons who conceive themselves entitled to consideration. I know that my time was by no means free from questions and difficulties of that character before the Purchasing Commission was established in 1915; but since that commission was established, I do not believe that on an average one hour a month has been occupied with any such matter.

The hon. member for South Renfrew (Mr. Pedlow) has criticised the commission in respect of matters for which it is in no wise responsible. We never intended to give, nor do we now give the commission power to dictate to any department. Occasionally, during the past four years the members of the War Purchasing Commission have said this to me: There is such and such a requisition for an enormous quantity of supplies for war purposes; we really think this subject should be brought to your attention, because it seems to us, although we have no right to dictate, that the proposed supply is much greater than should reasonably be required. I have taken up the matter, and in many cases the representations of the War Purchasing Commission to me in that regard have resulted in a considerable reduction of the supplies ordered and purchased. After all it is simply a question of whether it is better to disperse the purchasing organization over fifteen, sixteen or seventeen departments, or to concentrate it under one systematic management. Apart from the considerations to which I have alluded, that is the chief question.

I am not going into the details of this Bill. We shall be glad of the advice and suggestions of every member of this House respecting the particular methods and proposals. We have an entirely open mind in regard to that. But I think it is my duty to say that, if there is any suggestion that the men whom I invited to undertake these