

of the committee of last year could mean only one thing, namely, that this regulation should be more drastically enforced. But surely it is not intended, just because the age limit of sixty-five years has been reached, to deprive the government of authority to retain in the service in special cases a man who is of great value and who would be very hard to replace. One other point I would indicate in that connection is that if the regulation were rigidly enforced immediately, this would add a considerable burden to the superannuation fund by throwing out many hundreds of employees whose services could under ordinary circumstances be continued by order in council.

These questions I consider should be reopened for further study by the committee, and there can be a merging with the new recommendations so that when this committee brings in its report during the course of the session we shall have only one report to deal with.

I have only to add a word to alleviate the fears of any hon. member that the continuance of the work of this committee may in the least degree weaken the authority of the civil service commission. On the contrary, the appointment of the committee is meant to strengthen the civil service commission and to surround it with the proper guarantees which it has a right to expect from parliament. I need hardly repeat what has been so often said by my right hon. leader (Mr. Mackenzie King), namely that the present government is strongly and unequivocally in favour of the merit system, and I believe that parliament, if the question were put to a vote, would pronounce by a very large majority in favour of the merit system. But we all know that in the application of that system regulations of all sorts have to be considered. There have been inquiries into the administration of the civil service during the course of every parliament. I have myself served on several such committees. The present inquiry was promised early in the life of this parliament, but on account of the shortness of the sessions the inquiry was started only last year, and the expectation in all quarters of the house was that it would be continued this year.

Let me assure hon. members that there is not the least desire on the part of the government, either in instituting the committee last year or in continuing it this year, to do away with the principle that obtains in the civil service. The committee is asked to inquire into the operation of the act and to recommend changes in the regulations. Of course, when you have a parliament of 245

[Mr. Rinfret.]

members you cannot prevent all sorts of opinions from being voiced and all sorts of demands from being made, but I wish to say again most emphatically that so far as the government is concerned it stands strongly for the merit system. It wants that system applied fully, and it wants to surround the application of that system with all the guarantees that will make it worthy of our country. That is all I have to say, and in commending this resolution to the house I trust that the interesting debate we have had this afternoon will be referred for continuance to the committee when it is constituted.

Mr. STEWART: Would the hon. gentleman allow me to ask him one question as to the age for retirement, seventy or sixty-five? Is retirement now compulsory at sixty-five unless in individual cases an extension is made, or is it merely optional?

Mr. RINFRET: At sixty-five it is optional, although it does require an order in council. After seventy it is compulsory.

Motion agreed to.

TRADE AGREEMENTS

CANADA-UNITED STATES—CONTINUATION OF DEBATE ON MOTION FOR APPROVAL SUBJECT TO REQUIRED LEGISLATION

The house resumed from Friday, February 17, consideration of the motion of Mr. Mackenzie King that the house go into committee on the following proposed resolution:

That it is expedient that parliament do approve of the trade agreement entered into at Washington on the 17th day of November, 1938, between Canada and the United States of America, and that this house do approve of the same, subject to the legislation required in order to give effect to the provisions thereof.

Hon. J. L. ILSLEY (Minister of National Revenue): Mr. Speaker, the resolution before the house reads:

That it is expedient that parliament do approve of the trade agreement entered into at Washington on the 17th day of November, 1938, between Canada and the United States of America, and that this house do approve of the same, subject to the legislation required in order to give effect to the provisions thereof.

We are debating this resolution, which is an important government measure effecting far-reaching reductions of duties in this country, and indirectly, perhaps it is fair to say, in Great Britain and the United States. We are debating the principle of this resolution, not the details, and if it had not been for some of the remarks made in the debate, principally