

The Civil Service

the victors belong the spoils." . . . But I say that I do not see how it will be possible for the Civil Service Commission, sitting in Ottawa, to ascertain the proper persons to appoint to these positions without applying to those who might be reasonably expected to know who were qualified for them. I repudiate the reflection which I maintain is to a certain extent thrown upon members of parliament generally by the wording of this resolution and by some of those who are supporting it. In effect, you are saying that no man who has been chosen as a representative of the people to sit in this House can be trusted to make an honest recommendation or to select an efficient man to fill a vacancy in the Civil Service. . . . That is putting members of parliament on a very low plane.

The history of the commission since that time has, I think, fully borne out the predictions made by the gentleman whose remarks I have just quoted. It has been found to be practically impossible for the Civil Service Commission to make the impartial and judicious choice which was had in mind when the commission was appointed. They do not, either from choice or through fear of adverse criticism, wish to take into consideration the suggestions and recommendations of those who by their local knowledge are best fitted to understand the situation in any given locality. They are thus forced to call in and to take counsel from persons who in many cases have neither the confidence nor the respect of the inhabitants of the locality, and in a number of other cases have themselves been appointed to the positions which they hold from partisan motives and in order to increase the prestige of some political party. The result of this system is that instead of what was formerly called patronage we have a species of nepotism,—a kind of series of family compacts spread over the length and breadth of the land. Instead of the appointments being made by someone who is responsible to the constituency in which the vacancy occurs, the appointments are made by officers or by outsiders many of whom do not understand the conditions of the locality and are not fit in some cases to make any recommendations.

It is not my intention to ask that competitive examinations be done away with altogether. In fact, my understanding of the act of 1908 is that in a large number of cases competitive examinations must be held, but I do contend that there are certain positions for which competitive examinations, written or oral, are unnecessary and in many cases useless. When it devolves upon the commission to choose a man for a position requiring certain technical or professional knowledge, I contend that the Civil Service Commissioners are not qualified to judge whether or not the applicant has the necessary qualifications, and when it comes to the appointment of manual labourers I contend that

[Mr. Power.]

the Civil Service Commission cannot, by written or oral examination held in Ottawa, judge which man should be selected and which rejected in, say, Prince Rupert, British Columbia.

There has been some question of economy brought into this discussion. It is not the intention of those who support the resolution to ask that any more positions in the civil service of Canada be created. Their intention is simply to ask that appointments be made on a more impartial and more judicious system than has obtained during the last five years. I contend, Sir, that the efficiency of this service was just as high, that the public servants did their duty just as well, and probably better, five years ago than they do to-day. Almost since confederation we have had what might be called political appointments, and I think that, generally speaking, the public service of Canada was as efficient under that system of political appointments as it is to-day under the present arbitrary system. I cannot understand how it could be otherwise. The business administrative head of a department, the deputy minister, can surely not obtain from his subordinates, those who work in his department, the same loyal support and the same steady work under a system which gives him no right to punish, as he would get when he was absolutely and personally responsible for carrying on the affairs of his department. I contend that owing to this system under which appointments are made by someone who has no interest whatsoever in the efficient carrying on of the work of the department, discipline has slackened, the morale has been lowered, and the esprit de corps, of the department lessened. Would any hon. member—and I appeal particularly to my hon. friend the ex-Minister of Finance (Sir Henry Drayton), who was laughing a short time ago—accept, in his own business, appointments made by someone outside of the executive head of his business? Would he accept from a third party, say, the manager of his business, particularly when he had no confidence whatsoever in that third party? I think my hon. friend will agree with me that if we are endeavouring to have business government in this country we must carry on government on business principles, and if we are seeking to obtain the most efficient service possible, let those who are in charge of this service have perfect liberty to choose those in whom they have the greatest confidence and who, in their opinion, may be best able to do the work.

Before taking my seat I should like to refer to the fact that in 1921 a debate took place on