

all purchases. Hon. gentlemen who were members of this House in the last Parliament will recollect that in the spring of 1915 the War Purchasing Commission was established for the purpose of controlling the purchase of all articles required by the Government for the purposes of war. It has done good work and given excellent service; the gentlemen who compose it have given their services freely and voluntarily as a patriotic duty. We have passed an Order in Council that not only war purchases but purchases of all articles, commodities or materials required by the Government shall be made through the War Purchasing Commission and by tender and contract.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier: Who are the members of this commission?

Sir Robert Borden: Hon. H. Laporte, of Montreal, chairman; Mr. Gault, of Winnipeg, and Mr. Gundy, of Toronto. On the retirement of Sir Edward Kemp from the board when he went overseas, Mr. Laporte was appointed chairman, and Mr. Gundy became the third member of the board.

That statement by the Prime Minister, made at the opening of the session a year ago, was to implement the pledge made by the Prime Minister when the Union Government went to the country in the general election in the fall of 1917.

I had the privilege of speaking with the Prime Minister in the province of Ontario at a number of meetings. I do not know what he said elsewhere, but I know what he said in Ontario, and according to my best recollection there was not a meeting at which he spoke where he did not point out to the electors that the policy of the Government was to abolish party patronage, not only by appointments to the public service by extending the scope of the Civil Service Commission, but also in the purchase of all war supplies by enlarging the powers of the War Purchasing Commission, and to make the work permanent. On every platform on which I heard the Prime Minister speak he made that pledge to the country, and I know with what enthusiasm it was received by the people. I want to say to my hon. friends on both sides of the House, much as some of them might and do prefer the old system of party patronage in which political influence undoubtedly affects purchases in the departments of the Government, that I have been sufficiently in touch with the political life of the country for the past twenty years to know that prior to the establishment of the War Purchasing Commission political influence played a large part in the purchase of supplies in connection with the Government. The people of this country are heartily sick of that kind of thing, and they responded most cordially to the Prime Minister's announcement of policy in this matter.

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Mr. MICHAEL CLARK: Does the minister contend that party purchases are an absolutely necessary result of party government?

Mr. ROWELL: I do not contend that, but I say that the experience in this country under all governments—at least all governments within my recollection—is that party patronage has influenced purchases in the Government departments.

Mr. MICHAEL CLARK: England at the end of the eighteenth century was extremely corrupt, but a better state of life arose under party government, and I am glad that my hon. friend admits that party patronage and party government are not necessarily co-existent.

Mr. ROWELL: I quite agree that they are not, but prior to the appointment of this commission party patronage did prevail under both Governments. I ask hon. members to recall public criticism in the press and in Parliament, by the Opposition, in reference to the purchase of supplies, while the Liberal Government was in power, and, when the Conservative Government was in power, by the Liberal Opposition. Prior to the appointment of this War Purchasing Commission, in the press and throughout the country there was public criticism of middlemen who stepped in and got a rake-off and commissions. Who has heard that criticism in the past two or three years? It has ceased to exist. The business men of Canada have absolute confidence in the impartiality and fair dealing which the War Purchasing Commission has given them. They are satisfied that they have been given a square deal and that there is no discrimination, and for these reasons I submit that it is greatly in the public interest that the commission should be continued.

My hon. friend from Red Deer (Mr. Clark) inquired with regard to expenditures. He was not able to accept my estimate for the time being without some proof. In the different departments of the Government there are at present probably no fewer than three hundred officials engaged in connection with the purchasing, inspection and acceptance of supplies for the Government, and the opinion of the War Purchasing Commission is that by consolidating all the work under one single purchasing commission there will be a substantial saving from the mere standpoint of the number of officials employed to do the work. There will be a saving by reason of the greater efficiency in purchasing.