

*Civil Service Act*

Mr. ROSS: The argument that a person becomes a private secretary with the understanding of later on entering the civil service is, I think, a very poor argument.

An hon. MEMBER: Why?

Mr. ROSS: Why should a private secretary be given such a preference over those who have to take a competitive examination in order to enter the service? I have listened to the argument on both sides, and I repeat that that was about the weakest argument that could be put up, namely, that a person becomes a private secretary, I do not care under what government, with the promise that he is going to step into some nice job in the civil service.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): One comes to have a realization of the difficulties to be encountered when one has had experience. For example, in 1922, when the late government came into office we found the private secretary of the Prime Minister left high and dry after a good many years' service.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: There were three of them.

Mr. STEWART (Edmonton): Yes, there were three, and this particular man was absorbed into the civil service and became a very valuable member of it. Another one is acting as private secretary to-day. I took my private secretary from the civil service itself, and when I went out of office he was absorbed back into the service. I do know, however, that I tried through the avenue of the Civil Service Commission to have provision made for two of these private secretaries who had been left stranded and we did manage to absorb them into the civil service. I do not know of any civil servant who has suffered in consequence of these appointments, and I thought probably the committee that suggested this amendment would have evidence to prove that people in the civil service who had earned the right to promotion had been prevented from being promoted by the absorption of private secretaries into the civil service at the time of the change of government. It does seem to me that a man who has acted as private secretary to a minister for seven or eight years, as some of these gentlemen whom we found out in the cold had acted, is entitled to some consideration. It is all right, as the hon. member for Kindersley has pointed out, to say that we as members of the house must take our chances, that we have nothing to look forward to after our term of service has

[Mr. Chevrier.]

expired, but I say, Mr. Chairman, that the man who acts in the capacity of private secretary, if he is worthy of the name at all, is a valuable acquisition to the civil service of this country. That is my feeling in the matter. Perhaps the provision in the old act, that one year's service as a private secretary entitles a man to entrance to the civil service, might be amended to call for a period of five or six years, but it seems to me that it is hardly fair that with a change of government five or six men who have given good service should be left out in the cold and have to seek some other employment. There are usually not more than that number.

Mr. NICHOLSON: One word, Mr. Chairman, in reply to the hon. member for Kingston City (Mr. Ross). I do not think he caught the implication of the suggestion with regard to the rights of those who have come into the service. At the time they came in the law provided that they would be taken care of. The law, as it stood, made provision for them, and if this legislation comes into effect they will not be cared for. The proposed legislation would undermine the conditions under which these men came into the service as private secretaries.

Perhaps what the ex-minister said may be worthy of some consideration, namely that the period of time they should serve could be extended from one to three or four years. However to take that class of man and say that he must go back and pass an examination to take a position as janitor or office boy, or some other position, and then to work up again, is grossly unfair. No business in this country could be built up by following that principle. These men and women have come into the service because of their exceptional qualifications, or they would not be here. They have served and are serving, and to pass an enactment saying that because a government or minister may change they must be cut adrift without any moorings whatsoever is in my view the most unfair suggestion I have heard brought before this House of Commons.

Mr. ROSS: I do not think my hon. friend appreciated my stand. I do not see any reason why these men should not pass a civil service examination. The best qualified clerk in any city or town, or anywhere else, cannot take a government position without passing an examination. If they pass civil service examinations they are eligible for positions. I come to the argument that nothing has been heard about anybody being hurt. How can one person be put into a high position with-