

steel cabinets. I do not think that it should be necessary either for a manufacturing concern or for members to indulge in such propaganda. If we were in a position to convince the department that it was in the public interest to buy these wooden cabinets, it should be the duty of some person to act accordingly. We were referred to the War Purchasing Board, and with no better results. They treated us in exactly the same way; that is to say, they took the position that it was none of their business. The requisitions were sent into the War Purchasing Commission, and they simply rubber stamped them and passed them on to the Public Works Department, which made the purchases. I do not think you can convince any intelligent business man that doing business along those lines is in the interest of this country or of the public service.

The contract for the 500 filing cabinets that I have in mind was tendered for at the rate of \$41 for each steel cabinet. The same cabinet exactly in dimensions and in actual service, but made of oak, was obtainable at \$27. That represents a saving of \$14 on each cabinet, or an actual saving on the entire contract of \$7,000. When I convinced the Minister of Public Works of this feature of the transaction, there was no difficulty whatever; an order was placed for the wooden cabinets. I understand he has given instructions that no further orders shall be given for steel cabinets. Whether that is correct or not, I am not sure, but that is my information.

During the course of my investigation I found that in the preceding fourteen months 2,500 steel cabinets were ordered at an average cost of \$49 each, as against \$27 for the wooden cabinet, or the enormous difference of \$55,000. In other words, it cost the country \$55,000 more for the cabinets purchased during the previous year through the War Purchasing Commission; and it must be remembered that this is merely one sample of work that happened to come to my personal knowledge. In the fourteen months the War Purchasing Commission had actually thrown away \$62,000 of the public funds. If that is to be taken as a measure of the value of the service rendered by this commission to the country, then, Sir, I say the sooner we dispense with it the better.

I agree with the ideal condition enunciated by the member for Algoma, but I take exception to some of the examples he referred to. For instance, he stated that it is the custom with most of the large de-

[Mr. Pedlow.]

partmental stores of this country to have purchasing agents independent of the heads of the various departments. I am sure he does not wish to be incorrect, but as a matter of fact he is not correct, because I know whereof I speak. The men who have charge of the departments in such stores are entirely responsible for their particular departments. They are experts in their own line, and they do the buying and they supervise the selling. That is beyond doubt. But that is a different position altogether to the purchasing of supplies for the Dominion Government or for a large corporation like the Canadian Pacific Railway. It would be to the benefit of this country if such purchasing could be done under the supervision of the head of a department as outlined by the member for North Oxford; that, I think, would be an ideal condition. There is no need to establish another department of the public service with its elaborate staff to purchase the necessary supplies for the various departments, even if they do amount, as is claimed by the President of the Council, to the enormous sum of \$40,000,000 a year. Such purchasing could be effected by a less elaborate staff than is outlined in this Bill.

Other points I purpose to discuss at greater length when the Bill is in the Committee stage; but there is one section I would like to call to the attention of the minister, and that is the section destroying the effective service of the whole proposition. I refer to section 12, subsection 2.

The commission shall have no authority to change or vary any requisition.

That is just exactly the position taken by the Commission in the case I have called attention to. When I appealed to them to listen to the arguments of the manufacturer of wooden cabinets, they said, "We have nothing to do with that. We would not think of interfering with a requisition handed in to us by the head of a department." That is a vital point in the service to be rendered by such a commission. They should be in a position to dictate to any department the class of goods required for the Government service.

If a department requisitions gold-plated spittoons, I suppose the Purchasing Commission would have no authority to say; you cannot have them gold-plated; ordinary copper will have to do. If waste-paper baskets costing \$32 were requisitioned, I suppose the commission would have no authority to change or vary the requisition. If a department ordered extravagant furni-