

Hon. Mr. Flynn: The Commission survived 22 years of Liberal administration.

Hon. Mr. Lamontagne: Some objections were raised before the adoption of that important legislation. For instance, it was said that Her Majesty the Queen could not bargain with her own subjects and that the supremacy of Parliament could not be encroached upon by collective agreements.

The fact that, when this legislation was before Parliament, these arguments were not seriously considered, shows how removed our political symbolism had become from the new reality.

Meanwhile, especially after 1935, the civil service Establishment emerged and gradually became the centre of power within the federal administration, beginning when Mr. Towers in the Bank of Canada and Dr. Clark in the Department of Finance joined Dr. Skelton who was already in the Department of External Affairs.

Generally speaking, at least until recently, when the Establishment was united behind or against a certain policy, its advice was accepted by cabinet; when there was a division—

Hon. Mr. Flynn: On what basis do you state that?

Hon. Mr. Lamontagne: Just be patient.

Hon. Mr. Flynn: You suggested that you wanted to close the debate. You are opening up a new one.

Hon. Mr. Lamontagne: No. I am suggesting that your colleagues may have had that effect.

When there was a division of opinion between officials of a particular department and those of the Department of Finance, including the Treasury Board, then the views of the latter would prevail at the cabinet table. I knew the situation personally, when I was a civil servant, where two important groups of the Establishment were not able to reconcile their views on a vital policy issue. In that circumstance, as well as in others, the cabinet failed to act.

The supremacy of the Establishment may have reached its peak recently when, as a result of the implementation of the Glassco report, deputy ministers were given important managerial responsibilities which had been viewed before as being too sensitive, as being too dangerous, as being perhaps too important to be exercised by ministers and had been transferred from ministers to the Civil Service Commission.

[Hon. Mr. Lamontagne.]

The special position of influence of the Establishment was underlined again some years ago when a minister was asked by the Opposition to resign for having consulted outside experts, and when another minister had to resign for having reached a decision without proper consultation with his civil servants.

Hon. Mr. Flynn: I do not like that interpretation. That is your interpretation of the Gordon affair.

Hon. Mr. Lamontagne: All right. Then let me tell you a story which is supposed to be true and which illustrates the fall of ministers and the rise of civil servants. It is reported that a Liberal backbencher who had ambition and a good sense of humour decided one day to write to Mr. Mackenzie King asking to be appointed to the cabinet.

Hon. Mr. Flynn: I knew this would come up, because it is a good illustration.

Hon. Mr. Lamontagne: Yes, this is a good illustration.

In his reply, Mr. King, who could then afford to be straightforward, told the daring backbencher that he did not have the competence and the high intellectual qualifications required for such an important assignment. The persistent member, who was obviously not satisfied with that answer, wrote back to Mr. King saying, "My dear Prime Minister, I believe that you have misunderstood the nature of my request. High as my ambition can aspire, I did not expect, of course, to become a deputy minister; I merely wanted to be a minister."

I am sure the Leader of the Government (Mr. Martin) could tell us more about that little byplay, but whether the story is true or not, in my view it symbolizes very succinctly the twilight of ministers in Canada.

[Translation]

We should not jump at the conclusion, even if this is the feeling of the Leader of the Opposition, that the powers of senior officials have always been carried out along the same lines and that they have never been subjected to any kind of limitations. I think that positive influence—and I mean positive influence—was at its peak during the last years of the St. Laurent régime, because, under Mr. Diefenbaker, their authority was mostly negative, according to the oft-repeated evidence given by the Honourable Alvin Hamilton and corroborated in this House by honourable Senator O'Leary about two weeks ago. They