

Mr. ROWELL: They will report direct to the Prime Minister.

Sir SAM HUGHES: They will not be under the control of any minister of the Crown?

Mr. ROWELL: No, only so far as they must report to the Prime Minister.

Sir SAM HUGHES: How far would the minister of a department have authority to deal with this commission?

Mr. SPEAKER: I must remind the House that we are not in Committee. This is a debate on a second reading, on which it is competent for each hon. member to speak but once in discussing the principle of the Bill. It is not in order to go into details at this stage in the same manner as in Committee.

Mr. A. E. FRIPP (Ottawa): Has the minister made any investigation of the working of the commission which has been in operation during the last three or four years as compared with the purchasing by the departments separately through their purchasing agents?

Sir SAM HUGHES: Hear, hear.

Mr. SPEAKER: Order. If the hon. gentleman wishes to ask a question he may do so; but if he purposes to make a speech, that is quite another matter.

Mr. FRIPP: I purpose to make a speech, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. SPEAKER: It is understood that the minister has spoken.

Mr. FRIPP: I will withdraw that statement, Mr. Speaker. I do not purpose to make a speech, but I purpose to offer one or two observations. I am informed not only by merchants who have had dealings with the War Purchasing Commission, but also by purchasing agents of the different departments, that the operation of this War Purchasing Commission has not been a success.

For example, I am informed that they ask for tenders for certain commodities, returnable on a certain day, but that they do not order the goods until three or four months afterwards. That is to say, no time is stated within which the goods must be delivered if the tender is accepted. The result is that it is impossible for intending tenderers to give the better price, because they do not know the date of delivery, and for that reason the War Purchasing Commission has been paying much larger prices for goods than would be paid if the

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purchasing was done upon a more business-like basis. In fact, I am told that the business of the War Purchasing Commission has been managed by one or two clerks, and that business men who have dealings with them find the commission very unsatisfactory as to prices, date of delivery, and general quantities required. On the other hand, I am informed by purchasing agents of the departments—perhaps more or less in confidence—that they were able to purchase more advantageously for the Government when they purchased solely for their own departments; that they got better delivery and better prices, and that the goods were superior. I am also informed that local purchasing is practically cut out; that the War Purchasing Commission have been buying largely in the United States and that they refuse to recognize local agents for the supplying of goods manufactured in the United States. The result is that a large number of mercantile agents have been unable to do business with this commission. I bring these matters to the attention of the House because I think that before we embark upon a scheme which means a large expenditure of public money in the payment of large salaries to members of this commission and its staff, we should investigate the matter more carefully and see whether the system is any improvement over the one that was in vogue prior to the creation of the War Purchasing Commission.

Mr. JOHN HAROLD (Brant): Mr. Speaker, before the Bill goes into Committee I should like to make a few observations dealing with the principles of this measure. You will agree that this is one of the most important subjects from the business standpoint that has been brought before the House this session. I think we should concern ourselves more about the soundness of the principles which underlie this Bill than about the question whether some of the details in connection with the manner in which we have been purchasing recently are an improvement on the methods of the past.

We are departing, by this Bill, from the procedure that has been adopted by the War Purchasing Commission, in that a new organization is being set up. We are combining in one department the experts and others who have been looking after the purchasing in the different departments, in order that these specialists may devote their attention and abilities to work which will benefit all departments. Let me illustrate.