

Parliament and Patronage

IN a recent article dealing with the legislative achievements of the first Union parliament at its initial session the purpose and aim of the Civil Service bill was explained in general terms. It was indicated by the writer that while practically all members of the commons declared themselves as being in favor of the principle behind the proposal to eliminate political patronage, and to adopt the merit system in the outside as well as the inside service, many of them were none too friendly to the government's proposal to immediately convert these ideas into law.

The most apt description of the attitude of parliament was furnished by R. L. Richardson, member for Springfield, Man., who said the remarks of certain members of the House reminded him of the old couplet—

"You shall and you shan't, you will and you won't;

You'll be damned if you do, you'll be damned if you don't."

To those who listened to the debate it was certainly somewhat difficult to reconcile declarations of belief in the principle of the proposed legislation with subsequent criticisms coming from the same lips. Nevertheless, when consideration is given to the matter of the difference between the inside and outside services, it is possible to appreciate many of the arguments advanced by members. The broad difference between the two services arises out of the circumstance that members of the inside service make their living by devoting their entire time and energies to the work they are called upon to do. They are not supposed to take up other employment even of a temporary kind. When the Civil Service bill of 1908 was introduced by Hon. Sydney Fisher, it was found to be quite an easy thing to apply the principles of classification and merit to the employment of a body of men and women devoting all their energies to public service; but it was an entirely different matter to do this with the outside service which includes many thousands of people, such as country postmasters and other minor government officials, who earn their living in other ways and hold a government post "on the side." That is the chief reason why the original bill was confined in its operation to the inside service. It is also the major reason why the bill of last session does not absolutely recognize the principle of examinations for entry into the outside service and why other ways have been adopted for the securing of employees of a more or less temporary character.

An Illustration and an Explanation

In explaining why this classification of the inside service would not apply to the outside service, Hon. A. K. MacLean, the sponsor for the bill gave the following illustration—

"Take the customs service for instance, it would hardly do to classify the outside customs service as the inside service is classified today. In many cases, salaries of \$100, \$200 and \$300 a year are paid, and that is all the recipients expect, and all they deserve for the services performed, which only requires one or two hours a day on the part of such civil servants. The bill provides that after its passage the Civil Service Commission shall report to the government and to parliament some scheme of re-organization of the inside and outside services, and as soon as that report is made the government shall take into consideration the matter of the abolition of the outside service."

Equally interesting was the explanation given by the minister of the plan proposed to remove this class of appointments from the realm of political patronage—

"Heretofore permanent appointment in the inside service" he said "was based solely on the result of an educational test. This gave to the candidates, fresh from the class-room, and yet lacking in experience, a great advantage over the educated and altogether more suitable person who possessed business experience but might be a trifle rusty in some of the subjects written at the examination."

Some Members favored Elimination of Patronage in Theory Only—The Spirit was willing but the Flesh was Weak—Bill Finally Passed.

By The Guide's Ottawa Correspondent

"In future it is proposed in appointments to both the inside and outside services to give a rating for business experience, and thus, while not lowering the standard of the educational test, will enable the public service to be recruited from the really most efficient of those who successfully compete at the examinations."

"Where a vacancy occurs in a post-mastership, a collectorship of customs, or the like, is an important centre, the same will wherever possible be filled by promotion. If the public interest would not be served thereby the position will be thrown open to competition and applications invited from persons possessing the necessary qualifications and who have been residents of the city or vicinity for a stated period."

"There is naturally a very strong feeling throughout the country that positions should, wherever possible, be filled by the appointment of local persons and that, except in the case of transfers, which might occasionally become necessary, 'outsiders' as they are regarded should not receive preference."

"The United States Federal Civil Service system recognizes this principle,

Conservative Unionist from Brantford, "the members of this House and the people of this country will have every reason to be dissatisfied if the appointment of the Civil Service Commission is going to mean that the members of the Civil Service in all the towns and cities from east to west and north to south are going to be sent from the city of Ottawa. I do not know whether this is the intention or not, but I want the minister to guard against that. I lay down as a principle that every riding is entitled to a certain number of its own people to administer its own business. That may be considered a rather narrow view, but I think it is a practical opinion. I think in all our communities we have men who are fit to discharge the various duties in all walks of life."

E. W. Nesbitt, Liberal Unionist from North Oxford, expressed a fear that the bill would put too much power in the hands of the members of the Civil Service Commission. "Everything would be all right if they were fair-minded men who would not be subject to secret influence on the part of some members of the government, or by people known

and run that post-office. The man who is running that store then, instead of getting the appointment of postmaster, with a salary of \$30 or \$40 a year attached to it, has to pass the qualifying examination and when he does perhaps he has not got the job. Somebody will be sent to take that job, somebody perhaps from the North west or from Three Rivers to fill that position."

Bertha for Deputies' Poor Relations

H. C. Hocken, Toronto, was another member who expressed the fear that the various constituencies would not get their proper share of appointments under the act. "I was very much impressed," he said, "by the remark made by the member for Brantford (Mr. Cockshutt). It will not be satisfactory to send from Ottawa, Toronto, Hamilton or other eastern centres, men to take up government positions, say, in Calgary or Edmonton. Those in the locality concerned who are qualified should receive special consideration. I do not say this because I want to have anything to do with appointments in Toronto; I am delighted to be relieved of the responsibility. But the local feeling with regard to appointments of this kind should receive the consideration of the government. The member for North Simcoe (Col. Currie) emphasized the wide power that is conferred upon deputy ministers. I want to get away from patronage; I believe that that is the sentiment of the people. But if the people are forced to choose between the patronage system and the family-compact system, they will prefer the former. Nothing is more repugnant to public sentiment than the filling of public offices with men connected by blood relationship, or by marriage, with some particular group of officials. This bill put into the power of a deputy minister practically to take care of every relative he has, and every relative his wife has, and every person he is connected with in any way."

An Effort to Shelve the Bill

During consideration of the bill in committee quite a determined drive was inaugurated by some of the members having for its objective the shelving of the bill at least until another session. Mr. Best, of Dufferin, who was the first to go "over the top" with the suggestion that the bill should be held over, protested vigorously because the Civil Service Federation had sent out a circular stating that "some influential agency is endeavoring to dissuade the Union government from proceeding with the bill for civil service reform by the abolition of patronage in appointments and promotions in the public service." Mr. Best denied that he had been approached by anyone, but he failed to understand how two or three men sitting in Ottawa could possibly know what is the best thing to be done in the counties of Dufferin or Simcoe. "This is a very important bill," said Mr. Best, "and I think it should not be pressed through the House in the dying hours of the session. I believe it would be in the public interest if the bill was left over and a committee were appointed to examine it carefully and report at the next session of the House. I firmly believe that something should be done in the way of civil service reform, but in my opinion this bill is altogether too drastic."

While the majority of western members gave unqualified support to the bill, J. G. Turfitt was disposed to favor the idea that it should be allowed to stand over. "Would it not be better," he asked, "to leave this bill over until the commission report what they propose by way of amalgamating the outside and the inside services? I think it would be a good thing to have that done, and to have the whole service taken out of politics as far as possible and to do away with patronage. It seems to me that the committee of the whole is not a good body to deal with this bill clause by clause. We have not the time now at the end of the session to discuss it fully. If the bill is now dealt with I venture to say there is not

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And so the Poor Dog Got None

and in advertising for higher positions, limits the eligibility of the applicants to the vicinity of the particular town or city concerned, a year's previous residence being required. Our Civil Service Commission purpose following quite closely the rule adopted in the United States."

"The Civil Service Commission will appoint a board of three persons to whom the applications will be submitted for examination and report. The employment of temporary laborers who in some centres at least have heretofore been assigned from the lists kept by the political managers of the party for the time being in power will in future be based upon the necessities of the public service, and the fitness for employment of those applying therefor."

A Question of Workability

The workability of the plan proposed by the minister and the desirability of eliminating members of the House altogether in connection with the making of appointments within their own constituencies appeared to be the chief ground of criticism and complaint in connection with the consideration of the bill.

"I think," said W. F. Cockshutt,

to them. If they were not, he said, "the system will be nothing but a curse and a nuisance." He favored the bill provided it was fairly administered.

Colonel Currie Critical

One of the most vigorous critics of the bill was Col. J. A. Currie, the leader of the "Ginger" group on the government side of the House. "We are going," he said, "to put the outside service under a commission and have examinations. Can the minister tell me what kind of an examination you are going to have, for instance, for a man who shovels coal into a furnace? A lot of these men in the outside service are men employed to shovel coal, feed furnaces, sweep sidewalks and wash windows. We go far afield and come to the most important office of all, the post office. Now in the case of a small post-office in the country the postmaster, or postmistress, must pass a qualifying examination. Formerly they had to be examined by the post office inspector who had to find out whether the party nominated was fit for the post or not. But that is not going to be the case in the future. As it is now the man who has a post-office in his store sells out to another man who is duly qualified to take his place