

analysis by any business man who wants to study it and ascertain what he would do if he were in the same position as the Government. I venture to say that if hon. members who have spoken were carrying on business for themselves, they would not even attempt to operate on any other basis than that outlined in the chief principle of this Bill, namely, the employing of experts to do work that necessarily calls for expert knowledge and a thorough acquaintance with a particular subject. Those who purchase supplies should thoroughly understand purchasing.

Sir SAM HUGHES: We always did in the Militia Department.

Mr. G. B. NICHOLSON: Perhaps so, but I am a little doubtful as to whether we always did. If we had time to go through all the ramifications of all the departments we would find that a whole lot of things had been purchased in supplies of various kinds that would not measure up to the standard. I think that if this proposal were submitted to any group of business men who are accustomed to purchasing any considerable quantity of goods they would say it is the only possible system by which efficiency can be attained. To have purchases distributed broadcast, and to have experts in engineering—for instance, in the Public Works Department—start out to buy dry goods, boots and shoes, or woollen goods, about which they know nothing, is the height of absurdity and could not possibly be carried on in any private business, because a private business is done on a basis that would not permit the waste necessarily involved in such a system.

Mr. MICHAEL CLARK: Is the Government dealing largely in woollen goods in peace time?

Mr. G. B. NICHOLSON: I would say off-hand that this Government is buying just as great a variety of goods in peace time as any large corporation in this country. Indeed, I heard it said by the president of one large corporation, that it was buying everything from sewing needles to battle-ships.

Mr. CHAPLIN: May I ask a question of the hon. minister? I would like to know—

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. member would be out of order in asking a question at the present time. If the minister rose to reply now he would close the debate and would therefore preclude any other hon. member from speaking.

Mr. CHAPLIN: I do not care whom I get the information from but I would like to know what is going to be the cost of the proposed department.

Mr. DEPUTY SPEAKER: That information will be given in committee.

Mr. ISAAC ELLIS PEDLOW (Renfrew South): I have listened with considerable interest to the discussion on the principle of the Bill, but I submit that most of it so far is beside the issue altogether. As I understand the proposition, it is not quite as outlined by the hon. member for Algoma (Mr. Nicholson). In my judgment the purpose of this Bill is not to establish a department such as the hon. member has in mind—a central authority for the purchasing of all supplies of the various government departments—but to perpetuate under another name a department already in existence. I have had some slight experience with the War Purchasing Commission, and from that experience and actual knowledge I cannot agree with the claims made by the President of the Privy Council (Mr. Rowell) who has charge of the Bill, that it has been an unqualified success.

I will call the attention of the House and of the President of the Council to a case in point. A tender was advertised in August last for 500 four-drawer filing cabinets. It had been the custom of the department to buy steel cabinets, it being claimed by the manufacturers that they were fireproof. A manufacturing firm that I am not directly interested in, beyond the fact that it is located in the riding which I have the honour to represent, manufactures filing cabinets of oak—precisely the same in operation, but made of wood. The contention of the department was, of course, that the steel cabinets, being fireproof, were to be preferred, notwithstanding the much higher cost.

This manufacturing concern sought my services in regard to securing for them a "look in" on tenders for this class of material, and I found that it was almost impossible to help them. In passing I might just say that this purchasing board is a mere "lean-to" of the Public Works Department; it is not a separate entity in any sense of the word—a fact which I will illustrate later on. When I approached the Public Works Department I was told that it would be necessary for this manufacturing concern, with my assistance, to institute a propaganda through the various departments in order to secure endorsement by the departmental heads of wood instead of