

Mr. T. J. O'NEILL (Kamloops): I am pleased that it is the intention of the government again to set up this committee on civil service matters. In view of the fact that we have so many people in the civil service it is an excellent idea that this committee should be continued. In fact I think it should be a permanent fixture, just as the railway committee and the public accounts committee or the banking and commerce committee are permanent.

A great deal has been said to-day with reference to the present system. Some hon. members have stated that the hon. member for Témiscouata (Mr. Pouliot) is apparently trying to destroy the merit system. I do not see how the system as we have it to-day can be properly termed a merit system, or how it could ever function as a merit system when those at the top of the ladder, the commissioners, are appointed by the government which is in power at the time the position becomes vacant. Can the leopard change his spots? You cannot change a man simply by putting him in a government position; he remains just what he was before. I would be the same, and so would even hon. members who claim to the contrary—they would still be of the same mind with regard to politics. If we are to have a merit system, it must start at the top. Those who are at the head of the civil service commission should get there through merit, by promotion from the ranks.

Mr. LAWSON: The chairman of the commission reached that position through promotion.

Mr. O'NEILL: I quite agree, as far as the chairman is concerned.

Reference was made to the age limit. We know that in the civil service to-day there are many men far beyond the age limit, and I see no reason why such men, who have enjoyed large salaries for a number of years, should retain those positions after reaching the age of sixty-five when we have so many young men in the country out of work.

I do not see how there can be a merit system under the procedure of holding oral examinations. After the candidates have written the first part of the examination, a committee is formed to conduct an oral examination, and the chairman of that committee may be a man who knows absolutely nothing about the subject on which he is examining. After the oral examination the candidates are given their rating, which is based principally on that oral test. I quite agree with the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lawson) when he says that minor positions should not be under the civil service

commission. Let us assume a caretaker is required for a building in the west; after the written examination there will be an oral one, with perhaps the school principal as chairman of the committee. He probably would not know how to start a fire in a furnace or how to fix a leaking tap; yet he would sit in judgment on those applying for the position. How can a merit system operate under such conditions? It is absolutely impossible. As far as the higher positions are concerned, I quite agree that they should be under the merit system.

I was very much surprised to hear the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Woodsworth) say what he did with regard to the merit system. Every man who has belonged to a labour organization for any length of time knows that the merit system does not work as far as labour men are concerned, because views differ with regard to merit. The employees say one man has the merit; the employer says another man has the merit, so in connection with the railways in particular the merit system had to be discarded and the seniority system adopted.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I am glad the government has seen fit to continue this committee.

Mr. J. A. MARSHALL (Camrose): Mr. Speaker, I wish to dissociate myself from most of the remarks of the hon. member for Bruce (Mr. Tomlinson). I think it was absolutely unfair of him to introduce the name of either a member of the commission or a member of the civil service into this house for censure. I believe pressure is constantly brought to bear upon the civil service commission with reference to appointments, but I also believe the men on the commission are above such things as playing politics. I honestly believe the work of the civil service commission can be extended to include positions under the Post Office Department. I find myself in complete opposition to the patronage system in all its forms, whether it has to do with minor positions or with more important positions of trust.

I was a member of the committee last year. We worked faithfully, for long hours, and brought in a report which I believe reflected the opinion of all members. I do hope that in the near future we shall have an opportunity to discuss the recommendations which were brought in at that time. I should like to repeat that I am heartily in favour of the merit system and will do all in my power as a member of that committee to oppose any individual or any member of the committee who may endeavour to introduce any form of patronage.