

Supply—Civil Service Salaries

Mr. HANSON: Will the minister tell us how many railway mail clerks there are in the employ of the government?

Mr. RINFRET: Seventeen hundred.

Mr. EDWARDS (Waterloo): How does this adjustment fit in with the promise made to those postal employees who went on strike?

Mr. RINFRET: I understand the recommendation of the department at the time had reference to \$240, and that is what we are meeting.

Mr. LADNER: I do not think the minister answered my question as to the classes where the employee thinks there has been a decrease in his salary and not an increase. The minister keeps speaking about the increase, but I would ask him what about these decreases?

Mr. RINFRET: There has been no decrease in the real sense of the word. The bonus was removed. Now I take it for granted that bonus was to meet special conditions and was a temporary consideration. The bonus was removed in 1924. I believe I can safely say that by this revision the civil servants are restored to the salaries they were getting plus the bonus, with a slight difference one way or the other. But I would point this out: That while the bonus was a temporary consideration they are now getting this as a salary assured to them, and the same applies to other positions to which they can look forward in the future.

Mr. LADNER: Was not the bonus intended to meet the situation of the depreciation in the purchasing power of the dollar.

Mr. BENNETT: The high cost of living.

Mr. LADNER: In other words the high cost of living. As compared with pre-war times the dollar had depreciated in its purchasing power and accordingly the bonus was granted to cover that situation.

Mr. RINFRET: I am not an economist but I fail to see the distinction between the high cost of living and the depreciation of the dollar.

Mr. LADNER: There is none.

Mr. RINFRET: I think it is the same thing. But when the bonus was removed—and of course I am not responsible for that—I understand that the view was taken that the cost of living had decreased.

Mr. HANSON: It has gone up again according to your own figures.

Mr. RINFRET: So have the salaries.

[Mr. Rinfret.]

Mr. LADNER: I have not been taking up much time and will not do so because the intention is to prorogue parliament to-day, but I think this is the crux of the whole situation. We have all had representations made to us by different organizations, and I want some information on the subject. As compared with conditions prior to the war, the purchasing power of the dollar to-day is much depreciated, and the purpose of the bonus was to cover that very point. That being the case, the increase given to these men could hardly be considered as an increase unless it at least equalled or exceeded the bonus. If you take away the bonus, which was intended to meet the depreciation in the purchasing power of the dollar, and then speak of an increase, you are really talking about a decrease. Has that feature been considered? Objections have been raised all over the country to the government's treatment of the so-called increase because the men affected complain that they are receiving relatively less than employees in other walks of life.

Mr. RINFRET: That is the very thing we had in mind. We have sought to adjust the situation in such a way that these increases would be subordinate to whatever treatment the bonus received in this or that class. I said, and I repeat, that by this revision of salary, the whole civil service will receive practically the same amount as they did with the aggregate of the bonus and salary of 1924. There might be a slight difference. The great advantage to the service is that this is now a salary accruing to them with the statutory increase and possibilities all through the service of reaching higher maxima. That should be appreciated.

Mr. LADNER: On the theory which the minister has been explaining where there has been an actual decrease instead of an increase, or an injustice, is there in the act any provision by which the minister by order in council can remedy that situation?

Mr. RINFRET: That could be done only by reclassification or promotion of those men.

Mr. GUTHRIE: To cut the matter short, would the minister consider this suggestion? There are 3,000 letter carriers and I understand there are 1,700 mail clerks, or, in round numbers, 4,700 of these employees. All they ask is that in addition to what they are being granted they get \$60 a year. They are now getting an increase of \$60 a year less the \$18 of which we spoke, or a net increase of \$42. If the government would consider giving them