

chasing agent or agents. I do not see how any one having any business experience can disagree. Any ordinary business man, or small firm that is purchasing goods up to \$100,000, without going into the millions, will find it to their advantage to pay a salary to a man who understands how to purchase, who knows where to get the right kind of goods, as has been pointed out by the hon. member for Brandon (Mr. Whidden), and who knows what the goods are when he sees them. How does any large corporation, such as a departmental store, for example, do its purchasing? Does it leave it to the head of each department or employ an expert thoroughly conversant with the whole question of buying?

Mr. FRIPP: Is the hon. member aware that there is an expert purchasing agent in every department?

Mr. G. B. NICHOLSON: There may be a purchasing agent in every department, but whether he is expert or not I do not know. If there is a purchasing agent in every department, the hon. member's question seems to imply that he would prefer to have a purchasing agent in every government department. But this Bill would eliminate separate purchasing agencies and concentrate the business under one department. We can amend the details of the Bill, but at the present moment we are dealing with principles. Take the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, whose system is divided into departments from coast to coast. There is not a department, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, that can buy a single dollar's worth of material without going through the purchasing department, because the men at the heads of the various departments are not purchasers and do not understand that business. They are managers and devote their attention to the conduct of the business of their particular departments. But they leave to experts the question of purchases and allow them to buy the goods they require. It has been objected that by employing a purchasing agency the Government is getting rid of its responsibility. If the Government concentrates the whole purchasing for the Dominion in one agency, is that evading responsibility to any greater degree than if it distributes the responsibility throughout a multitude of agencies? From the information that we have now, each head of a department purchases the supplies for that particular department in his own way. If this work is all concentrated in one purchasing department for which the

[Mr. Nicholson.]

Government is directly responsible, does the Government thereby lessen its responsibility to the country? In my judgment it would only narrow the business down to a point where it would be controllable. As things stand now, it is uncontrollable and unwieldy. My hon. friend from Red Deer, with whom I always try to agree, has laid down the principle that you cannot effect economy unless you reduce the number of employees. If there is one man in each department to-day charged with purchasing for that department, and if he is capable of doing the work with which he is charged, he cannot be of very much use for anything else. Therefore, taking that phase of the argument alone, if you bring all these men under one head and employ one purchasing agent or agency, you will have eliminated a certain number of employees. I presume, without having any figures before me, that this Government purchases millions of dollars' worth of goods every year and, I have no doubt, will continue to purchase equally large amounts annually from all sources. Is it not conceivable that by reducing the cost at which these goods are purchased and improving the character and quality of the goods and obtaining the best materials that can be put into each particular article, just as any ordinary business man would do, a saving could be effected? A large departmental store could not carry on business for six months if it permitted the heads of the various selling departments to act as purchasers at the same time. No large organization producing goods in this country could successfully operate on such a basis. A lumber firm could not carry on business if the man who had charge of the work in the woods had to purchase the goods required in connection with the conduct of the business. In principle, I think the Government is starting out along the right lines. I have not read the details of the Bill. They may not be right, and the idea of a purchasing commission may be wrong. If, as the hon. member for North Oxford (Mr. Nesbitt) says, it is going to involve the employment of a commission and then a director, that would seem to me to be a case of overlapping, and if it is going to mean the employment of a large establishment, that again is entirely unnecessary. But with the principle of concentrating the whole business of purchasing the country's goods and placing it under the head of an expert or a small group of experts, I am entirely in accord, and contend that it will bear