

Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act

namely, that, appointments were not to be made by the civil service commission.

The act has been in operation since 1936 in its present form, and the government has concluded that there is reason for believing that this legislation will be more or less permanent. It will be to the advantage of the persons employed under the act to be under superannuation and considered as civil servants so far as certain classifications referred to here are concerned.

One of our difficulties in connection with the administration of the act is that these officials have been so carefully appointed and trained that other departments of government and others outside the government seek to hire them away from us, particularly the engineers engaged on irrigation and water activities generally. The most recent case was that of Mr. MacKenzie, our chief engineer, who has been lent to another department. When Mr. MacKenzie was lent this matter was discussed with him and others, and we are presenting this amendment in order to put our technically qualified officials on much the same basis as similar officials in other departments. We are asking that engineers, clerks and stenographers come under the civil service and have the benefits of superannuation.

The other section of the bill increases from \$5,000 to \$10,000 the amount of expenditure which the minister may decide upon without the consent of the governor in council. This is being done throughout the different departments, and section 2 of the bill simply applies the same principle to the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act.

Mr. Fulton: Is the minister in a position to indicate to the committee in a general way whether the project to make the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act of direct application to British Columbia and other parts of eastern Canada has advanced to the point where a decision has been reached? As the minister knows, certain operations are being undertaken in British Columbia by engineers of the P.F.R.A. They have to be carried on under a sort of special set-up which I understand is a little awkward. It seems to me that with respect to developments that we hope for in the future it would be much easier and more regular if the act had direct application to our province, and perhaps to other provinces as well.

Mr. Gardiner: At the present time the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act applies only to what is generally known as the Palliser triangle. It may be said that the area covered extends a little beyond the boundaries of the

Palliser triangle, but that is done in order to take in entire river basins. But generally speaking it applies only to the Palliser triangle or what is generally known as the drought area.

There is a provision in the act for making available the services of our engineering staff in connection with all kinds of water developments. This is done quite broadly, even outside the P.F.R.A. area. A committee was set up in 1943, and it recommended to the house that this legislation be made applicable to a much wider area. It was recommended that, to all intents and purposes, something similar be made to apply right across Canada. Since that time the matter has been up for discussion on a number of occasions. Because of some disagreement in the dominion-provincial conference with regard to finance, action was delayed. Bills were drafted which provided for the extension of the principle right across Canada, including diking in the eastern part of Canada, works in the province of British Columbia and elsewhere, and all along the northern fringe of settlement. But that legislation, which was introduced into the house in the session before last, I believe, and then withdrawn later in the session because of the fact that the meeting of the dominion-provincial conference had not been held, was prepared again for this session. However, on account of all the discussion with regard to extra expenditures on defence, it was intended to make this more or less a defence session to deal with defence expenditures, and it was not thought wise to take up new responsibilities this year.

That is the position at the moment. The government saw to it that legislation was drafted to make this extension a possibility, but it was not considered wise to bring it in at the present session.

Mr. Fulton: I am very glad to hear that, because I think we can take it from the minister's reply that the matter is not dropped, but is merely postponed for the time being. It is still definitely a possibility?

Mr. Gardiner: That is right.

Mr. Coldwell: This resolution foreshadows legislation that will be generally welcomed by the house, and particularly by those members who come from western Canada. The minister is quite right when he says that we can now look upon this legislation as permanent; consequently the officials who operate under the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act should be brought under the civil service commission, with all the advantages, both to the civil servants themselves and to the