

ernment to look into and report upon this matter, was that the national railways constituted such a distinct and important branch of the public service and had such an efficient purchasing organization in operation that no public interest would be served by taking it over. The Order in Council of February, 1918, authorized the War Purchasing Commission to make an investigation and report on the matter, and that was the report they made.

I was referring to the purchase of supplies. Last year there was purchased under the direction of the War Purchasing Commission, apart from certain supplies which I shall mention presently, \$48,718,537 worth of supplies. In addition, contracts were made for the supply of provisions and other commodities for the military camps and other public services, the contracts being made on a certain basis as to price for the supplies required for two, three or four months as the case might be. The commission has no record of the amounts supplied to the various branches of the public service under these contracts, but the total would be several million dollars. The commission during the past year has handled on the average about 100 distinct transactions a day, or a total of about 30,000 for the year. This gives some idea of the volume of business which has come before the commission and which has been personally supervised by the members of the commission.

Mr. BURNHAM: Does this cut out local buying?

Mr. ROWELL: No, it does not cut out local buying but simply provides that purchases shall be made by this commission. The question of where purchases should be made is a matter with which the commission deals. Provision is made in the Bill, as is necessary, that certain supplies may be purchased by the departments in small quantities or in case of emergency, which might arise in any section of the country. Just as in every well organized business where there is a central purchasing department, there must be a certain amount of latitude given to officials on the ground in the making of small or emergency purchases, so provision is made for such purchases in this Bill. The Bill provides for the appointment of three commissioners to hold office for a period of ten years, and they shall cease to hold office on reaching the age of 70 years. As I have already intimated, the salaries are left blank, and that clause must stand

[Mr. Rowell.]

until the resolution is submitted to the committee authorizing this expenditure. The main clause of the Bill defining the powers of the commission is section 6, which reads:

(1) The commission shall have the exclusive power and right to purchase, contract for, inspect and accept supplies for the public service. Provided, however, that the commission, when it deems it advisable, may, subject to such conditions as may be prescribed by regulation or by the commission, authorize any portion of the public service to purchase, contract for, inspect or accept supplies.

Members will see that the commission can make no purchase except upon requisition of the various departments. Under section 12 the departments must present requisitions showing the kind and quantity of supplies they require. The commission have no authority to change any such requisition, but if they feel that the requisition is not one which they should comply with or that for any other reason the attention of the Government should be drawn to it, they may communicate to the Prime Minister their observations on that requisition for such action as the Government may see fit to take in the premises.

Section 13, it will be seen, provides that estimates of the supplies required shall be made on or before such dates as may be prescribed by regulation and sent to the commission. This will enable the commission to purchase at one time for several departments and in large quantities.

Section 16 requires that the purchases shall be by tender.

Section 17 provides that the commission shall keep full records and make such reports to the Prime Minister as he shall from time to time require.

In brief outline I have set forth the main provisions of the Bill, and I can only close as I opened: The object of the Bill is to secure the benefit of the purchase on a business basis, through one central organization, of all supplies required by the Government for public purposes, wholly free from party patronage or political influence, so that the Government will receive for every dollar expended a dollar's worth in return. Every citizen of Canada is interested in securing this result, and this Bill marks a great step in advance over the pre-war and early-war conditions.

Sir SAM HUGHES: Will the minister kindly explain how he proposes to have the commission free from influence?

Mr. ROWELL: Free from political influence?

Sir SAM HUGHES: The minister mentioned about a dozen elements of influence.