

## STILL PATRONAGE AND THE MIDDLEMAN

**C**HARGES and assertions that the War Purchasing Commission appointed by Sir Robert Borden just after the close of the last session has failed to keep politics out of its business have been common in all parts of Canada for months past. It has been asserted that the middleman still flourishes and is allowed his unholy rake-off on equipment and supplies for Canadian soldiers training to fight the battles of the Empire; also that it is practically impossible for any firm to secure an order, no matter what its prices or what its ability to give good service, unless its name is on the Government patronage list or it has the good offices of some friend of the party with influence enough to command attention.

### Soldiers Drill without Uniforms.

It has also been charged, and indeed it has been a matter of common knowledge and observation by the public in most of the large mobilizing centres, that the supplying of equipment, especially uniforms, has been so slow that enlisted men have had to drill for days and even weeks in what civilian clothes they might happen to have when they enlisted. Sir Sam Hughes himself admitted this publicly at Toronto, October 25th, when he said,

**"There are thousands of recruits to-day who are waiting for uniforms and for arms and equipment."**

As late as November 2nd, a Toronto newspaper asserted that on that day it had made careful investigation at the Toronto Armouries and found that of 1,033 men of the Base Battalion on parade that day, only 196 were in uniform, although many of them had been in training for six weeks.

### Big Factories Cannot get Orders.

It would be difficult to find any possible excuse for such a state of affairs, especially when it is known that several of the largest clothing factories in Canada, some of which are specially equipped for just such work, have been unable to get a single order for uniforms. Had such factories been given orders which they sought, there could have been no shortage. The Canadian Military Gazette, the official organ of the militia in Canada, takes cognizance of the great volume of criticism and declares specifically that the fault does not lie with the Department of Militia, and that if there is any fault, it must be with the War Purchasing Commission. It states that the claim of the Purchasing Commission is that delays have been caused by slow delivery, to which the obvious answer is that if the orders had been given to firms equipped to turn them out, and smaller orders given to a larger number of firms, there would have been no delay at all. The claim of the Purchasing Commission is neither an explanation nor a good excuse.

### Real Estate Agent got \$20,000 Middleman Rake-off.

A very definite charge that the middleman still figures in Canadian War equipment orders was printed in the last number of *Men's Wear*, a reputable trade paper published in Toronto in the

interests of the clothing and men's furnishing business. It said:

**"It is not a shame, it is a crime, that in a time of life or death with the nation men should traffic in its needs. There are men fattening at the public trough while their fellows pour out their life blood in a foreign land. There are men scheming to make money out of this awful tragedy while the cries of heart-broken widows and orphans rise to heaven. Our soldiers go half clad while political tricksters and cowardly shysters play this boodle game.**

**"The situation is best illustrated by a case that has occurred in the city of Toronto. In spite of the number of bona fide clothing factories anxious to get a share of the work, a large contract for uniforms was recently given to a real estate man, who has had no more experience in clothing manufacture than the member of Parliament who got him the contract. He farmed out the order to a firm of foreigners at a net profit of over twenty thousand dollars, promptly covering his chances for loss with insurance. Here is a man who, beyond perhaps a subscription to the party fund, has never turned his hand in the making of a fortune out of his country's necessity. No doubt instances might be multiplied almost indefinitely. As we have already said, it is not a shame, it is a crime."**

### Kemp Denies but Publisher Reiterates Charge.

It is only fair to the War Purchasing Commission and to its Chairman, Hon. A. E. Kemp, a member of Sir Robert Borden's cabinet, to record that he immediately issued a specific denial of the facts alleged by *Men's Wear* and invited the publisher to give names and particulars. This the publisher has so far refused to do, but he has reiterated the charge, declared his ability to prove it to the hilt and intimated that he was ready to give evidence at any time before a proper board of enquiry. It would seem therefore to be a fair case for the Davidson Commission.

### Manufacturers Ignored, Merchants get Orders.

Without entering further into the merits of this particular case at this time, it may be said that many similar cases have been heard of. Cases are known where reputable manufacturers, fully equipped to fill orders for military supplies, have asked to be allowed to tender for orders which they knew were to be placed. They have been ignored by the War Purchasing Commission to the extent that some of them were not even allowed to have tender forms. These manufacturers have then had merchants and wholesalers, who never did any manufacturing and could not do it because they have not the equipment, come to them asking the manufacturer to figure his price on orders which the merchant or wholesaler was to get. And in some cases these manufacturers, who were denied the chance to do business direct with the Purchasing Commission, have actually got the orders at second hand through merchants and wholesalers. Such firms are at the present time working on orders received in this way, and have been for months past.

Is it at all likely that these merchants and wholesalers are getting orders and then turning them over to manufacturers for execution, without making a profit for themselves? The history of Tory middlemen and the whole Tory patronage system as applied to War purchasing furnishes the answer.