

Civil Service Act

mit, has been enriched by the absorption into it of men who have served as private secretaries. Private secretaries have opportunities for acquiring experience and becoming efficient administrators which many others in the service are denied; if we look about the service we find that many who are discharging important duties in high office in a commendable way have been in earlier days private secretaries. I am aware that some have protested that the provision of the Civil Service Act which this section would abrogate tends to lessen the ambition of the civil servant who has not been a private secretary, because he might be denied an opportunity for advancement by the appointment of a former private secretary to a position over him. There may be something in the objection, but I think, it should weigh very lightly in the scale when considered with the possibility of denying to the service the excellence, natural and acquired, of this class of men. I therefore ask the committee to hesitate before withdrawing from the private secretaries that stimulus to take up and perform very arduous duties which follows from the offer of a high and permanent position in the service when they have finished their days of secretaryship.

Mr. BROWN: Would the passing of this section mean that the private secretary, when he ceased to be such, would be eliminated from the service?

Mr. CAHAN: I understand that is the case. If a civil servant is appointed private secretary, while private secretary he is entitled under the law to an addition of \$600 to his salary as civil servant. But a private secretary who is appointed at a time when he is not a member of the civil service, and who continues as private secretary for any term of years, would have no right to be appointed to the civil service upon the termination of his engagement as private secretary.

Mr. VENIOT: Except by application and examination.

Mr. CAHAN: He would have to work his way up from the bottom as though he had never been a civil servant.

Mr. NICHOLSON: I support what the hon. member for Stanstead (Mr. Hackett) has said. This is most unfair. Assuming that all private secretaries were released every time there was a change of government, and absorbed into the service, those who were so released and absorbed into the service would be only a small fraction of the total number of civil servants in Ottawa or in

[Mr. Hackett.]

Canada. Anyone who has had experience with the departments and with the private secretaries of ministers over a period of years—I have had an experience of some fifteen years—cannot fail to realize that the private secretaries, from the Prime Minister's down, are perhaps the ablest men in the service. These men serve long arduous hours, they are at the beck and call of their own ministers, of members of the house, of delegations and of all types and classes of people from one end of this country to the other and to my way of thinking it would be most unfair to cast them adrift simply because a government has changed. I am unable to understand just what the committee had in mind in making this recommendation. There are men and women who served under previous administrations and who are to-day diligent in their services to present ministers. I do not know where you could find people more courteous and diligent than these private secretaries, and I feel that the clause should be amended.

Mr. BROWN: I am inclined to agree with the hon. member for East Algoma (Mr. Nicholson). I cannot imagine that the number involved would be very great, and I think it would be advisable to amend this clause. A private secretary must have the complete confidence of his minister and I think it is a credit both to the ministers and to the secretaries that those who served in the past have been taken over. I do not think this clause should pass as it might very well be that the very excellent service rendered by these secretaries might be required again in the course of a few years, as we think possibly might happen.

Mr. CHEVRIER: Mr. Chairman, it is with a lot of diffidence that I agree with the recommendation. During the eleven years I have been in this house I have come to appreciate the value of the private secretaries but, on the other hand, one must not lose sight of the fact that at every election there would be ten to fifteen men and women injected into the civil service. These men and women are not put into minor positions, they are entitled to chief and principal clerkships. There are conscientious men and women who for twenty to twenty-five years, and sometimes for thirty years, have been expecting promotions to these positions and I think it would be most unfair and against the merit system to inject these secretaries into the service over the heads of those already in the service. The service may be deprived of very efficient men and women but we must not blow hot and cold at the same time.