

Sweeping Condemnation

Royal Commission Convicts Government

Spoils System in Appointments, Promotions and Purchase of Supplies. Lack of Conscience in Marine. No principle except to spend as much as possible. Officers serving two masters. Favoured Contractors control the Department. A wasteful Militia Department. Staff sufficient for Army of 100,000. This is the verdict of Liberal Commission, selected by Ministers themselves.

Many charges have been made and proved in recent years against the administration on the ground of extravagance, of favouritism and corruption in contracts for supplies and services, of applying the spoils system to public appointments and promotions, of dishonesty in the disposal of the public domain, and of maladministration in the general conduct of the public service. Ministers and their supporters have pleaded that these are partisan attacks and slanders.

This plea has been suddenly swept away by the verdict of a tribunal created by the Government itself and composed of its own friends.

THE ROYAL COMMISSIONERS

In May, 1907, members of the civil service were pressing for larger salaries and improved conditions. Thereupon, Mr. Fielding recommended the appointment of three commissioners to inquire into the operation of the Civil Service Act, the classification, salaries, promotions, efficiency and retiring allowances of officers, and other matters relative to the service. The following were the commissioners appointed:

John M. Courtney, C.M.G., retired Deputy Minister of Finance.

Thomas Fyshe, of Montreal, former manager of the Merchants Bank of Canada.

P. J. Bazin, retired merchant of Quebec.

Mr. Courtney has been a public officer all his life in Canada and has no party sympathies. Mr. Fyshe is an ardent Liberal. Mr. Bazin is also a prominent member and office holder in the party.

These commissioners reported in March, 1908, after nine months investigation. While their report discusses civil service salaries and organization, it also deals with the efficiency and integrity of the public service. This part of the report was not expected. The Minister of Marine protested in Parliament that in taking up this question the commissioners went too far. (Hansard 1908, page 5621). His complaint is evidently due to the exposure of his own department. The public will not agree with the minister, but will rather regret that the investigation had not been carried farther. Even in the marine department the investigation covered a part of the business of one branch.

We shall allow the commissioners to speak for

themselves. The following is in their own language, pages 13, 14, 15, 19, 24, 27, 28:—

SPOILS SYSTEM IN APPOINTMENTS

"Patronage seems to run more or less through every department of the civil service. It was the universal feeling amongst the officials who gave evidence that this patronage evil was the curse of the civil service. * * * The character and quality of the male candidates entering the service has declined. * * * Candidates who just fluked through the examination by means of greater political influence have received appointments over the heads of more worthy and better qualified candidates. * * * A recent appointment of a postmaster at Kingston was made on the recommendation of the patronage committee; the last appointment to the postmastership at Montreal, the most important in the Dominion, was given to a member of Parliament sixty-seven years old. * * * People have been brought in from the outside over the heads of men who have given their life-time to the departments. * * * Promotions have been forced on departments owing to political influence, the officials promoted doing the same work as they performed in the lower grade. * * * In the outside service politics enters into every appointment. * * * The politics of the party is of greater importance in making appointments and promotions than the public interests of the Dominion. Those who have the political pull use it for all it is worth."

PATRONAGE AND PRICES

"The old-fashioned notions of frugality and living within one's means have to some extent been departed from, and instances have been found of departments giving orders for stores and other services to be delivered within a year in excess of the vote granted by Parliament. Large amounts have been spent for supplies bought from those enjoying political patronage at what may be called retail rates. Heavy expenditures have been incurred without necessary consideration or supervision. * * * The time has come when this practise of paying retail prices to a few favoured merchants in each locality should be discontinued. * * * The Auditor-General in his evidence pointed out that in one department he did not believe in the certificates received. This is a very serious affair. * * * In many instances stores are ordered unnecessarily and it may be doubtful if a good quality is always delivered. * * * Mr. Pottinger states that in his opinion the amount paid by the Intercolonial for coal was higher than it ought to be. * * * Stores have been received which were not wanted, and which it is difficult to get rid of. * * * In this connection your Commissioners respectfully beg to recommend that inquiry be made as to the working of the Prevention of Corruption Act of the Imperial Parliament passed in 1906, and the bribery clause in connection therewith." (Pages 24, 27).

MARINE DEPARTMENT CONDEMNED

The particular inquiry into the Marine Department was conducted by Messrs. Fyshe and Bazin, who say they "have to confess that the general conclusions which they have formed regarding the administration of the department are most unfavorable. It seems to have few redeeming features. * * * Organization, discipline, zeal for the public service and regard for economy are all conspicuous by their absence." (Page 37).