

listened to the astonishing speech from the Prime Minister this afternoon. Not only did these men stand valiantly in battle for us but others of hon. gentlemen opposite did as well and I think I may include—although I speak subject to correction, the Finance Minister of this government. Ah, yes, and more—hon. gentlemen opposite as a party when in opposition were in favour of that reform. Hon. gentlemen opposite looked with jealousy and suspicion on every move which ventured to infringe by the thousandth of an inch the integrity of our Civil Service Act. It is easy to so act in opposition; such a course is no evidence of character or principle. I do not pretend to any particular exhibition of moral strength because I opposed when in opposition this plan for the renewal of patronage. But standing in power it is a difficult thing. It is different when you have the responsibility of office and have around you all the influences and pressure that office entails. Then it is a difficult thing to stand by this reform; and this government—weak in every fibre, weak in heart, pitifully weak—has surrendered to these forces and has consented to throw overboard all the achievements that these years have brought about.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Will the right hon. gentleman oblige me by mentioning one sentence of mine which intimated, directly or indirectly, any desire in any way to change the Civil Service Commission?

Mr. MEIGHEN: I did not say the Prime Minister proposed to change the commission, but the sentence the Prime Minister uttered, not once but twice at least, means the results exactly which I have described. It is not nominally whether there is a commission or not, that is not the essence of the problem. The real question is, what is to be the power of that commission? The Prime Minister said that an irresponsible commission must not have power of appointment and promotion; that a commission not responsible to parliament—

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I beg pardon, I made no such statement. I do not wish to be understood for one moment as saying that the commission shall not have the power of making appointments and promotions. There are ways of arrogating to it control in the matter of promotions or appointments, regardless altogether of the needs of the situation, which can be most embarrassing to the country and the government. I think it is proper those should be looked into, but I have never suggested that the commission as a body with power to see that certain qualifications are

[Mr. Meighen.]

met in the matter of appointments, and that merit is duly considered in the matter of promotion, should in any way be interfered with.

Mr. MEIGHEN: I will have to plead my own density but I do not know where the Prime Minister is. What is the difference between saying they shall not have power to appoint and promote, and saying that the commission has now a control which it should not have and can arrogate to itself authority which it should not arrogate and that such power might well be taken away? Really I do not know what he means. If you leave the appointing authority in the commission, you leave it, over such an area of appointments and promotions as the government and the commission think wise. If you leave it there, you leave it, and if you take it, you take it, and I venture to say if you take it, you take it one place and no other, you take it right into the hands of the ministers and restore the conditions from which, after a struggle, we emerged some years ago. Very well. Such became the law in 1917. The difficulties this government battles with now, are the same as every government has battled with. And less and less are the difficulties as years go by. The British government, which has the merit system, has not anything like the struggles it had years ago. These difficulties we encountered too.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: Does the hon. gentleman mean to say the British government has the civil service system we have here?

Mr. MEIGHEN: Not precisely.

Mr. MACKENZIE KING: I should think not.

Mr. MEIGHEN: But the patronage system is gone in England, and the patronage system cannot be gone if the government responsible to parliament is to take to itself appointments and promotions. In 1921, the government of which I was the head introduced a bill into the House of Commons—I have the statute before me—sponsored by an hon. gentleman at that time member for Yarmouth, N.S., then minister without portfolio, Mr. Spinney, and the bill was commonly known as the Spinney bill. Its effect was, as far as I can remember, just about the same as this motion would be if it were amended as proposed. We proposed then to submit the bill to a committee of parliament, and we urged that the authority of the commission should be left intact, so far as the committee felt it right that the commission should operate at all. We believed that, in the opinion of the commis-