

know in how many cases it has been found that there have been defaults through accidental delay, or mistake or fraud—because I daresay the first causes are more common than fraud—or how far the Department has found the law unsatisfactory in other respects. But in the first instance when the Bill was presented to the House, it was supposed only to alter the practice by giving an extension of time—it was simply provided that the time should be enlarged in the remote districts of the North-West Territory and British Columbia. We have, therefore, had no opportunity of obtaining statistics and information as to the practical working of the plan, so as to show us that there is an evil to be remedied. What I fear is that claims will be made by persons who have not received acknowledgments, on the plea that a letter had been posted by a man's children or his wife at a certain time, and in that way inconclusive evidence after a lapse of months would be presented in regard to claims pressed against the Department; whereas that is at present impossible.

Sir HECTOR LANGEVIN. The hon. gentleman may be correct in what he states that the clause goes a little further than was stated when the Bill was read the first time. I understood, however, at the time, and the memorandum I had was to that effect, that this clause was an extension of the time from ten days to eighteen days as regards the North-West and British Columbia. Now, as to the registration of the letter: The Department is of the opinion, and it is at their instance that the motion is now made, that there is a better guarantee that the letter would reach than if the letter was registered, because if complaint is made, and the district postmaster is actually dishonest, he would be likely to tamper with a registered letter. His attention would be called to it, because he would see that it was registered and addressed to the Postmaster-General. If the letter was dropped in the post office with others in the usual way, it would have a better chance of reaching the Postmaster-General, as the attention of the local postmaster might not have been called to it. There may be good reasons on both sides. The registered letter may reach in very many instances; but, on the other hand, the Department, which has had experience in this matter, believes the plan will work much better in the public interest if the letter is not registered. I, therefore, move to strike out the word "registered" in the 42nd line.

Amendment agreed to.

Bill reported as amended, and read the third time and passed on a division.

CHIGNECTO MARINE TRANSPORT RAILWAY.

Resolutions (p. 513) respecting the subsidy to the Chignecto Marine Transport Railway Company concurred in.

Mr. POPE introduced Bill (No. 105) to amend the Act to provide for the granting of a subsidy to the Chignecto Marine Transport Railway Company, Limited.

Bill read the first time.

THE INTERPRETATION ACT.

House resolved itself into Committee on Bill (No. 80) further to amend the Interpretation Act (from the Senate). —(Sir Hector Langevin.)

(In the Committee.)

Mr. MILLS. How does the Minister propose to confer by this first section, power upon a Minister to discharge the duties that pertain to an office, when no Minister is appointed under the Great Seal?

Mr. THOMPSON (Antigonish). We propose to do so by Order in Council; and I would move the insertion of the words "by authority of an Order in Council" after the word "Minister" in the 11th line.

Mr. BLAKE.

Mr. MILLS. That might serve very well in the case of a Minister acting for another who may be absent, but not in the case of a Minister discharging the duties of an office which is vacant.

Mr. THOMPSON (Antigonish). Of course it is necessary to make provision for temporary vacancies, and though the Bill does not designate such a case as that suggested by the hon. gentleman, yet it seems reasonable to regard such a vacancy as a temporary vacancy.

Mr. BLAKE. It sometimes happens under the present regime that they are far from temporary. In one case, I think the vacancy lasted more than a year.

Mr. THOMPSON (Antigonish). The hon. gentleman must have hope for the future.

Mr. BLAKE. I did hope for a long time, but after long experience of hon. gentlemen opposite I have ceased to hope.

Mr. MILLS. There is besides the question of public policy. The Government have submitted a measure to Parliament to provide for a certain number of offices. They told us, for instance, that the office of Minister of Railways was a necessary office, and they provided for it by law. But now the hon. gentleman proposes to make provision for the discharge of the duties of a Department to which no Minister has been appointed, and under the conditions of this Bill the office may continue vacant during the whole period of the existence of a Parliament, although the law itself requires that the Minister shall be appointed. Now, while it may be important, and I think it is important, that some means should be devised for the discharge of the duties pertaining to any particular Department of the Government during a vacancy, it does seem to me that it is also necessary that Parliament should take care that that vacancy should not be indefinitely continued, as it might be under the provisions of this Bill.

Mr. THOMPSON (Antigonish). I do not think the Bill will effect a change of policy in that respect. There was necessarily a chance under the existing law of an office becoming vacant, and it is reasonable that we should take steps to prevent that vacancy operating to the public disadvantage. I do not think that making provision for a contingency of that kind, implies at all a change of policy or invites the Ministry to hold the position vacant.

Amendment agreed to.

On section 2,

Mr. MILLS. Will the hon. gentleman explain this clause?

Mr. THOMPSON (Antigonish). There may have been a great variety of acts performed by one Minister through the absence or illness of another Minister, and some, of course, during the vacancy of the office. As to none of these, I am informed, has any question arisen by which litigation might be caused; but as the doubt has been suggested, it seems proper to remove any question on the matter, and I think it is apparent to the House that such legislation is proper. For instance, it has been found necessary in many cases during the absence of the Secretary of State, that some other Minister should sign public documents for him; in other cases contracts have been signed, performed and executed, and no question has been raised by the party interested as to the validity of these acts. However, it seems advisable to remove any doubt on the subject, and hence this clause.

Mr. MILLS. Can the hon. gentleman say how long the office of Minister of Railways was vacant?

Mr. THOMPSON (Antigonish). I think from twelve to sixteen months.