

I presume, to feed the men at the front, and the same remarks apply to a great many of the other figures which my hon. friend gave. That was all right for a Government in war time, but I have, I repeat, very grave distrust of continuing that system in time of peace. The creation of this commission seems to be the shifting of governmental responsibility. We have been a country in Canada for some time now, and the various departments of the Government have had their experts making purchases for their departments. Their duties would be to study the needs of their own particular department, and if they were connected with the department and studied its needs it would appear to me on the surface, at any rate, that they would be better qualified for purchasing for that department than a commission would which had surveillance of all the departments of the Government. Furthermore, I think the creation of this commission will be associated with an increase in expense. I do not know what the minister's view would be on that point, but if he would assure me that it would lessen the expense he would remove one of my objections, and no doubt score a point in favour of this legislation.

Mr. ROWELL: If you consolidate the purchasing that is now carried on by ten or fifteen different departments into one, I believe it will very greatly reduce the expense.

Sir SAM HUGHES: The effect has been nearly to double it.

Mr. MICHAEL CLARK: It could only decrease the expense if it reduced the number of public servants in the various departments, and I venture to say that short as the minister's ministerial experience has been, it has brought home to him the very great difficulty of reducing the public service. His belief—because it is only a matter of faith with him; he has told me he believes it would reduce the expense—partakes of the nature of a prophecy, and as I have said before, the only thing you can do with a prophet is to disbelieve him, especially when he prophesies something that is contrary to one's own experience. I have very grave doubts that it would not increase the expense. It certainly increases the machinery of government, and if my hon. friend can increase the machinery of government and reduce the expense he will certainly be something of a miracle worker, because our universal experience is that with an increase in the machinery there inevitably follows an increase in the

[Mr. M. Clark.]

expense of government. These are the reasons why I do not accept the belief of my hon. friend on the subject. I have very grave doubts about this being a departure for the better, and I shall be glad if those doubts can be removed. It is no pleasure for me to oppose any legislation introduced by the ministry, and I would be very glad if the doubts that I entertain could be removed. But they exist in my mind and I would not be doing my duty if I did not express them.

Sir SAM HUGHES: I had considerable experience in war purchasing both under a responsible minister and under an irresponsible War Purchasing Commission. The great objection to this commission business is that there is no one responsible. The commissioners are responsible to no minister directly. The War Purchasing Commission has been run by two or three clerks, engineered by the commission and fortunes have been built up for the favourites of the commissioners, contracts have gone almost invariably in the right direction, and I have no hesitation in saying that if the facts were made known as to the way in which the War Purchasing Commission conducted its business they would startle the people of Canada. They would be astonished at the tremendously high prices that have been paid. This whole system of Government has been running away from responsibility. I went into the war to overthrow autocracy and bring about responsible government in so far as we possibly could in Germany, in other countries and above all in Canada. This is a departure from responsible government, and it places in the hands of a commission the spending of \$40,000,000 a year. If you will give me the management of that business, under the terms of this Bill, I will undertake to put any party in power at the next general election. If you have a purchasing agent for the department, the minister is responsible, he feels his responsibility, and he takes pains to see that the work is done in an efficient manner. I had to do with that business and I do not think there are anything like the irregularities going on that the general public claim there are in reference to these matters. I found that contractors were anxious to do the best they could, although there was an odd one here and there that had to be watched. I found the officers in almost all the departments the keenest men alive. I have seen instances where contractors who had succeeded in bluffing the War Purchasing Commission tried to put the same bluff over