

THE PREMIER AND THE SENATE.

Senator Griesbach is spoiling for a fight. In a communication published in another column he defies Premier King to come on and do something really terrible to the Senate. The Senator points out, quite correctly, that the Upper House did not divide on party lines on the National railway bills, that Liberal members opposed some of the bills and Conservative members supported some of them. In consequence of the course of the Senate in regard to these measures, to the same legislation at the preceding session, and to the Pension Bill, the Premier announced that steps would be taken to limit the veto power of the Senate over measures sent up from the House of Commons. Senator Griesbach thinks the Premier is not living up to this advance notice. Second thought, and protests from some of the older provinces, he says, have modified the intentions of the Prime Minister until what is now proposed is only a faint echo of the threat made six months ago.

It may be well to reproduce just what the Prime Minister said on the occasion in question. The Canadian Press, a non-partisan news-collecting agency, which supplies Parliamentary and general news to papers of both political stripes and none, reported the circumstances and the Premier's speech in this way:

"When the Senate's last message was received, within half an hour of prorogation Premier King announced that he proposed to invoke the Parliament Act next session to give the Commons of Canada the same rights as regards legislation initiated in the Commons, as the British House of Commons hold over the House of Lords. He had tentatively prepared such legislation for this session but he had waited until it was made clear that the interests of the people of Canada demanded such a necessity, he said."

Senator Griesbach to the contrary, there is no variation between the summary of what Premier King said six months ago and what he said a few days since as to the scope and intent of the legislation to be introduced. The announcement then was that the House of Commons would be given power parallel to that enjoyed by the British House of Commons and the Senate left with the same measure of authority which attaches to the House of Lords under the recent revision of the British Constitution. That is precisely what the Premier last week said would be the purpose and effect of the change that is to be made. So far as reported the Premier did not, as Senator Griesbach implies breathe out "fire and slaughter" upon the offending Senators. He stated plainly how and how far the veto power of the Upper House would be restricted; and in both respects his latest pronouncement is strictly in keeping with that statement.

WHAT THE MAJOR CONSIDERS

Bulletin's Mail Bag

SENATE AND GOVERNMENT

To the Editor of the Bulletin:

In your issue of the 15th inst. there is an editorial headed "Senate and Government" in which these words occur: "A Senate in which Conservative appointees largely predominate has undertaken to block the will of the House of Commons repeatedly, and to throw out measures which at successive sessions have been approved by the lower house."

The manifest intention of this paragraph is to convey the impression to your readers that Conservative members of the Senate are solely responsible for the rejection or amendment of Government measures in the Senate. This manifest intention is made still more manifest by the paragraph which follows:

"The trouble at present is that the Senate wants to lock the brakes and stop the whole legislative machinery at pleasure of a majority, which happens to be hostile to the Government of the day."

This, of course, is good Liberal propaganda, but it suffers from the common defect of Liberal propaganda in that it is not true.

Whether rightly or wrongly, the outstanding fact is that opposition in the Senate to certain Liberal Government measures in the recent past is by no means confined to the Conservative members of the Senate. Let us look at the record. On the 23rd of June, 1923, the Canadian National Railway Construction bill passed by the Commons came before the Senate for second reading. (Page 1239, Hansard of the Senate, 1923). The Liberal leader of the Senate led off with a speech in which he praised the bill with "faint damns". (Page 1239 and following). The Conservative leader then moved a six months' hoist and the Honourable Senator Beique (a prominent front bench Liberal) made a strong speech attacking the bill. (Page 1245). The Honourable Senator Beique was followed by another front bench Liberal, the Honourable Senator Belcourt, whose speech was short and much to the point and an appeal that the bill be withdrawn. (Page 1245).

Premier King has been so annoyed with Senator Belcourt for his action in this matter that he has appointed Senator Belcourt to several honourable and not altogether unremunerative missions to Europe and seeks to further punish him by appointing him Canadian Minister at Washington.

When the vote was taken on this bill (Canadian National Railway Construction bill) only ten Liberals (page 1301) voted for the bill (the rest were conveniently absent or voted against the bill).

Again I say, whether rightly or wrongly, the Senate did not divide on party lines.

When this measure (divided in separate bills for each line) again came before the Senate in 1924, the most vigorous and uncompromising opponents of practically every bill were the Liberal members of the Senate. On the other hand, individual bills in almost every case were shepherded through the committee by individual Conservative members. The six Alberta bills were in my case and five were passed. The sixth was rejected at the request of the people in that part of the country where the line was to be located.

The Ex Soldiers' Pension bill, 1924, is another illuminating example. It was introduced by the Government for second reading in the Senate on July 18th, 1924, one day before prorogation (Hansard of the Senate, 1924, page 833). Think of it! A bill involving the rights, liberties, happiness and well being of thousands of people; involving also a great item of expenditure brought down the day before the rising of Parliament. The question is does Mr. Mackenzie King think the proper function of the Senate is to approve without question and without delay all Acts of the Commons and, if so,—why a Senate at all? Or does he think that the Senate should give full consideration to all the legislation brought before it. If the latter, does he think six hours sufficient time to give to such a question as pensions of Ex Service men and their dependents.

What happened? The bill was referred to a committee of eight members, four from each side of the House (page 890). The Honourable Senator Pardee, a front bench Liberal, was chairman. The report of the committee practically emasculated

the bill (page 892 and following). I think the report was a Liberal vote. The bill was then referred to the Senate.

Premier King proposes? It is this—that if the Commons pass an identical bill in three successive sessions it shall become law, even though the Senate oppose it, and this—is no reform at all. Before one can visualize a reform, one must first visualize the evil which is to be reformed. Has the Senate of Canada ever rejected three successive sessions of the Commons? One will, I think, search the records in vain for such a case.

Briefly the situation is that at the close of the Session 1924, Premier King threatened very terrible things against the Senate, but later, on enquiry, reflection and some straight talk from the original Provinces of Confederation has brought about a change of mind. Still one must do something—hence his "reform". Having cried "Havoc let loose the dogs of war" the ponderous gates of doom swing back and a sucking dove emerges.

Yours faithfully,
W. A. GRIESBACH.
Edmonton, Jan. 15, 1925.

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