

The Winnipeg Tribune

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AN AFFRONT TO PARLIAMENT

Appointment of a royal commission by the federal government to investigate certain phases of the Home Bank crash is a flagrant affront to parliament. It is done with the obvious purpose of avoiding a wide open investigation by a committee of the House.

Parliament in due to meet in a couple of days. The ordinary course for a government would be to submit the matter to parliament with a recommendation either for a parliamentary inquiry or appointment of a commission to establish the facts. Instead of that the government, clearly with the desire to prevent a general investigation, has appointed a commission with a limited scope of inquiry and will greet parliament with the announcement of a fait accompli. Parliament will be told the government, to avoid delay, has lifted the matter out of its hands, and that parliament's only duty is to sit quiet and wait until the commission makes a report, probably for next session. Doubtless that appealed to the government as good strategy. The move has the merit of audacity, but that is all.

Home Bank affairs affect too many people in too vital a manner to permit parliament to overlook the responsibilities which rest upon it. It is the highest tribunal in the land, and there are certain points in connection with the Home Bank it must clear up and decide for itself. Royal commissions, as Canada knows by long experience, bring out what is expected of them and conceal what it is not desired to bring forward. There is no room for half-way measures in the investigation into the Home Bank's affairs. Shareholders and depositors alike expect parliament to inquire deeply and thoroughly and finally, and if parliament shirks this duty by accepting the government's wholly obvious ruse there will be a general public protest.

The purpose of the commission inquiry ordered by the government is quite apparent. The questions laid before it really can be summarized in one, namely: What measure of responsibility can be placed on the late Conservative government for the bank's failure? The present deficiencies of the Bank Act, the question of responsibility for the reports accepted by the government a month or two before the crash came and showed these reports to be wholly fraudulent; responsibility of the directors at various stages of the bank's career—these and other questions are given no consideration. The commission is asked to say only whether or not the Conservative government in 1915, 1916 and 1918 could have made investigations that would have revealed the bank in a dangerous condition.

To elicit a favorable finding on this question doubtless would please the government greatly, but it is not what the shareholders and depositors want, nor what the country as a whole wants. What it is necessary to know is if the government observed proper precautions under the Bank Act when statements that are now known to be fraudulent came from the bank, and if so, wherein the Bank Act is weak enough to permit such a condition to arise. Nothing but a parliamentary inquiry can satisfy this demand. No commission can or will bring out the vitally essential facts. Parliament will be recreant to its duty if it accepts the government's shoddy substitute for a real inquiry.

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