

Another Midnight Session

House in Committee on Railway Resolutions—Mr. Coaker, Chairman of Commission Did Not Watch Expenditure.

The Railway Resolutions were dealt with at yesterday's session of the House and some startling facts were made known by various Opposition members. Sir Michael Cashin's brilliant address of the afternoon could not be concluded yesterday as, unfortunately, he could not find it possible to be present at the night session. Mr. Sullivan and Sir John Crosbie, however, filled the breach valiantly and castigated the Government's conduct of railway affairs in a manner which caused the "frenzied financiers" to squirm. After the House had met, at the usual hour, the Exportation of Timber Bill was read a first time.

Sir Michael Cashin returned the messages of Trade Commissioner Smith and told the Minister of Marine and Fisheries that he wanted all the messages and that they must also be decided.

The House resolved into Committee of the Whole on the Railway Resolutions.

Sir Michael Cashin took up the remainder of the afternoon session with a brilliant address on the Government's Railway policy which he will probably continue to-day. He quoted from the report of the Prime Minister's speech of last year on Railway matters as published in the Daily Star of July 9th, 1920. The present situation, he said, was deplorable but was only to be expected from a Government such as this one, which had proved itself utterly incapable of dealing with any matters of importance. Sir Michael read the headline to the report of the Prime Minister's speech previously mentioned. It was "Premier Squires hammers Reid Newfoundland Co. unmercifully." The Railway policy of last year consisted of a loan of \$1,000,000 to the Reid's to be repaid with interest. It also called for the appointment of a commission to supervise the expenditure of the money loaned. This commission was to have consisted of seven members, four of whom would represent the Government. Sir Michael asked the Prime Minister if that \$1,000,000 was charged to the Reid Newfoundland Co. and was told that such expenditure as was made on capital account had been charged up to the company.

Sir Michael then enquired about the interest and was informed that the Reid was 6 per cent. and that this also had been charged to Reid's account. Sir Michael stated that the Government had charged the amount at the Treasury Office but had not notified Reid's that they owed the money. No attempt had been made by the Government to unravel the railway mystery which was now before the House. \$2,500,000 had been spent and yet another \$1,500,000 was asked for to go on with the Railway. He would not say it was not necessary. Under existing conditions somebody had to run the Railway somehow. If the Reid Newfoundland Company had not got the money, it was the Government's policy to run the Railway, whilst they had money, and when there was none left they would throw up both the Railway and the Government. He asked the "Minister of Railways," (a title which seems to suit Mr. Coaker exceedingly well), questions concerning the appointment of the Railway Commission and was told that only five men had been appointed, two only of whom represented the government. These were Mr. Coaker, and the Government Engineer, Mr. T. A. Hall. The Reid's had three representatives, Messrs. H. D. Reid, R. G. Reid, and J. P. Powell.

Sir M. P. Cashin—How did you watch expenditure?

Mr. Coaker—I didn't watch it at all. Sir M. P. Cashin—What we thought you were the watch dog looking out for the rights of the underdogs. But who did watch?

Mr. Coaker—Mr. Hall.

As regards the expenditure of the \$1,000,000, Sir Michael could only come to one conclusion, that Mr. Hall was the only member of the Commission who supervised it. Mr. Coaker was journeying abroad and the Company's representatives could not have been expected to supervise the expenditure in the Government's interests. Dealing with the improvements embodied in the Railway policy of last year, Sir Michael said that none of them have been carried out. He had been told that Mr. Coaker was a physical wreck. He sympathized with him and with the country and the Government which had let the Minister make a financial wreck of the Colony. It had been heart-breaking to hear the Prime Minister on Railway matters on Tuesday. On top of his denouncement of the Reid's as published in the "Star," the Prime Minister handed out \$2,000,000 to them. Under Government management \$153,000 had been spent to keep part of the road open during the winter so that a Government supporter would get his skis propped. The Prime Minister and his Government must be afflicted with some kind of disease to cause him to put up with the treatment his people were getting. Not a word had been told how the \$2,000,000 had

been spent. Still the people put up with it. There was not even any sentiment in the city of St. John's. Sir Michael then noticed that there was no quorum and called the Speaker's attention to it.

The members of the Government returned to the House in answer to summons by the Speaker. Sir Michael let loose on them for the indifference they showed to their country's interests by leaving their seats and going in the rooms to smoke their pipes at a time when a matter of a million and a half dollar gift was being discussed. For 4 months said Sir Michael the House has been in session, and practically no business of importance has been transacted. The Government members in great part did not care so long as they got their mess of potage. Some of these members came to this House as champions of the "underdogs," but now that their seasonal pay has been raised from \$200 to \$1000 they are content to let everything else drift.

Reading that part of the Commission's report, dealing with the Company's failure to make the Railway pay, Sir Michael said that Mr. Coaker had also made a miserable failure at the business, though no doubt he did his best. He was sorry for him as he sat in his seat taking his medicine.

Mr. Coaker—"Could you do better?"

Sir Michael—"Yes I could, but the people preferred you to manage the affairs of the country and now they are saddled with a burden of 10 million dollars for their choice. Where you are going to get this 1½ million dollars for the Railroad is still a mystery. It certainly will not come from the Revenue of next year. That will bring only 9 or 10 millions, which will not cover the estimates. You can get another loan as you did the last, when you submitted a false statement showing a surplus of 1½ millions. Will the country then have to go insolvent? We discuss this Railway expenditure as if the country had unlimited means. We are in a mess of the worst kind. Is that not so Mr. Chairman? Did you not say so Mr. Coaker? Our country will suffer long for the mismanagement of the present Government. Personally it will be no worse for me than any other man, but when I consider that this is my native land I cannot stand without raising my voice in protest. The mark put on the country by the present administration is RUIN. After two years of being in power not one measure of benefit to the country has resulted."

The Prime Minister at this juncture came into the Chamber and excused himself saying that he was absent seeking important information from the Finance Department.

Sir Michael, directing his remarks to the Premier, said when he handed you the Government there was 4 million dollars of a surplus, and what have you done with it. During the past 12 months you have expended 6 millions of dollars, and have added 2 million dollars yearly to expenditure. The country is looking in vain to you to keep her off the rocks, but you are not troubling. You asked for a suspension of the rules of the House three weeks ago so as to rush the business of the country knowing well that the Railway problem had to be considered. Sir George Bury came here and took from the colony 7 or 8 thousand dollars for a report on this matter, which he manufactured from the report written by Mr. T. Hall. This man was brought here for a blind and he left behind him only two sheets of fool's cap. Addressing Mr. Coaker he asked, did his suggestion in the commissions report to close down the Railroad mean only camouflage and what was meant by the statement that 50% ought to be allowed for the padding of account as made out by the Reid's. He offered to sit down if Mr. Coaker would explain these matters. It was not fair to say that the Reid's padded their statement, when they showed a loss of 1½ millions on operation, when Mr. Coaker lost 2 million on the same transaction, unless he too padded.

Mr. Coaker left the House but when he came back Sir Michael said to him, you beat the Prime Minister when you took the Chairmanship of the Railway Commission.

Mr. Coaker—"I did not want to be Chairman."

Sir Michael—"While you were on that commission was any of your propositions turned down?"

Mr. Coaker—"No."

Sir Michael—"You were boss of the whole outfit. You refer in your report to new freight sheds at St. John's. Have any plans been prepared?"

Mr. Coaker—"I assume they have."

Sir Michael—"Are they to be seen? Will you table their to-morrow?"

Mr. Coaker—"Probably I can."

Sir Michael—"Did I understand that Sir George Bury said in his report that the rails were good for the next 5 years?"

Mr. Coaker—"Yes!"

Sir Michael—"How then do you justify the commissions report on this matter?"

Mr. Coaker—"I do not know."

Sir Michael—"I understand that

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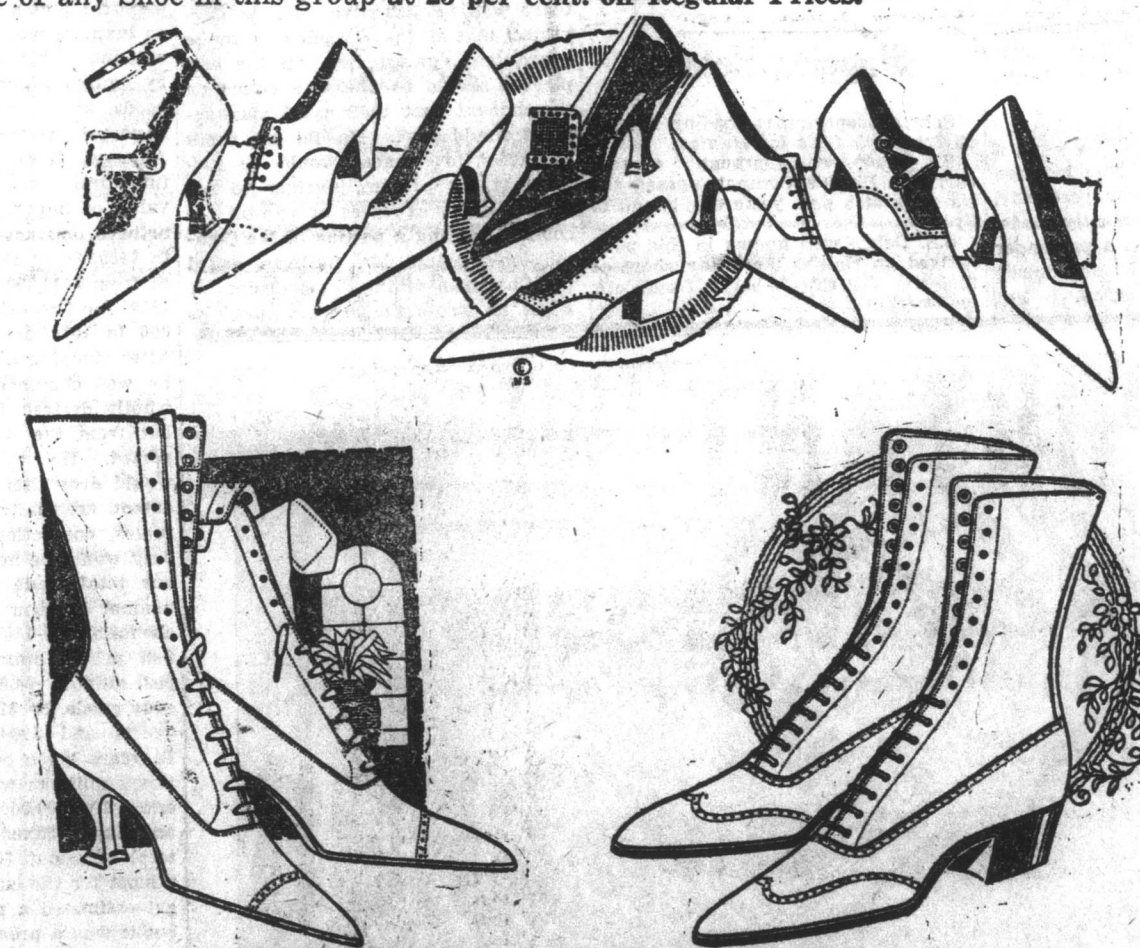
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