

BENNETT SPEAKS ON RAILWAY BILL

DEALS WITH CONSTITUTIONAL ASPECT OF PROPOSAL TO EX-PROPRIATE BOND MONEY.

R. B. Bennett was the speaker yesterday afternoon at the Legislature in the debate on the bill to amend the constitution of the province of Alberta, and to provide for the expropriation of the bonds of the Canadian Northern Railway Company.

He dealt with the bill largely from its constitutional and legal aspects, quoting extensively from judicial authorities, both English and American, in support of his contentions. He denounced the intention of the bill as a highway robbery by the province, and appealed to the members to pause before they enacted such legislation. He spoke at length on the constitutional aspect of the bill, and the president, W. R. Clarke, and asserted that the action of the Legislature, if they repudiated the contract, would be the fourth of its kind in the English-speaking world.

He claimed that the banks would never pay for the money as they would be liable in the courts of the United States, where the banks concerned had branches, for damages, and the act of the Legislature of Alberta would not be a defence. He drew what he termed as analogies between what the government proposed to do and cases of individuals, and time and again referred with irony and sarcasm to the course that was being pursued by the province, and an ex-judge of the province. He claimed that the majority of the House had been elected to build the railway to Fort McMurray and asserted that if the voice of democracy were unheeded then the day of democratic rule was past. He dramatically pointed to the British ensign that adorned the wall behind the speaker and made an impassioned plea that justice be done and the fair name of Alberta be saved from disgrace and dishonor.

An eloquent effort.

The speaker was undoubtedly a masterpiece of oratory. Proceeding with deliberation for more than two hours, the speaker closed in a terrific eloquence, even though many of his listeners and despite the rules of the House applause broke out as he concluded.

The adjournment of the debate was moved by ex-Premier Rutherford, who will address the House today. Leader of the Opposition, Bennett said he will follow and there will be other speakers. The debate will be closed by Premier Sifton, who will answer the criticisms that have been directed against the bill.

Routine business was soon disposed of and shortly after five o'clock Mr. Bennett rose to address the House. A hush overcame the crowd, closely packed in every available sitting or standing space. The speaker was slow and deliberately the orator began.

Reiterated Gravity of Situation.

"In my professional and public career," he said, "I have many times been called upon to address the courts and public gatherings. I have pleaded the cause of clients and I have spoken on my own behalf. But never have I addressed a public body or a court of law with such a solemn responsibility as I now feel. I am asked by the Prime Minister of this province to repudiate a contract, an act such as has never before been carried out in the British Empire, an act such as has few equals in the pages of history. Similar acts have been carried out, once in Nicaragua and Virginia, and in South Carolina, only in times of war or of revolution.

"Others may choose to repudiate their obligation, to annul their contracts, but I never will. I am of my country. I hope to show that this bill will, if carried out, bring disgrace and dishonor upon the province and upon its people.

Proceeding Mr. Bennett said he would first review the legislation leading up to the bargain between the Government and the Canadian Northern Railway Company. In February, 1909, an act was passed incorporating three men, two of whom were the late Mr. Rutherford and one a resident of Winnipeg, William Bain. This action of the Legislature brought upon it a great responsibility for by the incorporation of the company, it was given the right to expropriate the bonds of the Canadian Northern Railway Company, and of the honorable president of the Executive Council of the province, duty signed, sealed and executed. By these articles the province entered into an solemn contract with the Canadian Northern Railway Company, and we are now asked to repudiate.

"And this is what we are asked to do by an ex-chief justice of the province, and the province, and we are asked to do by a count of heads, by the force of numbers in the Legislature. This is a highway robbery."

Government Repudiated.

Mr. Bennett having established the contract proceeded a step further. Not one transaction between the company and the province but was taken with the consent and assistance of the government. Sydney B. Woods, the late deputy attorney-general, honored by the confidence of the present administration in being engaged to conduct an appeal before the Privy Council, was present at all the transactions in Winnipeg, Montreal and New York. This document, executed by the province, was sent to the bondholders in London and every one of them has had free access to it in the archives of the stock exchange to learn his right and privilege.

The speaker said that he had seen by the last listing of the stock exchange that the bonds were selling at 115. He had talked to a prominent English capitalist recently on his trip through the west, and he said that the company had bought a large block some time ago at 115. These men had no understanding that the province would guarantee the definitive bonds later to be issued by the company.

Then Mr. Bennett said to the House: "But I go a step further. I said, 'The province, represented by Mr. Woods, with Clarke drew up a contract with the province, and the act of the Legislature of Alberta in 1909 and 1910, and in 1911, and in 1912, and in 1913, and in 1914, and in 1915, and in 1916, and in 1917, and in 1918, and in 1919, and in 1920, and in 1921, and in 1922, and in 1923, and in 1924, and in 1925, and in 1926, and in 1927, and in 1928, and in 1929, and in 1930, and in 1931, and in 1932, and in 1933, and in 1934, and in 1935, and in 1936, and in 1937, and in 1938, and in 1939, and in 1940, and in 1941, and in 1942, and in 1943, and in 1944, and in 1945, and in 1946, and in 1947, and in 1948, and in 1949, and in 1950, and in 1951, and in 1952, and in 1953, and in 1954, and in 1955, and in 1956, and in 1957, and in 1958, and in 1959, and in 1960, and in 1961, and in 1962, and in 1963, and in 1964, and in 1965, and in 1966, and in 1967, and in 1968, and in 1969, and in 1970, and in 1971, and in 1972, and in 1973, and in 1974, and in 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