

# LEVEL CLASS LEGISLATURE ON LIQUOR LAW AND TAX REFORM

## Sir James Whitney and N.W. Rowell Cross Swords in Debate on Speech From Throne—Premier Denounced Those Who Suggested That He Tampered With Tax Committee, and Said That Single Tax Meant Abolition of Home, Marriage and Religion.

When Sir James Whitney and N. W. Rowell clashed yesterday in the legislature in the debate on the speech from the throne, it was indeed an occasion of unusual interest. Not for many years has there been such a lively debate on the floor of the house. For three hours the government and opposition leaders hammered away.

Mr. Rowell rose to speak when the house convened, and was on his feet for nearly two hours, during which time he forcibly criticized the government, especially on such questions as tax reform and liquor laws. On several occasions he was interrupted by Sir James Whitney and other government members.

The premier in his reply to the opposition leader hit hard and often. He twitted the Liberals for not entering candidates in the recent by-elections and concluded that this was an indication of the effectiveness of this party's platform. In answer to criticism regarding the government's apparent "hushing up" of the anti-treating question, he said that this legislation would come in "proper time." He attacked tax reform from every standpoint, and declared that the so-called Henry Georgeism would ultimately result in abolition of home, marriage and religion. In reference to his connection with the tax committee he described those who had suggested that the government should eliminate the treating system, as contemptible, miserable and cowardly failures.

Mr. Rowell's Speech. It was without doubt, Mr. Rowell's best speech since assuming the leadership of the opposition. In his address, which embraced many subjects, effectively, his argument was strong and his criticism keen. On rising to speak, he immediately took occasion to join other members in paying a tribute to the memory of the late Hon. A. J. Matheson and Robert Sutherland, former member for East Middlesex. And then he graciously congratulated the premier on his having received an additional honor from King George on New Year's Day. Referring to the loss of the nation of the four explorers, he said that all the people must feel great cause for gratification in the striking examples of heroism and self-sacrifice of those who died in the Antarctic.

Mr. Rowell vigorously attacked the government, because of what the speech from the throne did not contain. He quoted an authority as to the definition of the speech, stating that it should show what was done by the government since the parliament opened, and announced general legislation which was to be brought up. "I find in the heart of the speech," he said, "reference to the work of construction of the new government house, and considering that there is no reference whatever to tax reform, the sitting of the tax committee, the proposed anti-treating legislation, the government house must have more importance than the face it appears to have, he said. The speech touched on questions regarding the new library, but neglected to mention the revision of the statutes which the police magistrate had been waiting on for six years. "Surely the government," he said, "the library are not matters of great moment," he said. "The time has come to write a new speech. This one is time worn and stereotyped."

A Vital Question. As regards agriculture, the most vital question of the day was rural depopulation, but nothing was said of this in the speech. The housing problem was not mentioned, and there is no more vital question affecting the well-being of the people. "The University of Toronto is facing a financial crisis, at least that is the information which comes from the chairman of the board of governors," he continued. "I believe we are not here one of the most important questions with which we have to deal? Is it not strange that we are informed, not by the speech, but by the chairman of the board of governors, which makes no mention of it?"

Not Mentioned. The conditions resulting from the employment of women and children in factories needed remedy. This question touched the family and social life. But there was not a word about the public importance, there was no proposal from the government to consider it. As a result, apparently the government did not think it a question of sufficient seriousness to propose measures for the future. And on the question of the liquor traffic, there was not a word in the speech—the government gave this grave neglect to the public.

With the great increase of wealth from natural resources he thought that conditions should be such that every honest toiler should be enabled to have his family in a home of his own, to provide education for his children and to lay money by for emergencies. The question of developing a sound citizenship was of more importance than developing resources. The government should also devote some attention to old age pensions at the present time, so as to prevent conditions which now prevail in other countries.

A Disappointment. He was disappointed in not seeing a reference to the experimental and demonstration work and plans for extensions in connection with the hydro-electric system. What were the results of the demonstrations to farmers? In his opinion a shortening of the day was forthcoming from the government on plans for the future. Nothing would tend more to keep men on the farm and bring back those who had left than to create attractive conditions. Next to the expansion of the hydro-electric question of operating radial lines for the benefit of municipalities, many of which were asking for them, was a most important one. Adequate transportation facilities were badly needed by farmers today. Was the government behind the chairman, Hon. Adam Beck, in assisting municipalities to secure radials? Or was he fighting single-handed against his own colleagues, which was the case some time ago, according to statements by the press? asked Mr. Rowell.

"Public or private statements to this effect are entirely untrue," interjected Sir James. Claims the Policy. The opposition leader then switched to the question of good roads and the announcement in the speech of a plan to expend \$5,000,000. He was glad to see that the government had changed its opinion on this question. Within a year the government voted down our motion calling for an adequate system of good roads, especially ones leading to markets," he went on. "But you can take our policy. We are willing to devise policies for the government if it will be progressive."

There was only a meagre suggestion of prison reform in the speech, and this seemingly had been inserted in "an apologetic way." "I would like to see the government do for the masses outside the prison walls as effectively as for those confined there," he said. He then criticized the government for taking five years to decide on introducing a workmen's compensation act.

Re Anti-Treating. "I am sure the public would like to have seen some mention of the liquor problem and tax reform in the speech," he said. "Surely the local option was recently was of sufficient importance to be given a little prominence. What has become of the government's policy on anti-treating? Last year, when the government motion was introduced to eliminate the treating system, we thought that they were going to fight. Or was it a signal of distress—any port in a storm? It was an evidence of sudden conversion, which I hoped, was sincere, but looks now as if the government had been an inglorious retreat, had hopelessly backslid. I can hardly force myself to believe this after the government's solemn reiteration of Sir James Whitney's statement that he had received information of the evils of treating from a number of wholesalers and retailers. Have these owners withdrawn their approval of anti-treating?"

"We proposed our resolution of abolition of the bar and by that policy we stand. We will introduce it again this session. Will the government introduce their bill? We would render every assistance to the government, although we think that the elimination of the treating system would not be effective as the abolition of the bar."

Silent Contempt. He then veered to the question of tax reform, which, he said, the government was treating with silent contempt despite the wishes of the people. "The time has come for the government to reconsider its action just as it did on other questions," he said. "It has long been recognized that the tax system is much more than a method of collecting revenue. It has a vital relation to the progress of the community."

Mr. Rowell went into detail to show the inadequacy of the present Assessment Act. Lands were being held idle when needed, and a proposal for improvements was handicapped seriously by local taxation, which bore an ultimate relation with all housing and social problems. The important items to consider were land and the products of labor, or improvements. If you taxed land you forced it into use because you would render it unprofitable to the owner to allow it to stand idle. If you taxed improvements you discouraged industry. This was Henry George's theory, common sense and the Liberals proposed to stand by it.

Sir James Whitney, the hon. leader of the opposition says that by taxing land it is forced into use and the taxing of improvements discouraged building. This is a gross statement, but I would like to see it proven.

How It Works Out Here. "The proof may be advanced by argument and reason or by experience," said Mr. Rowell. "Take Toronto, where there is a demand for houses. A man can afford to hold land for years because of the rapid growth of the city, and he can well afford to hold it because of its gradual increase of value. The annual charge is small and the investment is large, without the investment of a dollar. If the burden of the taxation is on the land he must, for his own protection, improve the property so that he could get some return."

"There was a great inflation of real estate values in Toronto about 23 years ago, when land was subdivided and sold at every rise. The boom collapsed and many owners found that paying a moderate tax was a burden. It was so unprofitable to carry the tax that many owners abandoned their property. That showed," said Mr. Rowell, "that conditions might arise which, with the burden of taxation on vacant land, makes it necessary for the owner to improve it to make it profitable. The land tax discouraged him from keeping it idle. If you put the burden of taxation on a man's investment, whether it be a house, store or skyscraper, so it diminishes his return that he will likely invest in something else. By increasing his return you encourage investment in buildings and improvements in the city."

"Who is going to pay for the tax which isn't placed on improvements?" asked Mr. Lennox. "It will be put on the land," answered Mr. Rowell.

Should Go Further. He said that in the amended act of 1904 the personal tax was dropped and there was a greater exemption of the income. The government would well afford to carry it still forward. The same problem confronted Ontario today as Manitoba 35 years ago, where settlers were not charged a cent for improving buildings. There was a great handicap on new Ontario settlers who suffered by the improvement tax. Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta gave municipalities local option. Why not Ontario? New Ontario settlers were to-day competing with prairie settlers who did not have to pay taxes for improvements. Because of the great diversity of conditions no general act would suit all Ontario. Legislation would have to be drawn up to suit the cities, the

towns, the townships and new Ontario. The government was strongly against local option, but today, even under the present law, every municipality was allowed to use its own judgment in wiping out, reducing or increasing the poll tax. Toronto had dropped the poll tax. Had the province suffered because of this power given the municipalities? If the government could trust them with this item why not grant a general system of home rule?"

A Big Demand. "The government says there has been no demand for this reform," he continued. "All classes of people have demanded it. 217 manufacturers, 188 labor unions and 184 citizens are among the advocates. The people of Toronto favored it by a large majority. And still the government says there is no demand. It is the speaker then mentioned the fact that Sir William Meredith, when leader of the opposition in 1894, could see no objection to giving local option. He considered that the learned judge's opinion should carry some weight with the government. "If his opinion is so good on workmen's compensation and other questions, why is it not equally as good on taxation?" he asked. "Why could the government turn against the Conservative press? The Mail and Empire, The Telegram, and The World advocated reform in its columns and by petition to the government. I congratulate The Toronto World for sticking to its guns and not changing following the attitude. With the majority of the people asking for tax reform the government strangely can see no demand."

Mr. Rowell concluded after speaking nearly two hours, by voicing his support to the amendment to the effect that the house regretted that the government did not act upon the wishes of the people.

Sir James Surprised. "I am surprised," said Sir James Whitney, "at the statements of the hon. leader of the opposition," said Sir James. "I did not know him so well. I would be asked where he was doing these things. He has been in the house a little over a year and he has said a great many astonishing things, and I am afraid he will go on saying and doing these things. We have just heard a straight-out, advanced and matured declaration of socialism from the government. I might say, ever heard in this house. I might say, ever heard a lousy sneer about the construction of the government and receiving the money of the people, but I suppose they were clear to himself, so that was all that was necessary."

"All the gentlemen in the world he is the last who should criticize the government regarding the university. He assisted the man who a few years ago was a straight-out socialist, and as it could be strangled and thereby caused the crisis which now confronts us. The man who was then a holder of political intrigue, the government merely doled out small amounts like \$10,000 or \$15,000 for his upkeep. New men were brought in and treated in the British Empire. And now he blames the people who have made it what it is today for well I don't know what I do not he did."

In Proper Time. Regarding the anti-treating legislation, Sir James said that the government had got into the hands of the paid of the people. "This government has dealt effectively with the liquor traffic, but it has not rendered it unprofitable to the owner to allow it to stand idle. If you taxed improvements you discouraged industry. This was Henry George's theory, common sense and the Liberals proposed to stand by it."

He said that the people hardly realize the effect of the program to improve the rural areas of Ontario. He could quite understand why the newspaper which the hon. leader of the opposition party owned had said nothing about it. It makes no difference what progressive step this government takes the Liberal organ does not give it credit, he said.

The government proposed to form an elaborate plan. We intend to appoint a commissioner and send him to New York State to inquire into the operation of the system there, in order that we will be enabled to take to great scheme on a reasonable and proper basis. If there was no other way to get the good results of the roads policy this would have been a good way to save it from such condemnation."

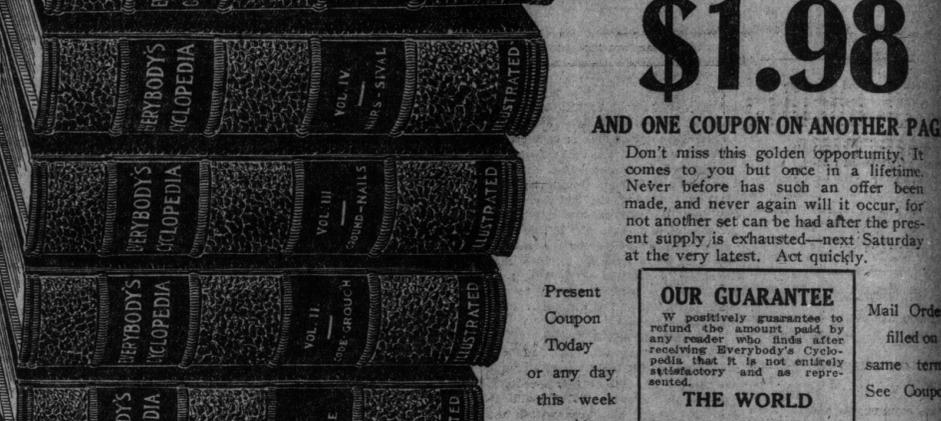
Tendered Thanks. "I must thank the hon. leader of the opposition for something which he has unconsciously done. Here in this formal manner I will thank him for the way he conducted the recent three election campaigns which resulted in the election of Conservatives." He then twitted Mr. Rowell for not sending candidates into the field and asked a little criticism at J. C. Elliott, Liberal member for West Middlesex, for not entering the fight.

Mr. Elliott interrupted: "I was unavoidably absent." Sir James: "I take your explanation anyway. At all events you were not there." "It will be put on the land," answered Mr. Rowell. "In a most whole-hearted and cordial way for the Conservative majorities. In no one of the three ridings did the hon. leader of the opposition dare to lift up his banner and ask the people to stand by it. It strikes me that the

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FORT COLBORNE, Feb. 12.—(Special)—Two men were probably fatally hurt here this afternoon thru the collapse of a scaffolding at the plant of the Canada Furnace & Steel Co. In the 40-foot fall Charles Edgar, of Midland and William Sandy of Cleveland received injuries from which they have slight prospect of recovery. The other man escaped almost unscathed. The men, who were employed by the Variety Iron & Steel Structures Co., Cleveland, were removed to the Welland Hospital.