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RAIDS ON THE TREASURY GOVERNMENT PAYS TWO PRICES

Another Little Scandal in Which the Federal Government Paid \$1,325 for a Job Only Worth \$615—The Facts Brought Out in the Public Accounts Committee—The Halifax Land Deal Again Ventilated in the Committee.

Ottawa, March 22.—What appears likely to develop into another little scandal in connection with the way in which the Government money is squandered was introduced before the Public Accounts Committee this morning. For the vestibule at the main entrance to the Parliament buildings it was shown that a total of \$1,325 had been paid to the Library Bureau Company, while Ald. J. E. Askwith, a contractor, who had been for thirty-five years in the business, and one of the leading citizens of the capital, gave evidence that the whole of the work could have been done for \$615. The first witness called in connection with this investigation was Mr. John Shearer, superintendent of the Dominion buildings at Ottawa, who in examination by Mr. Lennox, said he had occupied the position for two years. Being a carpenter by trade he considered he was a good judge of the value of this work. He testified that he certified this account for the work and considered the price paid was a fair one. In arriving at his decision, however, he admitted that he had no papers before him to assist him in arriving at what was

A Proper Price for the Work.

There was no specification as to what was a rush order, and the whole matter was left to his discretion—to see the work completed before the opening of Parliament last year. The work, he believed, was finished on the night before the opening of the session, namely on the 7th of March.

Mr. Lennox pointed out that the account was issued on the 27th of January, and the witness could not explain this except to say that that must have been the date when the order was first given. The item of \$1,325 was made up of two amounts, namely \$950 for the vestibule, and \$375 for the side door. He considered that in certifying for these amounts that as a practical man he was content to do it without making out any detailed statement. He just estimated the value of the work by a

general survey. It was between one and two weeks before the opening of parliament that the work was started and it was not done by tender.

Neither was Any Price Fixed before the commencement of the work. Since the matter was introduced a short time back by Mr. Taylor (Leeds), he had applied for a statement from the Library Bureau Company, and Mr. R. A. Sprague had replied, saying that the work had been a rush job and a good deal of night work was put upon it. It appeared from the examination that whilst the account was dated January 27, the cheque in payment was dated March 12.

Mr. J. E. Askwith, an Ottawa contractor, who commenced life as a carpenter and had spent practically the whole of his life in the contracting business, testified that he had examined the work and doorway and was of the opinion that the whole of the work, which had cost the Government \$1,325, could have been carried out for \$615, allowing at this rate a 50 per cent. discount.

In reply to the chairman he admitted that a rush order might cause an increase in the price. The matter was still under investigation when the committee arose.

Halifax Land Deal.

Prior to this matter being introduced Mr. David Pottinger, general manager of the Intercolonial, under went examination concerning the purchase of certain lands at Halifax for the I. C. R. In reply to Mr. Ames he said it was decided to abandon the Richmond Road site because it was too expensive, and would not afford means for expansion. He was unable to say when Mr. Henderson and Mr. Pearson became aware of the fact that the Government required the property.

Replying to Mr. McDonald, Pitou, the witness said the usual course was proceeded with in securing the land, and the instructions to purchase the land was sent by him to the chief engineer.

It was pointed out that there is a small surplus or deficit as the case may be. People say things are not in such a bad shape after all. I am surprised and the people will be surprised with me that we have to pay nearly \$20,000 interest on current account when we begin and end with a slight surplus. This amount is the interest on nearly \$100,000. There must, therefore, have been an overdraft of nearly that amount. Then, too, there were treasury bills issued near the close of the year for over \$500,000. All bear interest, but I am informed that they were not issued until near the close of the year and so I have not calculated the interest upon them. About 1900 the Premier entered the government, in that year the interest paid was \$134,771.77. In 1906 the interest was \$212,733.76, or an increase in six years of \$77,961.99. On the whole, the statement, hon. gentlemen will see that there has been an increase of more than 50 per cent. in interest charges alone, which the people must pay. It might be shown that

Shrinking Revenue Has Made it Necessary

to borrow money, but such has not been the case. The hon. gentlemen have discovered new methods to tax the people and get increased revenue. They have found new methods of taxation. In 1900 the revenue was \$758,998, last year it was \$887,206.53. Thus we see an increase of \$128,208.55. Despite all this increase, the administration spent all the revenue and had to borrow sums which increased the interest by 50 per cent. If allowed to continue in power for the next six years the charges will be increased to more than \$300,000 or more than the total receipts from territorial revenue last year.

If pass to a consideration of the receipts and expenditures for 1906 as set down in the report. For ordinary revenue the amount stated is \$887,206.53. The expenditure chargeable to ordinary revenue, \$879,065.52. Apparently there was a surplus of \$8,141.01 on ordinary account. The Premier did not make that announcement but the Auditor General's report is a book printed for distribution near people may learn the true condition of the finances, shows this apparent surplus. In this it is incorrect.

A Most Remarkable System of Book-keeping

is followed. It is this way: they take all debt balances and carry them in to the liability column. Thus, for instance, the Public Works department was so much behind at the end of the year. This amount was carried into the liability column and the amount expended goes down as total expenditure. There are many cases of this. A correct system would require that the expenditure under departmental heads would appear at what is actually paid. The report for 1906 shows itself. Last year credit carried forward was said to be \$167,891.17. At the end of the year a balance is claimed of \$77,616.09. What became of the \$90,275.08 difference? It is an item which will shortly go into the bonded indebtedness. The pro-

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Under the present system must be bonded to carry on the ordinary services.

I also want to draw attention to the overdraft accounts of last year. Under the head of Provincial Hospital the report shows a sum of \$22,502.21 is due the Bank of New Brunswick for over-expenditure. This by the way is \$2,000 less than the overdraft of last year. According to the Premier's remarkable reasoning of last season, we must have had a surplus last year of \$2,000. But the deficit was real. This year the overdraft on the Public Works (ordinary) was \$42,122.24. Apparently there is one ordinary Public Works account and one extraordinary. The Chief Commissioner, I suppose, administers the accounts of the latter. The advances by the Bank of British North America for Public Works was \$19,935.52. Together the two charges amount to over \$197,000 as the overdraft on account of Public Works. On page 11 of the report it is set down that the province last year expended \$197,250 on Public Works. Will the Chief Commissioner admit that

Every Dollar Expended Last Year Was Borrowed?

There was an overdraft too of \$5,641 on account of the Hamilton bridges. The Crown Land Department too had an overdraft of \$2,910.94.

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Every one of these was due at the close of the fiscal year, and more than that, in order to bolster up the obnoxious Highway Act, they spent some \$39,000 for agriculture. When year there has been borrowed nearly every dollar of the amount due for expenditure for road superintendents in 1907. We found in the estimates some \$39,000 for agriculture. When

(Continued on page 5.)

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260 14 200 100
June 30/07