

Manitoba's Legislative Program

A review of the laws passed at the session just closed

At the recent session of the Manitoba legislature, which began on January 6 and ended on March 10, a record program of momentous legislation was carried out. The women were enfranchised. The Macdonald Temperance Act was passed and endorsed at the referendum on March 13. Direct Legislation was incorporated into the statutes. A compulsory education act became law, and the bilingual clause was expunged from the School Act. The Caldwell amendments were repealed. Much labor legislation was enacted, including a new Workmen's Compensation Act, new regulations governing employment in shops and factories, and a Fair Wage Act. Authority was given to the government to sell cattle on easy terms to needy settlers, and a Mothers' Pension Act received the royal assent.

Unquestionably the most important step taken by the legislature was that by which it enfranchised the women. There was nothing in the woman suffrage bill to indicate its importance. It was in the form of an amendment to the Election Act, wiping out the political discrimination which had existed against women. As a result of the act, women have now the right to vote in Manitoba provincial elections, and also the right to offer themselves as candidates for election to the legislature. The first draft of the woman suffrage bill did not recognize the right of the women to sit in the house. On that account it failed to satisfy the leaders of the Political Equality League, who waited on the government and represented that enfranchisement should include the right to select candidates as well as the right to vote for them. Apparently the government accepted the logic of the situation at once, for the bill that Premier Norris introduced gave the women the right to be voted for, as well as the right to vote. It was passed unanimously.

Bilingual Schools Abolished

Division on party lines occurred in the house in relation to one bill only, that cutting the bilingual clause out of the Public School Act. This measure was strenuously opposed by the five Conservative members and by P. A. Talbot (La Verandrye) and J. P. Dumas (St. Boniface). It was passed in the closing days of session, and the government intimated that it will as quickly as possible make English the teaching language in all public schools. There will not be any immediate suppression of bilingualism. Before the Ruthenian and Polish bilingual schools can be transformed into English-speaking schools, a sufficient number of competent teachers must be trained. Hon. Dr. Thornton pointed out that this will take time. The minister said positively that no more bilingual schools will be created, and that as soon as the department of education gets ready it will begin converting the existing bilingual schools into English schools. Speaking on the bilingual situation on January 11, Dr. Thornton stated that an impossible condition had resulted from the attempt to enforce the bilingual clause in the school law. Utter confusion, he said, was the outcome where more than one set of children were entitled to bilingual teaching. He recited cases in which English schools had been captured and turned into Ruthenian bilingual schools, and cases in which bitter feuds had existed between other nationalities over the bilingual privileges. On June 30, last, the minister informed the house, there were in operation 1,685 one and two roomed rural schools. In this number there were 126 French bilingual schools, 61 German bilingual schools, 111 Ruthenian and Polish bilingual schools. No bilingual schools of other nationalities had been formed, but the total of 421 schools here comprised represented one-fourth of all the rural schools in the province. The enrollment in the bilingual schools was 16,720, while the total enrollment in the province was 106,963. The number of children enrolled in the bilingual schools therefore amounted to one-sixth of the enrollment of the province. The third reading of the bill exercising the bilingual clause was carried on a division of 28 to 8.

Compulsory Education

Compulsory education was provided for in an act entitled "An Act Respecting School Attendance." Under the terms of the act, children between the ages of 7 and 14 must attend the public school, or receive an education equal to that given in the public school. Enforcement of the measure is left to the local authorities in the main. School attendance officers must be appointed by the school boards, and the department of education will appoint supervisors to oversee the work throughout the province. If a child does not attend a public school, he may be examined by a public school inspector with respect to his educational attainments. Should they not be up to the standard of the public school, the child may be sent to a public school. Heads of private schools can protect their scholars from individual examination by getting their schools endorsed by the department of education. There are provisions

in the act recognizing certain grounds for exempting children from school attendance, such as sickness, distance from a school, etc. For a limited period a child may be kept at home to assist on domestic or farm work, but a permit for this must first be obtained from a justice of the peace or a magistrate.

Dr. Thornton also obtained the assent of the house to some amendments to the Public Schools Act, among which was one providing for the creation of municipal school boards. Nominally the statutes permitted this already, but the regulations were unworkable. The act required, as a preliminary to the creation of a municipal school board, that it should be requested by 25 per cent. of the electors in every school district which it was desired to amalgamate. It might happen, under the rule, that nine districts would have the needed 25 per cent. in favor of the municipal school board, while a tenth would not. Then the desire of nine districts would be frustrated by the opposition of one. The new bill allows the machinery to work more easily. It provides that a municipal council may submit to the ratepayers a bylaw for the creation of a municipal school board, and a majority vote will carry the bylaw. If the council does not take the initiative fifteen per cent. of the ratepayers may do so by signing a petition for a bylaw to be submitted.

Other legislation respecting education, which the house passed, provides for government loans to needy school districts. In fact, the department of education was virtually empowered to do whatever may be necessary for the education of the children.

THE COUNTRY MERCHANT

What place does the country retail merchant fill in rural economy? Is, or is he not, a necessary factor in the rural community?

This is a question of vital importance to every one of our readers and next week the leading feature of The Guide will be a discussion of this problem. Both sides will be fully dealt with. Letters have been received from country merchants and farmers. These will be published and the ideas expressed will not only give a great deal of valuable information on this subject but will also serve to create a better understanding of each other's position between country merchant and farmer.

Authority was given to establish model rural schools at strategic points, and to make special grants for various purposes, including agricultural instruction.

Absentee Reeves Barred

Under the terms of a bill to amend the Municipal Act it was provided that reeves must reside in the municipalities they represent. Formerly, reeves were not subject to the general provision against absenteeism on the part of the members of municipal councils. The lieutenant-governor-in-council was empowered to appoint receivers or administrators for insolvent or financially embarrassed municipalities, and limits were set to municipal borrowing power. The municipal commissioner, however, may at his discretion allow a municipality to exceed these limits. There was also passed an amendment requiring all candidates for municipal office to be able to read and write English—to write it from dictation.

Relief for hard pressed taxpayers was afforded by an amendment to the Assessment Act, by which the second 10 per cent. penalty on unpaid taxes is reduced from 10 to 5 per cent. Previously a 15 per cent. penalty was imposed in December and another in March. Hon. A. B. Hudson, the attorney-general, said that if any private creditor charged interest at this rate he would be imprisoned for usury.

Pensions for Mothers

Mothers' pensions were provided for under terms of a bill entitled "An Act to Provide Allowances for Mothers." It provides that the lieutenant-gov-

ernor-in-council may set aside in each fiscal year, out of consolidated revenue, a sum not to exceed \$15,000. This will be used to provide support or partial support for the mothers of neglected or dependent children. A citizens' commission will be formed to administer the pension fund, and it is expected that an amount equal to that contributed by the government will be obtained from public subscriptions. At first the pensions will be limited to \$300 annually for each mother. Hon. Edward Brown, the provincial treasurer, expects that by developing this plan the province will in time be relieved of the burden of contributing to many private charities, and he also believes the indirect benefit, by keeping children in their homes, will be great.

Moratorium Increased

The Moratorium Act was amended to enable a debtor to recover the protection of the moratorium by paying up his arrears of interest, taxes and insurance. It was provided a year ago that no one could be sued on an agreement of sale of a mortgage if he took care not to let his interest, taxes and insurance get more than a year behind. The courts held, however, that if a man paid up his taxes, interest and insurance after the expiration of the year of grace he could not by so doing protect himself against legal proceedings in respect of principal. They ruled that a man lost the protection of the act by getting a year in arrears with the charges. This ruling was corrected by the legislature, so that henceforth the moratorium protects everyone that pays up his interest, taxes and insurance before the courts issue a judgment against him.

The War Relief Act was amended to continue the protection of soldiers for one year after their death on active service, or for one year after the end of the war. Rental values in excess of \$500 annually may, however, be appropriated by mortgagees.

In Aid of Labor

In scope and quality the labor legislation passed at the session constituted a record. The most important labor bill was the Workmen's Compensation Act. This measure provides the same scale of compensation payments as a similar act in Ontario, but, unlike the Ontario act, does not embody the principle of the state accident fund. In Ontario the government collects the premiums for workmen's compensation from the employers, and administers the fund. Under the new Manitoba act, employers will be required to take out insurance in private companies. The companies, for their part, will be required to make out the policies in favor of the government, and the government, thru a commissioner, will settle all claims. It will also guarantee the payment of all claims, the consolidated fund of the province being a contingent reserve should the deposits of the insurance companies prove inadequate in any crisis.

Another important labor bill was the Fair Wage Act. This act gives statutory recognition for the first time in the British Empire to fair wage clauses. A board, consisting of one labor representative, one employers' representative, and an official of the department of public works, will each year draw up a fair wage schedule based on the rates of pay recognized by the employers and the trades unions. The schedule will apply on all government contracts. If a contractor for the government expects to make any money out of fluctuations in wages, he will be disappointed. Allowance will be made for such fluctuations by the fair wage board, and the contractor will neither lose nor benefit on account of them.

The Factories Act was amended by including within the term "factory" places with three or more employees. Heretofore a factory has been a place employing not fewer than five employees. Factories must be closed on legal holidays. They must not work women and girls more than fifty-four hours a week, except that on thirty-six days a year women and girls may work fourteen hours a day. They must not, however, be worked more than sixty hours in any one week. Hours of labor for men are not affected by the Factories Act.

The Shops Regulation Act, which has not been enforced for fifteen years, was brought up to date. It calls for the inspection of 2,500 shops throughout the province, and provides that no girl under fourteen and no boy under thirteen may be employed in any shop. Boys between thirteen and fourteen may be employed in shops for two hours a day on school days, and eight hours a day on school holidays; but they must get a permit from the bureau of labor before seeking such employment. No female and no boy under seventeen may be employed in a shop longer than fourteen hours in any day or longer than sixty hours a week.

All labor legislation will henceforth be administered by the labor bureau, legislation authorizing

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