

POOR DOCUMENT

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THE EVENING TIMES AND STAR, ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, JULY 30, 1921

A present published notice of the... of the local plebiscite act... stipulates that the terms are exactly the same as the federal act.

As this about concludes my simple effort to protect the citizens of St. John from another burglary, permit me to say that as there has been no organization or other means to provide accommodation for the voters reaching the polls, and as I am not in a position to furnish them, I only ask in return for my slight effort, that you go to the polls and vote for the best interests of St. John.

In conclusion Mr. McLellan said that the difference between the two parties to the controversy was that one had faith in a dying government and the other in a living St. John.

Hon. Dr. Baxter.

Dr. J. B. M. Baxter, K. C., the city solicitor, was well received on arising. He made his usual attack on "The Telegraph and Times" and on the opinion of the lieutenant governor. The speaker said that he had some confidence in his own opinion and would give his reasons for it.

He accused Mr. McLellan of bringing up the political aspect of the question and that it was known that he meddled in political matters, and spent more time in other affairs than in those connected with his office. He said that the question also was being made a political one by the newspapers and said that the people were being misled by false political guides. He said that the press and public men who put forth dishonest arguments against commission were doing it for political purposes.

He admitted again that the act was faulty. He told of improvements of other ports under commission and said it would insure continuity of management.

D. D. Macdonald has said that we should not be paid one dollar for the harbor as we would still have it and its benefits.

The speaker berated Mr. McLellan for bringing Mr. Wignome's name into the controversy without that of his colleague. Why should Mr. Wignome be here, the speaker asked, unless he wanted to make a political farce out of it?

The worst feature of the act was that the draughtsman had not said plainly that the government was liable for the \$1,342,717.53. He admitted that the government did not guarantee this amount. The act provided for the sale of the harbor to the king for \$2,000,000 and until the \$2,000,000 was paid the king owed the city that amount. He called in H. A. Powell, K. C., who was in the audience, for his opinion and Mr. Powell replied that there was no definite statement that the government would pay. It was not a guarantee but an assumption by the commissioners. The bondholders would have to agree to the act before it could become effective, said Mr. Powell.

The Legal Aspect.

Dr. Baxter said that the Dominion parliament could not pass any act that could take the harbor from the city. The provincial parliament was the only one that could give this authority. The Dominion act makes the offer and the provincial act gives the authority to dispose of the harbor. In drawing the provincial act he said that he had in mind the faults of the Dominion act and he claimed that the liability of \$1,342,717.53 must be specified and provision made for the ferry. He said that the mayor would not sign unless these points were protected. He claimed the plebiscite act was not a mandate of the people and that it was no word in the act to force the mayor to sign.

In reply to Michael Kelly, who asked if the mayor and council could fail to carry out the wishes of the people, Dr. Baxter said that in plain language the act said the people, by the plebiscite, would permit something to be done, not direct that it be done.

The speaker said that the government property to be taken over would pay 3 1/2 per cent interest from revenue it would bring in. Mr. McLellan asked how about the elevator. Dr. Baxter said he thought it would pay 8 1/2 per cent. Mr. McLellan said it was a \$200,000 elevator and had cost \$80,000. Dr. Baxter said that he did not think the elevator would be handed over as it would be held by the railway department. Mr. McLellan interjected that was what they wanted to do give the east side to the department of railways and the west side to the department of marine and fisheries.

The speaker again mentioned the danger of some of the wharves tumbling down and the big cost of replacing them. It was a question of spreading the cost all over Canada or centering it in St. John.

At this stage Mr. Powell was called to the platform and the next speaker was F. C. Weyman.

C. Weyman.

Mr. Weyman said that he had come to the opinion that the opponents of the act were mistaken. He thought that commission was the best way to have the port administered by the government. It would give continuity of control. He forecasted how the port would grow under commission and he thought that all the people of Canada should furnish the money to make the port what it ought to be.

He said that it was not a question whether you were for or against the act and advanced many of the arguments used by others in favor of the act. He also said that no one could force the mayor to sign the transfer and he admitted that it was correct that the city would still be assessed for the sinking fund and interest on the \$1,342,717.53. The city could be relieved of this by an act of the provincial legislature.

F. L. Potts.

F. L. Potts, the next speaker, contradicted the statement that the sinking fund would have to function until the bonds were paid.

In regard to Mr. Elkin's remarks about the fire danger he said that if the city had honest members at Ottawa would it fair that they should attempt to saddle on the government this poor property? No politics for him, he said, he was for St. John.

After they got rid of the harbor they would have to go to the other fellow and bargain for the ferry. This should have been provided for.

He also said that it was true that the government was liable for only the \$857,000.

It was a great calamity to raise the taxes. He had kept them at \$1.98 for five years and they could be at that rate yet. The city was not getting all the money it should. The citizens had built the harbor and they should continue with it.

He said that there were too many politicians and too few men in parliament. Why not get together with the west and have the traffic all go through Canadian ports. Have a league of ports and all under commission and have a flat rate according to carriage.

He advised them to take their own view of what was best for their own town. He was not afraid of losing the harbor but he thought that something

better ought to be done. There was no reason to expect that the government would spend any money on the harbor. He advised them to vote against the act and then changes could be made. As it was the act was not good.

H. A. Powell.

H. A. Powell was next called on and said that he had dealt with similar questions as a member of the International Joint Commission.

He said that there was no expressed statement in the act that the government was liable for the \$1,342,717.53. The commissioners assumed this indebtedness. The bond holders would have to consent to this assumption of liability by the commissioners. Whether they would do it or not was another thing.

He said that if there were a deficit the city would not have to pay it, but the government would. If the harbor went over to the government tomorrow all they would have to do was to tax the shipping interests, not the citizens.

He told of railway and port congestion in the United States during the latter days of the war and said that it was caused by obsolete facilities at Atlantic ports. New York has abandoned the old facilities and is building new terminals at Staten Island.

St. John had a great strategic advantage. Are we going to awake like New York? he asked. There would be great Canada.

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Mr. McLellan Replies.

Mr. McLellan, in reply to the previous speakers, said that he had heard nothing new. He again asked why Mr. Wignome was not present and also asked how long had Mr. Baxter been a friend of Mr. Wignome's.

At this stage the mayor called Mr. McLellan to order and said that the hour was late. Mr. McLellan said that he would look after that. The people were there to listen to information and he proposed to give it to them with all due respect to the mayor and his position.

He asked if there was any lawyer who holds as high a place in the legal profession as William Pugsley and had any representative at Ottawa ever done as much for St. John as he had done? This was greeted with cheers.

In regard to the statements about Courtney Bay he said that the contract there would have to continue with or without harbor commission.

The people of the maritime provinces had faith when Confederation took place. He asked them if they could continue that faith after the treatment received.

-ICED-

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It had been said that he had tried to shove his opinion down peoples throats. He asked how much would they have plebiscite on Monday. The meeting then closed with the singing of the National Anthem.

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