

Our Ottawa Letter

Liquor Legislation Promised—Borrowing Money in United States—The Shell Game—Apple Duty Debated.

(By The Guide Special Correspondent)

Ottawa, Mar. 18.—The developments of the past fortnight in parliament have been the decision of the government to introduce liquor legislation; the definite refusal of the government to inquire into the old disbanded shell committee, altho direct charges have been made, and the enlargement of the borrowing powers of the Minister of Finance by \$75,000,000.

The decision to introduce temperance legislation was reached after the ministerialists had twice met in caucus to struggle with the problem which arose out of a resolution moved a week ago Monday by H. H. Stevens, asking for the enactment of Dominion-wide prohibition during the period of the war. Mr. Stevens suggested that such a law should be passed as a temporary measure, and voted upon a year after the war is over to settle the question of its permanency. He also suggested that the distilleries be nationalized and utilized for the manufacture of denatured alcohol for industrial purposes. Hon. Charles Maclellan, who confessed himself a convert to the prohibition cause, seconded the proposal, which was supported by Thornton, of Durham, Wright, of Muskoka, and Levi Thompson, of Qu'Appelle. Vigorous speeches in opposition to prohibition were made by Weichel, of North Waterloo, and Gauthier, of St. Hyacinthe. It having become apparent that further discussion in the house would develop a difficult situation, a ministerial caucus was held, at which it is understood Mr. Stevens was criticized by some of his fellow members for having introduced the resolution. At any rate, no decision was reached and it was necessary to summon another caucus for Thursday of this week. As a result it is announced that the government will introduce a bill under which the importation of liquor into provinces such as Manitoba and Alberta, which have adopted prohibition within the scope of the provincial powers, can be prevented. All the responsibility for the application of the law will rest upon the province, the request for federal action bringing about Dominion-wide prohibition being completely negated. To what extent the government's action will satisfy the prohibitionists remains to be seen. The bill will undoubtedly receive the support of the majority, if not all, of the Conservatives in the house, while Liberals will in all probability be left to vote as they please.

Borrowing in New York

In moving his resolution authorizing him to make additional borrowings not to exceed \$75,000,000, Sir Thomas White said that owing to the large borrowings last year, the existing borrowing powers amount to only about \$10,000,000. It was therefore necessary to replenish them. He explained that for several reasons, more particularly the high cost of exchange, it has been inexpedient to borrow in the United Kingdom. As a consequence \$45,000,000 had been borrowed in the United States, and it was likely that that market would again have to be resorted to. During the year commencing April 1, it would be necessary, the minister said, to raise by way of loan between \$290,000,000 and \$225,000,000. This \$75,000,000 will be part of the entire borrowings and will be used for the construction of public works and other general purposes.

W. F. Maclellan again urged upon the minister the desirability of creating a national currency and a bank of discount to be known as the Bank of Canada. Such a bank, he said, would be an organization for the emission of the national currency to the banks as they require it. The Minister of Finance expressed the view that the ideas of the member for South York were quite unsound. Mr. Maclellan retorted by accusing the minister of egotism.

Dr. Michael Clarke reminded the minister that members on the opposition side of the house wanted to increase our business with the United States by a treaty, and that treaty would have increased the business both ways. But

the minister is increasing our business with the United States by debt. "In my opinion," he said, "our method is better than his, altho I say, in all candor and fairness, that what the minister is doing is necessitated by the condition of war in which we find ourselves."

On Friday afternoon Sir Thomas White told the house that the new loan is already being negotiated in New York, and he would ask the house on Monday to put the bill based upon the resolution thru all its stages.

Shelling the Government

The debate on a resolution by Sir Wilfrid Laurier demanding the appointment of a special committee of the house to inquire into the operations of the defunct shell committee took a new turn this week when Hon. William Pugsley, on his responsibility as a member put the case of the opposition in the shape of a series of formal charges. When Sir Wilfrid Laurier moved his formal motion last week he dealt with the general aspects of the question, emphasizing more particularly the demands which have been made thruout Canada for an inquiry. The prime minister on that occasion emphatically declined to take action, saying that Sir Wilfrid's case was based very largely upon newspaper assertions, and that it was not the desire of the Imperial authorities that there should be an inquiry at least while the war is in progress. Sir Robert also stated that if a direct charge were made against a member of the government or anyone direct-

ly concerned in the matter, an inquiry would be instituted.

It was with the purpose of complying with this demand that Mr. Pugsley on Tuesday summarized the allegations of the opposition in the form of direct charges, mentioning Sir Sam Hughes, minister of militia, and Col. J. Wesley Allison more particularly as the parties responsible for some of the unnecessary expenditure. Mr. Pugsley charged, amongst other things, that the shell committee appointed by the minister of militia fixed excessive and unreasonable prices for shells, munitions and goods furnished to the British government but for which Canada would pay in part; that such prices were fixed without competition, involving an unnecessary expenditure of many millions of dollars, conservatively estimated at \$80,000,000; that the committee gave orders at excessive prices and without competition to companies in which members of the committee were interested; that there was unnecessary delay in providing fuses, and that the committee, failing to provide for their construction in Canada, awarded contracts in the United States, thru J. Wesley Allison, amounting to \$22,000,000 on which they made an advance of \$3,700,000; that the making of this contract was unwise and improvident, and was entered into with the knowledge and connivance of the minister of militia. Mr. Pugsley's final charge was that the government of Canada, thru the minister of militia, to whom the shell committee reported weekly, had knowledge of such irregular and improper methods, and permitted the same to continue.

Meighen Called to Order

Mr. Pugsley spoke at length in support of his charges and was replied to by Hon. Arthur Meighen, solicitor-general, who, on behalf of the government, again declined to agree to the granting

of a committee of inquiry. The solicitor-general said that the charges as formulated by Mr. Pugsley were not real charges. The general statement that \$80,000,000 had been improperly spent, he said, could have been made by any member of the house. "The opposition," declared Mr. Meighen, "do not really want an investigation because they do not want a verdict. All they want to do is to continue what they have done for months under the cover of a political truce. They want merely to spread thruout the country poisonous political garbage. If an investigation is asked for by Great Britain this government will be only too glad to comply with it." The solicitor-general was able to put his fingers upon some inaccuracies in a speech made by F. B. Carvell, in which the member for Carleton had stated that a number of western companies which received orders "for political purposes" had failed to make delivery. Quoting from statistics undoubtedly furnished by the new Imperial Munitions Board, Mr. Meighen was able to show that in most instances the deliveries had been considerably larger than Mr. Carvell had stated. Waxing indignant over the criticisms of Messrs. Pugsley and Carvell, the solicitor-general described them as "profligates and abandoned slanderers."

"Order," said Sir Wilfrid Laurier. The Speaker rose in his place, whereupon Mr. Carvell remarked, "Let him go on, Mr. Speaker. It does not hurt anybody." The Speaker reminded Mr. Meighen that such language "is offensive and unparliamentary."

Mr. Meighen: "I do not think I am unparliamentary in using the word, for I think I can show that it has been used. But I bow to your ruling, Mr. Speaker, and withdraw the expression."

The debate is not yet concluded, but

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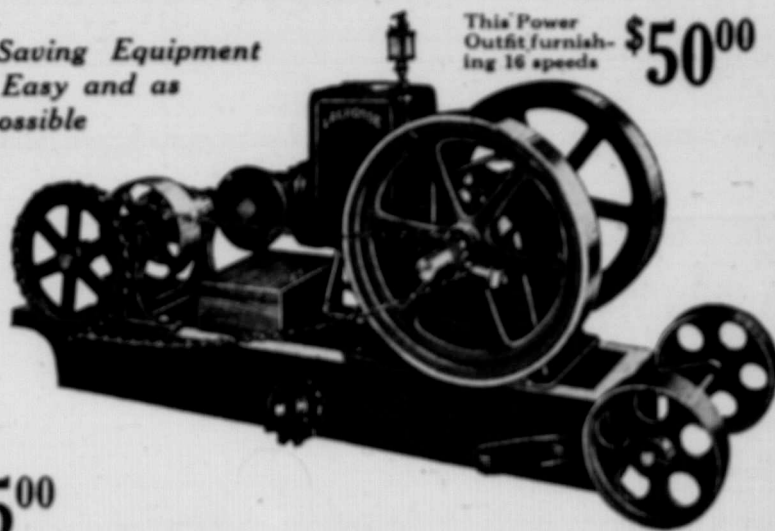
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