

Graft in War Contracts

Disgraceful Revelations at Ottawa Regarding Purchase of Supplies for Canadian Troops

The chief interest in the proceedings of parliament during the past few weeks has again been centered in the investigations going on in the committees. The public accounts committee has been particularly productive of developments of a none too creditable character, while in the special committee investigating the boots supplied to Canadian soldiers evidence has been given in condemnation of the footwear, and also in support of the contention of the manufacturers that the boots made were as good, if not better, than the specifications called for.

The bad effect from a business standpoint of the patronage system was particularly emphasized by an investigation in the public accounts committee of the sale of binoculars to the militia department. A number of binoculars, it was shown, had been offered to the department by S. Bilsky, an Ottawa dealer, of the Liberal political persuasion, but were not accepted on that account. Subsequently they were sold to the department by a local company of which T. Birkett, the son of a former member of parliament, is the head, at an advance in cost of at least sixty per cent. The binoculars were bought in the United States for \$5,318, including duty, and sold to the government for \$8,632, a profit for the middleman of \$3,314.

Both Parties Responsible

Previous letters have told the story of how W. F. Garland, Conservative member for Carleton, was mixed up in a transaction whereby a drug clerk in his employ got away with a profit of \$6,300 on a supply of bandages—a profit subsequently surrendered as a result of the light thrown upon it by the inquiry. The more recent probings of the committee have revealed the fact that G. C. Hurdman, Liberal M.L.A. for Ottawa, made some use of his relationship with an official of the militia department to obtain information for an American automobile firm for whom he was acting as agent. The understanding was that the company was to keep this information to themselves, because otherwise "it might injure us in getting further orders." The Ottawa Free Press, the local Liberal organ, remarks editorially in dealing with this matter: "There is no evidence that the government suffered as the result of Mr. Hurdman's action as an intermediary, or that he materially profited thereby, but it is an indication of the conviction that seems to exist both inside and outside the government that the situation set up by the war is 'fair meat' for anybody in a position to take advantage of it." The Free Press asks if it is not possible for Conservatives and Liberals to get together, forget their purely party differences, and take immediate action to eradicate this cancer that is eating into the body politic and threatens to spread into the life of the nation. If ever a party truce

were needed, said the Free Press, it is for a crusade against the grafter.

M. P. Horse Buyer

Another peculiar transaction being inquired into by the public accounts committee is one relating to the purchase by A. DeWit Foster, Conservative M.P. for King's, N.S., of 428 horses for the first overseas contingent at a cost of \$72,000. The evidence shows that a Mr. McKay, at present the secretary of John Stanfield, the chief Conservative whip, bought \$19,000 worth of horses while acting under the instructions of a friend of Mr. Foster's, named S. B. Keever. This man Keever has since disappeared with all the records as to the prices paid for the horses. All the auditor-general has to cover the purchases are checks paid to middlemen on the order of Mr. Foster, acting as purchaser for the government. Mr. McKay, in giving his evidence, said that he did not know anything about Keever. He did not even know his first name. He had met Foster, M.P., and Keever and a Halifax man named Woodworth in Ottawa. Keever and McKay left together for Mr. Foster's constituency. The three associates—Keever, McKay and Woodworth—with a livery man named Walter Moore, proceeded to buy the horses. Foster made out the checks. McKay got \$19,630, Keever got \$24,445, Woodworth \$21,784 and Moore \$3,500. McKay said in his evidence that he got all his checks thru Keever. It took them about two weeks to buy the horses, then Keever disappeared with all the records which McKay had turned over to him, giving details as to prices paid and the horses bought. McKay came back to Ottawa and is again acting as secretary for John Stanfield, the chief Conservative whip, this session. He told the committee he had made nothing on the whole transaction but \$150 which Keever gave him and out of which he had to pay his expenses. Mr. Foster, who paid the checks, was in the committee all afternoon, but did not offer to testify. Just why he should have interested himself in buying the horses and why he got these particular friends to buy for him is not explained. Some of the farmers who sold the horses may be called to testify as to just what prices they received as compared with the prices which Foster's purchasing agents received. It may be noted, too, that Mr. Woodworth is said to be a mining engineer at present in New York, and probably cannot be reached as a witness.

Profits on Boots

The most interesting revelation in the boots committee this week was also in connection with big profits made by middlemen on war contracts. It was shown that on seventeen thousand pairs of army boots and twenty-two thousand pairs of canvas shoes which the Gauthier Company, Quebec, sold to the department thru Charles E. Slater, the latter got a commission of no less than \$15,275. The company which made the boots, having all the work and trouble, only got a profit of \$8,650, which on an order of this size would appear to be quite reasonable. The story of Slater's big profits at the expense of the country which is straining its financial resources to provide the sinews of war was told by George Long, secretary of the Gauthier Company. The price of the army boots, he said, was fixed by the company at \$3.27, which left the company a profit of twenty-five cents per pair. Slater sold the boots to the government at about \$3.85. On the canvas shoes the company made a profit of twenty cents per pair, while Mr. Slater got away with a second profit of twenty-five cents per pair.

"So Mr. Slater was making twice as much as you?" commented Mr. Middlebro, the chairman of the committee.

"Yes," replied the witness.

"And all he was doing was to walk up here and around the departments and sell to the government?"

"Yes."

"The poor middlemen," remarked F. B. McCurdy, Conservative member for Queens-Shelburne.

Another interesting development in

the boots inquiry was the bringing out of the fact that eastern boot manufacturers sold to a number of Winnipeg jobbers at from \$3.40 to \$3.50, boots which they were selling to the government for \$3.85. These boots were sold to the government by the Winnipeg firms, including T. Ryan and Company, Kilgour and Rimer, Marsh Western Ltd., and by them sold to the department at higher prices. It is understood that the profits amounted to about \$20,000.

Hughes Defends Boots

Major General Sam Hughes appeared before the boots committee on Tuesday, and made a characteristically breezy defence of himself and his department. In regard to the boots, he declared that Canadian boots are superior to British, despite the fact that the Canadians now in Northern France are not wearing footwear made on this side of the Atlantic. General Hughes did not appear to give a hoot for the opinion of General Alderson, who is commanding the Canadian army. He referred to Sir Geo. Perley, the acting high commissioner in London and one of his own colleagues, as tho he were merely fulfilling the duties of a clerk when he transmitted complaints in regard to the boots to the prime minister.

Altho the minister spoke so glibly in defence of the transactions of his department, within forty-eight hours of the giving of his evidence he suspended Col. Geo. Hurdman, inspector of technical equipment, the officer who is under some degree of suspicion since the inquiry into the purchase of binoculars. According to S. Bilsky, already referred to, he was asked by T. Birkett to sign an agreement covering a charge of two dollars per glass for "incidentals." This Bilsky declined to do. Birkett denied ever having paid this money, and Hurdman denied having received it, but he has been suspended pending a further departmental inquiry.

Electioneering in the Trenches

The Commons failed to bring about prorogation by Easter, as the government had hoped. In view of the developments in the committees of inquiry this would have been impossible anyway, even if the government had not introduced a number of bills at a late hour of a fairly contentious character. One of these provides for the giving of the franchise to all soldiers on active service. The House is agreed as to the desirability of doing this if it were practicable, but the Opposition does not think it possible to frame a satisfactory measure. They think that Lord Kitchener would probably object to the carrying of partizan Canadian politics into the trenches of Flanders at a serious stage of the war, while the opportunities for the dishonest manipulation of votes sent across the Atlantic by mail to partizan returning officers would be without limit. Curiously enough when the bill was first taken up by the committee Hon. C. J. Doherty expressed the view that it would be practically impossible to collect the soldiers' vote at the front. Now he is fathering the bill thru the House. The only explanation would seem to be that he is yielding to the pressure of other members of the cabinet who think more of elections than of anything. Many Conservatives have frankly stated in private conversation that if the bill goes thru the House they expect that the Senate will kill it. All they want is another "loyalty" cry against the Opposition.

The Election Law

The committee which has labored for two sessions with election law reforms has brought forth but small results. Workmen under the bill now introduced will be given an additional hour in which to vote at noon without loss of pay, but there will be no extension of the hours of voting. Another bill to amend the Controverted Elections Act has been introduced as a result of the labors of this committee. It contains a number of commendable amendments which will have a tendency to shorten election trials, but that is about all. The proposals to make contributors to campaign funds reveal their names and the amounts of their subscription has been conveniently forgotten, and it is safe to say that nothing will be said about this omission in the House, now that we are, apparently, so near the date of another appeal to the people.

ASSISTING THE LABOR PROBLEM

The labor problem is one of the hardest matters to solve confronting the western farmer today. Hired help is hard to obtain on a great many farms. The reasons for this state of affairs are many and varied but one certainly is that in the large majority of cases there is a lack of understanding between the man and his employer. Anyone who has been a hired man in the West must recognize this fact. Sometimes the "boss" is to blame and in other instances misunderstanding is due to the hired man. In either case a little more toleration and judgment shown would lead to mutual benefits, and so it is that the little book just issued by the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture under the title of "Practical pointers for farm hands" is strongly recommended for the consideration of the "boss" as well as the hired man.

Here are a few quotations from the book taken at random:—

"Don't think the boss ought not to watch you and your work. That is his business. And he would much rather find things all right than all wrong. If your work pleases him, you will be glad, and if it does not you should be glad to find it out so you can avoid further error. His careful inspection is no offence, and you do him wrong to take it so."

"Go to the front of your horses once in a while and see if the harness is all right and that the sweat pads are in place. The man who is always on the watch is worth twice as much as the other kind. Don't expect two sets of harness to work perfectly a whole half day without attention. A steam engine will not do that and it is built much more solidly."

"When you are asked to help move some furniture or clean the stove pipe, do so cheerfully. Don't act as if you are doing too much of a favor. You may get hurt or get sick and have to be taken care of yet. Anyway, think of the stormy days and breakdowns that give you hours and hours of rest in the busy times."

There are 200 pointers in this little book and every farmer and hired man in the West should have one. A card sent to the Department of Agriculture, Regina, asking for "Practical Pointers for Farm Hands" will receive prompt attention.

STUDENT REUNIONS

For college students, ex-students and graduates who are spending the summer months in the country in Manitoba, a new event is being arranged for the mid-summer in the form of student reunions. Two, at least, of such reunions will be organized, one at Souris, in the south, and one at Sandy Lake, in the north and west of the province. These reunions will be organized by the student Young Men's Christian Association of the colleges, and in each case will last three or four days. Dates will be so arranged that the students on farms will be able to plan to take such a holiday at the slack mid-summer season.

The purpose of the reunions will be three-fold: (1) To provide for a pleasant outing for men between whom there is a natural bond; (2) To keep ex-students and graduates linked up with their colleges, to keep them informed of and in sympathy with the work being done there; and (3) To help them in their christian thought and in relating their christian ideas and ideals to conditions and life in their home districts.

The program will be very similar to that of a student conference or a summer school. The forenoons and evenings will be devoted to study groups, addresses, etc., and the afternoon to a strong athletic program, including track, aquatic and team sports.

The student committees which are completing arrangements for these reunions are very hopeful that all college men within reasonable distance of these points will plan to attend. A nominal registration fee will be charged to cover expenses. Those who can attend the Sandy Lake camp, please communicate with J. E. Sirett, of Neepawa, and those who can attend the Souris camp, communicate with F. F. Laughland, of Hartney, or J. R. Bell, of Clearwater, Man. All communications should reach these men by June 15, or as much earlier as possible.

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