

Our Ottawa Letter

The Militia Estimates—Col. Sam Hughes as a Vaudeville Star—Changes in Homestead and Pre-emption Law

(By The Guide Special Correspondent)

Ottawa, May 8.—The event of the week in Parliament occurred on Thursday when a day was spent in the preliminary consideration of the estimates of Hon. Sam Hughes, minister of militia. As anticipated, there was a great deal of criticism and no headway was made with the votes, altho the house sat until midnight. The proceedings throught most of the day lacked decorum and were classed by more than one member and observer as a "vaudeville" performance. The minister prefaced the consideration of the various items which make up an expenditure of well on to eleven millions, apart from the money to be spent on the construction of drill halls and armories, which is included in the public works estimates, with a general statement. The speech of the minister was characteristically warlike. With customary force he maintained that nothing was so good for the country as all the militarism it can afford to pay for. "My plan is," he said, "the building up of the youth and beauty of the country in manhood, physically, mentally, morally and, I have not the slightest doubt spiritually. Far in the rear comes the question of defence. I have pointed out on many previous occasions that, if war were to be wiped off the face of the earth and peace were to reign, I would still be in favor of having a cadet system and of having the youth and beauty of the country trained in physical development and in the art of carrying themselves properly."

Boy Soldiers

The minister proceeded to take great credit to himself and the department for the manner in which the cadet corps throught the country have been systematized and developed. During the past year 44,680 cadets have been drilled, equipped and inspected. Col. Hughes then intimated indirectly that in the event of war these mere youths would be expected to take the field, for he said: "When I point out that many of the men who fought in the ranks at Alma; especially in the Welsh regiments who fought at Waterloo; who fought during the American war, were sixteen years of age and upwards—Wolfe himself was only sixteen when he entered the army—it will be seen that boys of sixteen years of age and upwards make very good soldiers, and it will be realized what an asset these cadets are for the defence of the Dominion of Canada."

The minister grew particularly enthusiastic when he came to the matter of the construction of drill halls. He described them as the secondary and continuation school for the public school of the village. They kept boys and girls from gadding about the streets uncontrolled, "and going into these nickel shows." The cost of drill halls, he said, had been much criticized. The cost of each mile of the Transcontinental Railway would build ten drill halls. In other words, said the minister, we could have one drill hall every 170 yards from the Atlantic to the Pacific if we had put into drill halls the money spent on the N.T.R. "I am not saying," he continued, "that this would be a good expenditure of money, but, if properly distributed throught the country, a few drill halls built with some of this money would have done no harm. The money spent upon the Newmarket Canal would have built 100 splendid drill halls. The cost of the Quebec Bridge would represent fully 1,000 drill halls. Even the Sawdust wharf would represent two, and the late lamented Technical Commission would represent two."

The reference by the minister to the Technical Education Commission, which, under the chairmanship of Professor J. W. Robertson travelled thru Europe, the United States and Canada to secure data which has been incorporated in a very valuable report now receiving the consideration of the government, was a very unfortunate one, and indicates

that he is not as much interested in the uplift and betterment of the educational, mental and moral status of the people as he would desire to make people believe when urging the necessity for the placing of a drill hall in every community, no matter how small.

Col. Hughes maintained that the percentage of the total revenue being spent at the present time on militia is less than it has been at any time since confederation. He expressed the conviction that the people of Canada were willing to pay the necessary taxes to maintain an effective military organization. He went extensively into figures to show that in the matter of cost the people of such countries as Germany, France and Switzerland pay a great deal more for defence than do the people of Canada.

Liberal Criticism

The chief opposition criticism of the day came from Fred Pardee, the chief Liberal whip, who spoke in the evening. Mr. Pardee placed the proposed expenditure for the current fiscal year, including drill halls and armories, at \$13,561,375 as compared with \$7,009,822 for the last year of the Liberal administration. He said the calculations of the Minister show that his mind is obsessed with drill halls, soldiers and drill. He can go no further and see no further. He does not seem to realize that what the people want is a fair expenditure for militia, but what they want still more is to have the revenues of this Dominion used for the development of our latent resources and not for the promotion of a warlike spirit. The minister, he said, wholly mistakes the temper and ideas of the people of Canada if he continues on the same line he has been following since 1911. In Ontario alone he has spent \$1,154,800 on drill halls, mostly in small places. These drill halls the minister says have been put up so that the young men might meet at night to receive physical instruction and above all that they may meet the young ladies, and have a good time during the evening. But, with the exception of two places, these halls built in Ontario for the culture of the youth and beauty of the province have been established where Conservative candidates were returned in 1911. As for the rest of the places, the young men grow up stunted, untrained, undrilled, but the minister would do nothing for them.

The European Trip

F. B. Carvell devoted particular attention to the expenditure on the headquarters staff and to the trip of the minister and twenty-one officers last summer to take in the manoeuvres abroad. He maintained that this was nothing more nor less than a pleasure jaunt for the minister and his friends and would not result in any good to the country.

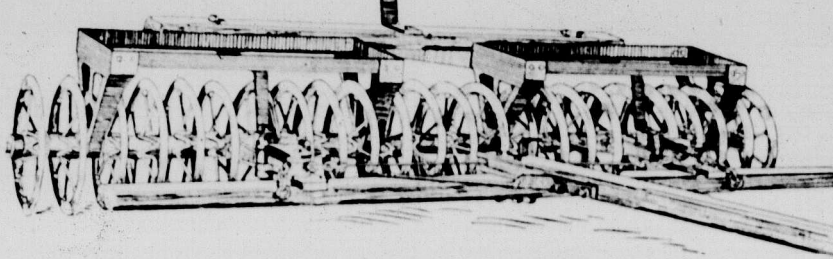
Dr. Neely, of Humboldt, said the people of the West were not in favor of the extensive program of the minister of militia, but the house could congratulate Col. Hughes on one thing at least and that was that he had furnished parliament and the people of the country with about as fine an exhibition of vaudeville as most people have ever paid good money for in the many years of their experience. The minister, he said, takes himself so seriously, both in the house and out of it that he is fast becoming a joke in the country, but the expenditure that is being carried on in his department and under his direction is much too expensive a joke for the people to enjoy.

Homestead and Pre-emption Law

Practically the entire Wednesday sitting of the house was given over to the consideration of Hon. Dr. Roche's bill to amend the Dominion Lands Act. This legislation has been introduced as the result of representations made on behalf of homesteaders and holders of pre-emptions in the West, who complained that the existing homestead regulations

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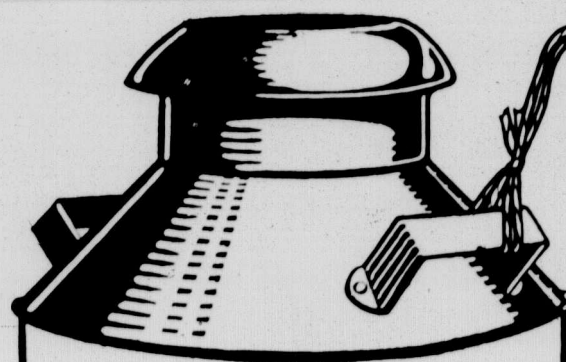
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