

# The Ont. Farmer Government

## Opinion Regarding What Has Been Accomplished During the Last Session of the Ontario Legislature—Are Two Great Parties Necessary in Our Politics?

By J. W. MACMILLAN.

It is universally agreed that the Farmer-Labor coalition government has come through the ordeal of the session just ended with flying colors. The mood of the electors of Ontario, when the results of the last Provincial election showed that neither of the traditional parties had gained the ear of the voters, and that the peoples' confidence had been transferred to rural and industrial leaders, was expressed in the phrase, "Give them a chance." In that spirit the members of the house, acted, whatever group they belonged to. It is now apparent that the government has made good.

It had been a postulate of all articulate political thinking in Canada that two great parties were necessary for the orderly and responsible discharge of the public business. "Look at the countries where there are half-a-dozen parties," it was said. And indeed the sight of an Austrian house of parliament, with the proceedings often resembling a bear-garden, was not reassuring. But it seems possible now to raise the question as to whether the group system or the temperament of the people of the nation was the real cause of the vociferation, the disorder and the pliancy of legislative assemblies in central Europe. Perhaps it was those qualities of character which prevented the formation of only two parties which injected hysteria into the debates. Certainly the decorum of Queen's Park has been as correct this year as ever, and its attention to business has never been more manifest.

Even the groups were careless of their alignment. Not one of the four, conservative, liberal, farmer, labor, but split on some question or other. It was not uncommon for a follower to oppose his leader in argument, and oppose him in the division. Party discipline of the old style has vanished, and a man may differ from his political companions without being branded as a traitor.

However the quirks and idiosyncrasies of the political instinct may determine the matter ultimately it is manifest that the past session saw more frank and honest endeavor to do the right and wise thing than is sometimes seen in parliaments. The playing for advantage in the fight of the next election was notably absent. The leaders of the two groups which were not represented in the government gave constant and valuable aid to the house in its deliberations. The spirit of the session was rather like that of ancient Rome in Macaulay's couplet,

"Then none was for the party,  
But all were for the state."

The Premier proved himself a capable and sagacious master of the situation. One hears, in circles far removed from the influence of the United Farmers of Ontario, such remarks as, "He is the best educated man in the house," or "They say he will go to Ottawa next." He has impressed the entire Province, and even the capital city of Toronto, as shrewd, laborious and sincere. One critical hour was when Mr. J. J. Morrison, the acknowledged leader of the farmer's organization, threw his strength against the government in respect to the bill to superannuate employees in the civil service. He pleaded that it was "class legislation" and circularized the farmers in opposition to the bill. As it happened, the government was in no jeopardy, for, so popular was the bill with the other three groups, that it could have been carried against the votes of all the farmer mem-

bers. But the Premier did not require such support. He called the members of his own group into conference, talked the matter over with them, and won their support for the act, in spite of Mr. Morrison's circular.

Of the 250 bills which became law only one or two are strictly agricultural in their interest. Loans to co-operative societies are provided for the purpose of cleaning seed, and to insure, in times of scarcity, a larger supply. Rural recreation is remembered also in assistance being offered for the erection of community halls and the cultivation of athletics in the country.

The labor end of the coalition got more, though, as scarcely any labor representative had ever been seated in the house in preceding years, it was to be expected that the demands of labor should be at least recognized in adequate fashion. Yet the three labor acts do not add up to any comprehensive or radical programme of industrial reforms. The chief of these is the Minimum Wage law, for women and girls, which I discussed in a recent article, showing that it is not nearly as far-reaching as similar statutes in other Provinces.

The Mother's Pensions also begin in a modest way to provide for mothers who have young children to support. It is less inclusive than many now existing in Canada and the United States, applying only to widows and women whose husbands are insane, and who are British subjects, and who have at least two children dependent on them.

The Workmen's Compensation Act was amended to the effect that the benefits may amount to two-thirds of the wages of the man who has been killed. The labor unions asked for three-fourths, but the lower figure was adopted. Even so the Ontario compensation becomes the most generous on the continent. None of the States, I believe, allow more than sixty per cent, and, moreover, it is paid for only a certain number of years, rarely more than ten. The Ontario compensation is during the lifetime of the widow.

The matter of prohibition occupied a good deal of time. Two acts were passed, both introduced as private bills, but both supported by the government. They are in the direction of making prohibition more prohibitory. One of these, known as the McCreary bill, asks the Dominion Government to take a vote in Ontario upon the question of the importation of liquor. The other—known as the Sandy bill—forbids the carrying of liquor from place to place in the Province. This is contingent on the forbiddal of importation, and does not become law until after the McCreary law has become effective.

One interesting feature was the discussion and passing of a law allowing municipalities to exempt improvements in taxation. It was amended in debate to the effect that ratepayers, and not electors, should decide upon the matter. Thus the Single Tax gains entry, and the principle of local option in municipal taxation.

The government followed the course of other governments in the appointment of a number of commissions. One of these has been sitting and the papers have been featuring the evidence disclosed before it. It has to do with the sale of timber and pulp limits and the collection of dues by the late government. Much public interest has arisen as to the summary methods in vogue

in the northern woods, when logs are counted and accounts settled with the government.

Another commission which has been at work is that appointed to investigate the conditions at Chippawa, where the laborers on a Hydro-electric excavation were threatening to strike. This commission, the prominent members of which were two ex-clergymen, has presented its report. The effect on the problematical strike is not yet apparent.

Four other commissions are yet to get to their tasks. They are to deal respectively with temperance, hydro-electric rates, milk, and proportional representation. Thus there will be material awaiting the house at its second session.

A curious incident was the passing of a bill permitting the Hydro-electric system to develop electricity from steam. The demand for electricity has outrun the development of waterpower, and the steam engine is but to carry the system over the brief period while the water is being harnessed. The odd thing lies in the fact that Ontario is replacing the word 'electric' by the word 'hydro'. Workmen instal 'hydro'. Neighbors compare the monthly cost of 'hydro' for lighting. The whole scheme is generally known as the 'hydro' scheme. Now, will this process of word-interchange be checked by steam taking the place of water?

One small matter, which may possibly lead to large results, was the provision for the appointment of a commission of five to supervise sport, and boxing in particular. When one recalls how much the supervision of play has done for children one is encouraged to meditate upon the possibilities involved in the social control of adult recreations. Many who thought they loved and understood children were suspicious of the early attempts of adults to direct the play of children. These good folk thought that to mix oneself with children in their games could be nothing but interference and intrusion. They thought it would offend the children and spoil their fun. Now we know that the Play Movement gives the children more and better fun. Now we know how vital a thing play is. We know that it is the chief means of moral education among children. We know that fairplay is justice and that teamplay is co-operation. We know the truth of the adage "The boy without a playground is father to the man without a job." Knowing these things, we venture to hope that in the future the sports of older children, and all who play are in some sense children, may not be left to the haphazard management or avaricious exploitation which often overtakes them now. I do not know how much of this was in the minds of the Legislature when passing this bill, but it stirred me with the thought of great possibilities coming out of it.

### British Readiness for Hydro-Electric Enterprise

One of the largest electrical manufacturing groups in Great Britain has made efficient preparations for undertaking complete contracts for hydro-electric enterprises. The business of a prominent firm of water-power engineers and contractors has been acquired in order to provide facilities for making the largest sizes of water turbine, while the resources of the group are available for the electric generators, the construction work, the transmission of power, and all the other sections of hydro-electric work in any part of the world. Valuable patents have been acquired in connection with this development. A French company associated with the group is undertaking the construction of water turbines with a total output of 300,000 kilowatts, two hundred electrical locomotives, and other electrical machinery required in an important scheme of railway electrification.