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House of Assembly Proceedings

MONDAY, August 4 (Continued).

Mr. Halford followed Mr. Hickman on the discussion of the budget, and discussed a number of issues very briefly, but most particularly the new Railway Commission and referred to Hansard of 1923 quotations, utterances of Mr. Higgins and Mr. Sullivan last year to try and prove inconsistency on the part of these gentlemen. In dealing with the appointment of a similar Commission which was then under debate. He ridiculed the idea of the members of the new Government serving without pay. He quoted the recent editorial of the Daily News on which to base his remarks in that connection. He then referred to the Coal contracts of March and April last to prove that certain interested parties of that time were members of the new Railway Commission.

The gentlemen on the Government side took his remarks as insinuations that they were on the Commission for special personal considerations inasmuch as they would look out for their own interests when anything like coal contracts were going, and some pretty sharp passages of arms occurred between Mr. Halford and the one side and Messrs. Sullivan and Cashin on the other.

Then, the Minister of Justice spoke in part as follows:

Mr. Chairman, since there are certain other gentlemen on this side of the House who may have some personal explanations to make, I would like to say shortly that I am not a coal contractor. For that reason I have no personal explanation to make. I would like to say a few words with regard to the general tenor of Mr. Halford's remarks: I may say firstly that I approve of the manner in which he approached his standpoint in this matter, especially in the concluding portion of his remarks on the industry on the West Coast, and the effect it had on changing the condition of the railway as to its earnings. He also very properly said that he hoped that the recent troubles would be settled soon and good results come out of an apparently disagreeable situation. I, however, want to repeat the statement which I made from the other side of the House last year. We have to view this matter according to circumstances. Last year the railway had been taken over on the spur of the moment—after a couple of years had been spent experimenting with it. A commission of control was appointed. The Prime Minister of the day said that he had undertaken to settle the Reid situation. I repeat that that settlement was a disaster for the Colony. It has proved that what I fear is that it will get dearer, as the years go on. The Reid got clear of all their obligations. I use the same offensive term now that I used last year. The Reid put it all over the Government of the day. They got clear of all their obligations and got two millions of dollars for a broken down railway. It is going to cost a fine amount to put it in first class running order. The Leader of the Government of that day said that the Government's taking over of the railway was only temporary, and that he had been communicating with an English concern to take over the Railway. Anyhow since the Government has taken over the railway temporarily it was proposed to appoint a commission to run the railway until permanent arrangements were finalised with the concern referred to. A Commission was appointed and the members were Mr. Halford, the then Colonial Secretary, Mr. Hall, the Government Engineer, and Mr. Bertain, the Auditor General. I repeat now what I said, that if ever there was a "one man commission" that was one. The idea of two civil servants forcing their views upon Mr. Halford, that he was to be forced to talk about the whole thing was a joke. Fortunately at the time the matter was intended to be a joke. It could not be seriously contemplated. If a man suggested to me that the railway would not be run according to Mr. Halford's ideas I would be surprised. It would be his railway. It was a fee little scheme. Mr. Halford, Mr. Hall and Mr. Bertain. Mr. Halford was the Government man, because he was the most influential man to present. His name was sufficient. Every one knows Mr. Halford. There would be no trouble Mr. Halford knows himself that it would have been a joke. What happened. Mr. Sullivan and myself were the only members of the Opposition present on our side of the House that night and as the members for Trinity states we threatened to hold up the Estimates. We would hold them up until a Commission was appointed that was not so partisan. What was the result? The late Prime Minister will confirm what I say. He came to me and Mr. Sullivan's name was mentioned. The reason we wanted him on the Commission was because he was a competent man. There was no other reason. We had no one else to go to the Commission. The Prime Minister told me the next day that some followers of the Government would not have Mr. Sullivan because of the way he had criticized them the night previous.

There was no question of his competence. What happened afterwards? The Government came along after-

wards and said that they would appoint a Commission consisting of Mr. Halford, the Colonial Secretary, Mr. Shee and His Honour Mayor Cook. They thought that the appointment of Mayor Cook would give it a less partisan colour, because Mayor Cook was a friend of those on our side. I may say right here and now that I am not aware so far as I am concerned that Mayor Cook was even the least interested in party politics. Not in any way. However the Commission was an improvement on one consisting of two civil servants of the Government and we let it go at that. There is, now, one other point I want to make. We were now in a totally different position with regard to the management of the railway. I want to say right now that I do not believe in Government ownership at all. The quicker the Government can get clear of the railway the better I will be pleased. The changed situation has not altered my views. Any success that has been the lot of the railway for this year could not do that. There has been a lot of freight passed over the road for the past few months. But what is the condition of the railway now? What is the condition of the road bed? We will be called upon to pay through the nose to put that bed in a good condition or I am very much mistaken. So far as I am concerned I would almost give the railway to some contractor if he would take it over and run it. My views have not changed from what they were when I sat opposite to Mr. Halford in the Government control. The Prime Minister at the time of the taking over of the railway said that there were negotiations going on with somebody to take over the railway. I do not believe that these negotiations ever had any foundation in fact.

I may say with respect to the present Prime Minister that we have not received any serious suggestion from anybody for the taking over of the railway. I think that the whole thing was a dream. A dream of the gentleman who was then the leader of the House. We took away the railway and paid two million dollars for it and nothing was heard of the millions for counter claims which it was alleged we had against the Reid and now we have got to keep this railway going especially since the big industries were started on the Humber and elsewhere. Now to-day the Government has got to carry the responsibility for the railway and it is no place for an outsider on the Commission. We are in a totally different position. My stand is that if a Government intended to continue the railway as a Government business then it should create a Minister of Railways and have him devote his time wholly to his department. I do not believe that any man, or number of men for that matter, can run an enterprise as great as the railway without devoting all his or their time to it. It has managed to get along largely because of a pretty good staff of management, of course. A pretty highly paid staff I may say. Some gentlemen up there are pretty highly paid for their work. It is up to the new Commission to find out just how far the railway can possibly be run cheaper with regard to the matter of salaries. It is not for me to say just what can be done in this direction. And with regard to the present commission I think that we have been able to hand out a much better Commission than the old one. I say this is not in any way disparaging of the ex-Colonial Secretary, the hon. member for Trinity. The members of the present commission have been experienced in this kind of work. I am not making any reflection on the old commission or on any of the men of which it was made up. There is a new submission a marked improvement in the Commission. However, I think that some of the members on this side have a few remarks to make in reply to the Hon. Member for Trinity and I will not delay the House further.

Now, Mr. Sullivan in reply mentioned the whole remarks of Mr. Halford and said while he was on the Railway Commission every person would get a square deal and no person would get favours to the detriment of others. He remembered very well the time when coal contracts were being considered by the late Commission.

Continuing Mr. Sullivan said in part: Well, gentlemen, what did really happen? Did that Commission make any attempt to find out in the coal markets of the world what they could get coal for? No, they did not, because the crowd who comprised that Commission were either too indifferent, too careless or too incapable, and I am afraid that they were all three. Their policy seemed to be in keeping with the policy of the Government of that day. They simply took the attitude of letting her drift and paying any price for coal that they were asked to pay. They did not call for tenders or find out where they could get coal the cheapest; they were prepared to swallow whatever the Besco people were prepared to offer them. On one occasion I found out that a cargo of coal was required at the opening of navigation for Humbermouth and Argentina, and I rang up the Commission asking that they provided my price was right, I expected to get fair play. But I did not get fair play; neither did I sell a ton of coal to the Railway Commission. Is that a strange thing, I wonder, for Mr. Halford to know? Still he gets up here and says that I sold coal while he, a

member of the Railway Commission, was incapable and indifferent of what was going on. I was the Agent here for the firm of Evans and Reid of Newcastle on Tyne, and Mr. Lindstrom, the Business Manager of that firm, was here last year and he called on Mr. Russell, General Manager of the Railway. Mr. Lindstrom pointed out that he had good steam coal to sell and he asked for an opportunity to tender. When I was in England last winter there was a cargo of coal afloat that had been sold to a firm in New Brunswick and which firm had some into involvement. Now if that Commission that we had here then had had their eyes open, they would have bought that coal for \$4 per ton c.i.f., but they were too indifferent. In March last Messrs. Evans and Reid called the Newfoundland Government offering coal at \$12.50, c.i.f. At that time, bear in mind, the Commission were paying \$7.50 per ton c.i.f. Here was a concern offering coal cheaper than the Railway Commission decided to give them a trial cargo and that was all I had to do with that transaction. But I realized that we were not buying coal in the right place and I was not afraid to cable Philadelphia, Virginia and Pennsylvania, because I found out that the Armstrong-Whitworth people had bought their coal considerably cheaper in the United States than it could be bought in Sydney. When I was convinced that it was not possible to get coal from Newcastle at a price to compete with the Dominion Coal Company I went elsewhere. I might say what really happened last year was that the Dominion Coal Company sold the Railway Commission practically all their requirements of coal at \$7.50 c.i.f. I quit the House to be the figures that I am going to mention in mind. In 1922 and 1923 the Railway Commission paid \$7.50 per ton c.i.f. for run of mine coal. In February of this year the Railway Commission bought a cargo of coal c.i.f. from the Besco Company at \$7.40 per ton c.i.f. Do you think, sir, that if I had not completed this year and if Cashin and myself had not completed that the coal sold by the Besco this year would not have been sold by them at \$7.40 per ton c.i.f. or 10 cents per ton less than last year? I can produce the documentary evidence to show what happened. I have a letter from Mr. McMaster, the Sales Agent for the Besco people, quoting me certain prices. Coal was sold in February, 1924 to the Railway by the Besco Company at \$7.40 c.i.f. In the early part of March I cabled direct to Philadelphia, West Virginia and New York, people whom I had been dealing with during the war, and the prices I received from them was \$1 per ton cheaper than the Besco people were prepared to sell at. Is not this a curious thing, that when I cabled those American firms in the early part of March, a broker walked into my office on Water Street two days after saying that he had a message from the Head Office of the Dominion Coal Company in Montreal, and that they wanted to know who I was purchasing forty thousand tons of coal for in the United States. I replied that it was none of their business and that I was purchasing coal for clients of mine who were carrying on a large business in this country. This is how I cabled to Philadelphia, West Virginia and New York, coal cheap and this is how I discovered to save \$60,000 for the taxpayers of Newfoundland. I said to the Broker that I would give the Besco a chance to quote a figure. I cabled them and I received an answer saying that they would deliver forty thousand tons of coal in any port in Newfoundland at \$7.50 per ton c.i.f. and \$8.00 for service charges. I cabled them back that there would be no business for them at that price. They cabled me back advising me to hold back until they were then enroute. He arrived and offered \$7.50 for run of mine and \$7.65 for screened coal c.i.f. This was the Dominion Coal Co.'s quotation on the 27th or 28th day of March last, which was, no small order either. It is needless to point out that I did not give them the order because I got coal cheaper afterwards in America. But later I was told by Mr. McMaster that he was prepared to quote at a considerably cheaper price, and that Mr. Wolrige had told him to get the order at any price. If I had known that at first I would have quoted as low as \$5.00 and they would have come down to that price. But some 48 hours after that price, Mr. McMaster, after spending several days here waiting and smelling around, found out what my quotation was and put in the tender to the Railway at \$6.50 c.i.f. I do not know where the leak was, but I intend to find out. We made him come down to the price. He would not have done it were it not for our competition. Therefore Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask, have I not got a right to do a legitimate business in this country? I am not asking for any favours. I am going to ask Mr. Halford presently for the information of the House why he gave the Besco people the order at all. I know myself why he gave it and he and the other men who comprised that Commission ought to be ashamed of themselves.

Mr. Halford—I would like for the

honourable member to take that back. I am not going to tolerate such language without a protest.

Now, Mr. Sullivan—I repeat, Mr. Chairman, that the men who comprised that Commission ought to be ashamed of themselves over the way that contract was given to the Besco people. Why during the last three years that Company has crucified the people of Newfoundland. It is true that they paid a paltry export tax on ore for a certain period, but if they did they got it back a hundred fold by overcharging us \$1 a ton on every ton of coal that they sold us. Those who comprised the first Railway Commission were bad enough, but the last one was the worst. Now I want to let the people of this country see if I have done anything that I should be ashamed of. In 1923 the Dominion Company sold the Railway Commission coal at \$7.50 per ton, and in February, 1924 they sold it at \$7.40 when they could have got it, better coal too, at \$6.40. We were prepared to supply this cheaper coal, which contained less slack, more volatile matter, less ash and less sulphur. In April last Messrs. Evans and Lindstrom, Ltd., sold a cargo of coal when coal was a high price in England at \$7.30. What complaint was it to a firm that I represented to sell the Railway 3,000 tons at that figure, I ask? I did not sell it personally though. In April also Messrs. Cashin and Company sold a cargo at the same price. In March, 1924, Mr. S. Sullivan quoted on 40,000 tons of American coal at \$8.40 c.i.f. That was the lowest price put in up to that time. I never altered my tender. I never got a chance to do that. That was one of the things allowed to be done under the late administration. Now I am going to cite a case where the price was altered. On March 31st, last Messrs. Cashin and Company and myself both quoted at \$6.40 per ton on different grades of coal and on April 2nd, after this man McMaster had smelt around and found out what our tenders were he quoted at \$6.50. My price was in a week before at \$6.40, American funds, and which was equal to \$6.55. Furthermore, it must be remembered that Cashin and Company and myself were instrumental in bringing down the price, because if we did not tender the Railway Commission would have paid the Besco people the same price probably as they paid them the year before.

Now I would like to ask Mr. Halford why he did not give me a share of that large order, under the circumstances? Was there anything wrong about it? When I put in my tender Mr. Russell remarked that it was an exceptionally low price. In fact, he said that he never dreamt that he could get coal as low, and he said that on our quotation there would be a saving of \$15,000 a year on 60,000 tons of coal. Still, Mr. Halford gets up and tells us that they would not buy from my people. Mr. Halford! We know where to get the best quality of coal.

Now, Mr. Sullivan: You knew you had a steamer on charter alright too. Mr. Halford: That is incorrect.

Now, Mr. Sullivan: It is not incorrect. In it did not deserve to be written up in that way in the editorial of the Advocate. Was it done because I am a member of the Government? I do not want any favours from anybody. All I want is a square deal. But this assurance I am prepared to give to the honourable gentlemen opposite, that no Company I am interested in will receive any favourable consideration from me as a member of the present Railway Commission, unless their tenders are such as to warrant such consideration. Now that man who came down here for the Besco people was determined to beat any man competing against him. To show you how they are watching things they sent a Broker, W. B. Fraser, into my office 48 hours after I had cabled to the United States to get coal prices. If the latest Commission had done their duty and had realized that coal could be brought here much cheaper than they were in the habit of paying for it the past few years, they would have made the Besco people give them a refund. When I found out that the Besco tender was \$6.50 I immediately rang up every coal merchant of this town and acquainted them of it so that every man who imports coal could get the benefit of the reduction of price and incidentally every household as well. I also informed the Armstrong-Whitworth people of what this man was down for at the time. This Besco Company made so much of us of late years that they were prepared this time to sell at a sacrifice. But the late Railway Commission never called for tenders in the proper way, just tenders were not called for in the proper way for the Normal School. That should make an interesting story I think, and I think that Mr. Halford would be the best to tell it, namely, what happened when the tenders were opened; was the man who got the contract thousands of dollars above others; will he tell what gentleman was ten thousand dollars out in this additions and various other questionable matters in connection with that historic

(Continued on Page 12).



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W. J. WALSH,
Minister of Agriculture & Mines,
Dept. of Agriculture & Mines,
St. John's, Newfoundland,
July 14th, 1924.
July 14, 311

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(Continued on Page 12).

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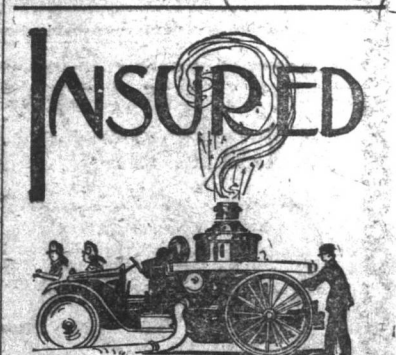


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