

## THE TRENT VALLEY CANAL INQUIRY.

ON October 14th, 1912, Mr. G. Howard Ferguson, member for Grenville in the Ontario Legislature was appointed by the Borden Government a commissioner to investigate charges in regard to the purchase and use of explosives on the Trent Valley Canal. On November 28th, 1912, the Commission was extended to include the general administration of the Canal and the conduct of the employees.

Mr. Ferguson's report is dated February 18th, 1914, and was, together with the evidence taken by him as Commissioner, presented to Parliament, on March 9th. In answer to a question asked in the House on March 23rd, the acting Minister of Railways stated that Mr. Ferguson had charged for his services in connection with this investigation the sum of \$985.00 of which \$550 was for thirty-seven days services at \$15.00 per day, \$370 for expenses and disbursements and \$60.00 for preparing the official report to the Government. In other words Mr. Ferguson took 511 days or nearly a year and five months to prepare a report of an investigation which occupied at the outset 37 days.

### An Amazing Disclosure.

Like the Lynch-Staunton-Gutelius report on the National Transcontinental Railway, Mr. Ferguson's report was intended to serve primarily a political end. The part of the report which relates to the purchase and use of explosives reveals grave irregularities, but they are, unfortunately for the Government, irregularities which have occurred since it assumed office. Though the Commissioner in his findings would have it appear that appointees of the late Government were in some way responsible, the evidence does not contain one word reflecting on the purchase of explosives made prior to 1912. On the other hand, it is clearly shown that after the Conservative Government assumed office, instead of explosives being sold direct to the Government by the local dealer who purchased from the manufacturer as had been customary, instructions were given from Ottawa that purchases thereafter were not to be in this direct manner, but with the intervention of a middleman in the person of a leading Conservative of Lindsey who was to purchase the explosives from the local dealer and sell to the Government. The evidence and the report both show that the explosives were bought by the dealer at 19 cents per pound, sold to this middleman for 22 cents per pound and by him resold to the Government at 27 cents per pound and that by simply making entries, but without even handling the explosives, the Government's nominee reaped a large profit.

The Commission extended the Commissioner was allowed to search at large over the affairs of the Canal for years preceding, as well as subsequent to the elections of 1911. Having found evidence of dishonesty on the part of the superintendent, the commissioner appears to have gone out of his way to in some manner connect the Liberal party with these transactions, and to make what might appear a scandal reflecting on the party.

Having in mind the sensation they hoped to create by the presentation of the Lynch-Staunton-Gutelius report, the Government evidently believed that bringing down the Ferguson report a little later, they might create further suspicion in the public mind. This will explain the time given Mr. Ferguson to send in a report which took only 37 days in preparation, and the particular juncture at which it was presented.

### Evidences of Partisanship.

The report is in no sense judicial. Comparing the findings with the evidence it is a serious reflection upon the Commissioner himself.

For example, the commissioner in his findings would have it appear that the wrong-doing set forth related to happenings prior to 1911, whereas the evidence show, that the same doings, and worse, by the same parties were going on at the time of the inquiry. An effort is made to have it appear that persons of different occupations and professions, respectable citizens of Peterborough had received public moneys as laborers when they had never been employed in that position. The evidence shows conclusively that as respects some thirty-four of these persons such irregularities as occurred were wholly with respect to the lax method of bookkeeping, and not of a nature to reflect against any of the parties whose names are mentioned. Not one of thirty-four persons so named were called as witnesses, or questioned as to the nature of the services they had rendered; and though one of them, a local bank manager, was examined with reference to an account of an employee, he was never questioned as to a payment to himself as "labourer".

In the report it is stated that groceries had been improperly supplied to a caretaker, William Hewitt, during the months of June, July and August 1910, whereas the evidence shows that these groceries were supplied not in the year 1910, but in June, July and August of 1913. Similarly the report speaks of "picture" frames and "photographs" in a manner which would indicate that purchase had been made for private use, whereas the evidence clearly shows that the "frames" referred to were for signs to be placed along the Canal route, and that the "photographs" were sketches of parts of the route intended for public use.

The most obvious evidence of political partisanship in the report is an insinuation that a fraction of the moneys fraudulently obtained by the Government employee whose dishonesty is the main subject of the report, were turned over to a Liberal campaign fund. There is nothing in the report to prove any allegation of the kind. There is the mere assertion of a man whom the report says "has not only practiced deception and dishonesty himself, but has condoned it and winked at others". The report cites the names of persons mentioned in this connection by this dishonest individual, but it does not appear that the Commissioner ever called these persons to appear before him, or gave them any chance to answer the insinuations. It has since been learned that they deny them absolutely. Except in this unfair and indirect manner, the report fixes no blame upon either the Liberal or the Conservative Administration for the conditions described. Indeed it goes far to show that such irregularities as existed were due but wholly to the dishonesty of individuals.

In having exposed deliberate dishonesty on the part of unworthy public servants the Government is to be commended. It will be worthy of still higher commendation if it follows up its disclosures by prosecuting the offenders to the limit they deserve. But by seeking to make party political capital out of the report the Government and its commissioner only help to foster dishonesty in the public service and to show their indifference to the offences disclosed.