

The British Columbia Legislature.

(SPECIAL CORRESPONDENCE.)

After being in session 54 actual working days. The British Columbia Legislature adjourned on Monday of last week and accomplished more probably than any previous body did in one parliamentary season. His Honor, the Lieutenant-Governor assented to some 75 bills, 35 of which were private and the remainder public in character. The session was characterized mainly by work, there being little or no oratorical fireworks. There was a good deal of talking but it cannot be said there was one speech at all memorable for its ability or exhaustiveness. The Legislators are all matter of fact business men. A feature of the business done was the absence of wrangling and acrimonious debate. Although the opposition proper is not numerically strong, the large and important body of independents preserve the balance of power, thus preventing the government from assuming any attitude of recklessness or disregard for public opinion which is often the result of too large a party following. Throughout the proceedings were dignified and business-like.

As an evidence of the development in progress it may be stated no less than nineteen private bills were passed incorporating railway and tramway companies, nearly all of which, there is good reason for believing, mean business. The railways in contemplation are: The Crow's Nest & Kootenay, to connect with the American system; a tramway to connect Vancouver and Westminster, now in course of construction; the Burrard Inlet and Fraser River valley; the Ashcroft and Cariboo railway, supposed to have in view connection with Alaska; the Vernon & Okanagan, virtually an extension of the Shuswap & Okanagan, to connect at Osoyoos with an American road; the Chilliwack railway, to run on the south side of the Fraser from Mission to Chilliwack, a branch of the C.P.R.; Burrard Inlet railway and ferry; Nelson & Fort Sheppard to connect with an American railway; Nicola Valley Railway, which controls some 10,000 acres of coal land in the Nicola Valley; the Upper Columbia Navigation and Tramway Co.; the Vancouver and Lulu Island Railway; the Hood Mountain and Nelson tramway, to tap the mines in the vicinity of Nelson; the Liverpool (opposite Westminster) and Canoe Pass railway; the Vancouver and Lulu Island Electric Railway Co.; the Vancouver and Alaska railway; the Nicola, Kamloops and Similkameen railway; the Hot Springs and Goat River tramway; Okanagan telephone and tramway lines between Vernon and Enderby.

An important private bill was that incorporating the British Columbia Dredging and Improvement Co., which has in view the reclamation of the Sumas Lake and considerable overflowed lands adjacent. This has been referred to at some length in previous issues.

The public business transacted was of equally important character. It was generally understood that some changes in public policy would be effected, if not radical at least far reaching. We can hardly say whether the result was disappointing or otherwise. The three things which were in the mind's eye of the people and which required attention were the school laws, land laws and mining laws. It will probably be admitted that of the three the school law was least in need of revision, whereas the

change in principle brought into operation has been the most marked, viz., the substitution of the appointive for the elective system in regard to trustees, the government appointing one half and the city councils the other half. This may be regarded as a retrograde step rather than one in advance; at the same time a greater share of the burden of maintenance is thrown on the municipalities, which are handed over the poll tax heretofore collected by the province. The advocates of this measure or rather the members of the government claim that it is a provision best suited for the conditions of this province. One reason alleged for it is the lack of interest manifested by the electors in the matter, and it is held that the council under such circumstances is more apt to make a wise choice. The opponents of the measure regard it as a still further move in the direction of centralizing educational control with the government, instead of distributing it over the various responsible bodies elected by the people, something, it is claimed, which had already run to an abuse.

The most crying evil that demanded reformation at the hands of the government was the abuse incident to the state of the land laws, by which it was possible for single individuals to acquire large tracts of public lands and by which the best lands of the province at present accessible have been so acquired. That evil must not be laid at the feet of the Robson government any more than to any preceding administration. It simply represents a condition of things that existed at the outset—and has been perpetuated, the proportions of which and the injury to the province were not fully appreciated until too late. Previous to last session and especially during the election campaign the feeling was very strong and nearly every candidate included land law reform in his platform. It was expected that some clear, well defined public spirited policy would be crystallized into legislative enactment, but those who looked for a wise law in the interest of the prospective settler have been measurably disappointed. It is true the price of farm lands has been raised to \$5 per acre, but while the settler is required to put improvements on it equal to \$5 an acre, the purchaser can get an out and out title for \$5, \$2.50 or \$1 per acre according to the classification as to quality. This practically places no limit on speculation; in fact, makes it easier than before to acquire public lands, while no inducement has been held out to actual settlers. The one wise thing the Government has done in this connection and for which it deserves all credit is the raising of the wild land tax to about double what it was. This will discourage the holding of wild lands and produce a disposition to sell to those who will utilize it advantageously for their own good and the development of the Province. No doubt both the land laws and school laws will demand further attention in next succeeding sessions of the Parliament.

Coming to the mining laws this is one feature of legislation in which the Government has acted with wisdom and thereby given general satisfaction. Last year an independent commission was appointed to examine into the whole subject and after being in session for some months the members

reported certain resolutions which were approved of and adopted by Parliament, and without in any way endeavoring to outline its provisions it may be stated that they have apparently met with the unqualified approval of the miners and those most interested.

A determined effort was made by the leader of the opposition to introduce an anti-Chinese clause in all these private bills, restraining the employment of Chinese, but his amendments were as persistently voted down one after another. The inspiring principle of the opposition as alleged was this, that if the Chinese do not obtain employment they will not stay here, while on the other hand it was claimed that such a clause inserted in private bills, while all right for bills of a public character, would be unconstitutional and an interference with the rights of individuals or companies to employ whom they please, both positions being very sound.

A number of other bills were passed, relating to assessments, for libraries, workingmen, and so on, all of which received a fair share of consideration and in the main will be beneficial in effect. In respect to railways the province went in for connection with the railways south of the boundary, irrespective of any considerations of diverting trade. It was recognized that the people of Kootenay and Okanagan were bound to have railways, and if not from one side from the other. How the Dominion Government will treat these charters remains to be seen, but unless the Canadian Pacific can guarantee what the people want it is very evident that it will be a case of Manitoba over again. Local interests are so strong in favor of communication southward, in the absence of regular communication from the British Columbia side, that a hue and cry may be expected if any attempt is made to thwart the wishes of the people.

Nelson Miner: John F. Ward, the man who brought the first stock of provisions to and opened the first hotel in Nelson returned this week to stay with the town. He will erect a fine 2 story hotel.

We are sorry to learn, says the *Prince Albert Times*, that during the breaking up of the ice some 700 or 800 of the Sanderson Co's saw logs escaped by crowding under the boom on Shell River, and no doubt by this time many of them are floating in Cedar Lake. This is a serious loss to the company.

The Vancouver sugar refinery has shipped sugar to the States, owing to temporary scarcity. "Yesterday afternoon", says the *News*, the steamer Michigan took 75 barrels of sugar from the B. C. Sugar Refinery for Portland. They will ship several hundred barrels in the course of a few days, and as long as the high prices are maintained, they will be able to find a market there.

H. F. Anderson & Co., implement dealers, Winnipeg, arranged last week with Mercer Bros. & Co., of Alliston, Ont., to handle the Mercer binder in the west. Agencies are now being established at principal points. The Mercer is a new binder here, though it has been on sale for the past four years in Ontario, and for three years in Australia. The machine was exhibited here first last fall. It is an invention of Mercer Bros., and its distinguishing feature is that it works without canvass.