

Political Letter

Ottawa, May 22 (Special Correspondence). Parliament is presented every week with a new evidence as to the strange mixture of irreconcilable elements which go to make up the Government side of the Commons. Everybody knew that those ranks were full of men opposed to public ownership of public utilities, nevertheless, to hear Walter Mitchell (St. Antoine), former Provincial Treasurer of Quebec, rise in his place and denounce the very principle to which his leader and the Government is pledged to give fair trial. Then, within twenty-four hours, another Liberal, W. D. Euler, of North Waterloo, took the floor and gave the House reasons for his faith in public ownership. He made bold to criticize Mr. Mitchell's stand, and predicted success for the National system under careful management.

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MADAM RICHER

Labelle, P. Q., April 18th, 1921

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State, might be interesting if anyone could tell what he says. There is some hope for the Department of Trade and Commerce, where Hon. J. A. Robb seems at least willing to find out what he doesn't know. Hon. Jacques Bureau is still chuckling over a benevolent joke played upon him by the Conservative Opposition in allowing passage of his estimates without a battle. Probably the one minister who thoroughly knows his work is the veteran Finance Minister, whose influence in the regime of 1896-1911 was so well recognized that the slightly modified version of the National policy current during that period is still described by Liberals as the "Laurier-Fielding tariff." And even Mr. Fielding's great test comes on with the budget.

It is only natural that ex-ministers to the left of Mr. Speaker should be better posted than the new incumbents, and it is amusing to hear them, at times, providing information to help out the latter when questions come from the many new members in the Progressive section. And to refer again to the member for St. Antoine Hon. Mr. Mitchell, ran up against this situation in his railway speech, when some of his arguments were challenged by Hon. J. A. Steyart, late Minister of Railways, and shown to be based on entirely wrong premises. In brief, the occupants of the treasury benches are not always able to fight their own battles, let alone extend help to each other. And as for the Premier.

"Gone are the days when his heart was young and gay.

Those good old days when he followed Laurier.

Now he's in power and the arrows round him sing;

There's no one needs more pity than Mackenzie King."

Interest in the railway rates question, now before a special committee, received new impetus with the appearance as a witness of E. W. Beatty, President of the C. P. R. Mr. Beatty, in a long, prepared statement informed the members in effect that the country must cease to hope for relief from the burden of high freight rates in the event of the Government allowing the schedules of the Crow's Nest Pass agreement of 1897 to come into effect again. The effect of other concurrent rate reductions would be "too serious to contemplate" the C. P. R. is prepared, however, said its Pres-

ident, to put into effect reductions on basic commodities which would be of greater benefit to the country generally than resumption of the Crow's Nest agreement. All of which is a further blow to the ambitions of western Progressives. Mr. Beatty's statement strengthens a general impression that the demands of the Progressives in this regard, would serve a sectional interest, at the expense of the Dominion generally. It may be accepted, indeed, that there is a small chance of the Crow's Nest agreement, with its special low rates on a certain small list of commodities, being restored, and so, denied the wheat board in the compulsory form asked for, the Progressives have little left to hope for from the Government. With the budget proposals reflecting the will of protectionist Quebec, there remains no substantial basis for the Liberal Progressive alliance which the Government at the beginning met the 14th Parliament.

An attempt of the Government to sequester a bit of patronage and dodge the jurisdiction of the Civil Service Commission was frustrated by the Senate, when the Upper House cut out of the Defence Bill a clause giving the Cabinet power to place in new positions such officials as were affected by the amalgamation of the militia, naval and air departments. The Senators also rejected the proposal for three deputy ministers, amending the plan to provide for but one deputy and a controller of finance. We're always saving the country money," remarked Senator Fowler.

The House dividing on non-party lines, as declared against restoring the embargo against oleomargarine. Existing legislation expires on August 31st, and there is some conjecture as to who will take the necessary action. Hon. W. R. Motherwell, Minister of Agriculture, whose department the matter chiefly concerns, spoke and voted against allowing importation and manufacture of the butter substitute, while Hon. W. S. Fielding, took the opposite view on the ground of personal liberty. The Finance Minister also took occasion to read his colleague a lecture on his treatment of the question, and remarked that he feared Mr. Motherwell was "a free trader in everything but oleomargarine."

During discussion of Public Work estimates R. B. Hanson, Conservative member for York/Sunbury, caused a fluttering on the Government side by allusion to pre-election promises made by the Liberal candidate in Charlotte N. B. Mr. Hanson said that W. F. Todd, who was defeated by R. W. Grimmer, Conservative, had carried on a campaign throughout the island parishes, and promised a wharf or breakwater practically every fishing hamlet in the country. Mr. Hanson described it as "a straight bid for votes on a bribery principle," and challenged by Hon. A. B. Copp, Secretary of State, to name instances, quoted specific cases at Castalia, Welshpool, Deer Island and Seeley Basin. He added that no attempt had been made by the Liberal Government to implement these promises, some of which had no doubt been made in good faith.

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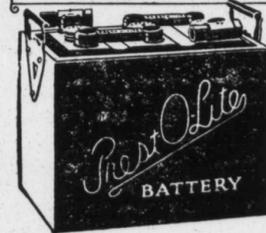


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