

Political Letter

Personnel of the Fourteenth Parliament, only two months old, is already changing gradually. In addition to the Senate vacancy caused by the death of Hon. F. P. Thompson, of Fredericton, two Quebec members Liberals, of course have been called from the Commons. Major Gustave Boyer, of Vandreuil-Soulanbes, now sits in the Upper Chamber, and has been succeeded by J. R. Ouimet. The Kamouraska seat was vacated a few days ago by Adolphe Stein, on appointment to a judgeship, and the by-election date set for May 29. Capt. J. T. Shaw took his seat for Calgary West about a month after the session began, but is still threatened with defeat, as Hon. R. B. Bennett has taken the election case to a higher court, and the decision rests on the marking of a very few ballots. Among those mentioned as possibilities for the forthcoming Senate appointment is one member of the Commons Onesiphore Turgeon, member for Gloucester, N. B., since 1900.

A pious hope has been expressed by some Liberals, privately, that the Government may see fit to elevate to the Senate or the bench one or two of the present Cabinet Ministers who are not regarded as sources of strength altogether. Hon. Geo. F. Graham appears himself to regard his position at head of the Militia Department as rather a misfit. Hon. D. D. McKenzie, Solicitor-General is well known to be slated for a seat in the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia when the proper time comes. As for Hon. Jas. Murdock, he has had some rough passages in the House, in connection with which active sup-

port from his colleagues was conspicuously missing. There were times when it looked as if Hon. James might wreck the government if the government did not drop him first.

The government's majority of 17 on the railway rates division—or 15 as the Liberal Chief Whip admitted next day—shows what must happen should Progressive and Conservative opposition deliberately combine. The government has a total strength of about 116, with the Speaker in the chair, while the Opposition can muster 118. On the division referred to, nine Progressives and several Conservatives were away without being paired, while two Progressives and the Independent member, A. W. Neill, of Comox-Alberni voted with the government. It was a curious anti-climax to Premier King's appeal for a Dominion-wide viewpoint in the matter, that three opposition members should throw in their lot with the Government, on this vote, stating specifically that they were influenced thereto by local considerations in British Columbia, in respect of certain freight schedules!

Donald Sutherland (Conservative, South Oxford) had a poser for the government in regard to its decision to saddle upon a special committee of Parliament the responsibility of finding out the right thing to do about the Crow's Nest Pass agreement. When the Premier admitted that conferences had already been held between the Ministry and the railway executives, and the latter had expressed concurrence in the necessity of an immediate reduction on basic commodities, Mr. Sutherland rose to point out that the Government, in sending the issue to a committee, was thus responsible for deferring such rate reduction. He said:

"The Prime Minister has told us that the railway companies are prepared to make a reduction in freight rates, but are waiting to see what the government will do with regard to renewing the suspension of the Crow's Nest Pass agreement. Not-

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withstanding that, the responsibility to be placed upon (is not a committee of this House because, apparently, the government has not the courage to declare what it intends to do. Surely these are not the men who were so emphatic in telling the country what they were going to do in regard to this and other matters.

The Government's safety really lies in the fact that neither section of the Opposition desires an election this year. After the troubled years of the war and the period immediately succeeding, it is time to get down to business. There are big problems before the administration, and although the Cabinet shows a disposition to delegate its responsibility to special committees, and the first half of the session has seen but little of importance accomplished, private members are anxious to expedite constructive work. Standing committees are well attended, and problems of agriculture, fisheries, railways and soldiers re-establishment grappled with conscientiously. So far, the west has virtually monopolized the agricultural committee's attention, with the Wheat Board difficulty.

In the Public Accounts Committee, "Tommy" Vien (Lib., Lobnitz) has been quizzing militia department officials and ex-officials, with a view of finding out all about Canadian war expenditure overseas. He asked Major-Gen. MacBrien if records could be produced in connection with one matter under discussion, and the Chief of the General Staff said, "Yes, but they would fill three rooms like this." It is in the Public Accounts Committee that scandals come to light, when there are any, and it is worth noting that the late Government came through preceding sessions with a clean record, though members of the Liberal opposition had every facility to challenge it. Another phase of this "fishing" is no doubt shown by the long lists of questions placed on the Order Paper this session by Liberal members, dealing with all manner of appointments, administrative changes, departmental decisions and other transactions of the government prior to last December. With a Liberal government in office, if not in power, there ought to be no difficulty in supplying the information desired by members on the Government side, but the lack of charges would appear to indicate a lack of material highly disappointing to scandal seekers.

Militia camps will be seriously affected, if held at all, this year, as a result of reduction in the estimates following a show of force by Quebec members in the House. Unsupported by his colleagues in the government, or by any member on his own side, Hon. G. P. Graham was in the peculiar position of a Minister withholding his estimates with the aid of the Conservative opposition only. The result was that he held them over, and in the subsequent party caucus met the Quebec insurgents with a compromise. Last year's estimates for annual training amounted

to \$1,500,000. This year the King cabinet brought in an estimate of \$1,400,000, which, it is understood, has been cut to \$1,000,000. As city corps training, according to custom, in the early months of the year, have already used their proportion, it is not difficult to understand the view of a highly placed official who describes the vote as "No good at all".

Brig-Genl. J. A. Clark, Conservative member for Burrard, who made a special appeal in the House against any such compromise, quoted extracts to the effect that omission of training for a year would result in disorganization of the whole Militia Force. Canada's expenditure, by the way, on defense, is much less than that of other British Dominions, per capita, or that of any civilized country in the world.

Before Hon. Mr. Graham withdrew his estimates, temporarily, he was faced with an amendment to cut them by \$1,100,000., almost wiping out the grant. This amendment was proposed by no less a person than C. G. Power (Liberal, Quebec South) Among those supporting it was Fernand Rinfret (St. James) editor of Le Canada, in which paper Sir Lomer Gouin and other Quebec statesmen are interested. In view of the personnel of other Quebec members attacking the militia estimates, and the silence of the Ministers, it may be taken that some of latter, at least, were sympathetic. In future, the government will probably take the precaution to air controversial matters in caucus beforehand.

Major C. G. Power, who moved the reduction of the Militia trailing vote, is brother of a recent appointee to Quebec Harbor Commission. Displacement of the former members of that body came under discussion in the House when a vote of \$1,500,000 to be "advanced" to the commission for terminal facilities was put through. Here again the government found itself on the defensive, and not the least interesting feature was the unusually candid admission of Hon. Ernest Lapointe, Minister of Marine, that the administration had been governed by the good old patronage principle. Resignations of Sir David Watson, Brig-Gen. Tremblay and Mr. Gravel, members of the Board, were asked when the new Government assumed office. Efficiency was unquestioned, and the two first named had rendered distinguished service overseas. In reply to enquiry by Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen, Mr. Lapointe confessed that General Watson as owner of the "Quebec Chronicle" was persona non grata to the new administration, which could not be expected to work with a gentleman whose newspaper criticized the Department. S.W. Jacobs (Liberal, George Etienne Cartier) declared that the Chronicle attacked the Government "every morning before breakfast." As a matter of fact, investigations show no such series of attacks or severe criticism of any kind. Rt. Hon. Mr. Meighen read some correspondence on the subject which placed the Government in a very unpleasant light, and quoted one close friend of Sir David as writing: "I do not consider it too much to say that what the Huns failed to do the Liberals succeeded in accomplishing killing him" in any event the action of the Gov-

ernment in declining against the proposal of a newspaper owner rendering public service on such a body as the Harbour Commission is a curious variation from its pronouncement against the McMaster Resolution aimed against the practice of men who hold directorships in big corporations serving as ministers of the Crown.

Not even the testimony of the Liberal press is lacking in regard to the powers of Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen as debated and parliamentarian. On several most important issues of this session, he had been in the position virtually of leader of the House, not alone the Conservative Opposition. Aside from this interesting situation, however, he has quite evidently risen high in the esteem of the Progressives, many of whom had evidently pictured him as a specialist chiefly in caustic criticism. As the session has advanced, they have found in him a wonderful grasp of public questions, and an ability, through experience, study and mental activity, to see further ahead than most men. No member of the House is listened to more attentively (Continued on page 6)

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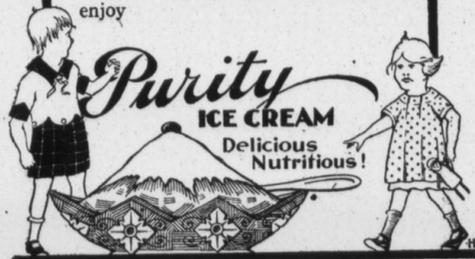


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