

House of Commons Debates

THIRD SESSION—NINTH PARLIAMENT

SPEECH

MR. HENRI BOURASSA, M.P.

SUPPLY - - STOCK EXCHANGE SPECULATION

OTTAWA, TUESDAY, JULY 21, 1903

MR. HENRI BOURASSA (Labelled). Before you leave the Chair, Mr. Speaker, I wish to bring to the attention of the House a matter as to which I have already spoken. I refer to the operations of the stock exchange; and in order to indicate clearly what the scope of my argument is, I wish to state that I shall conclude with the following resolution:

It is of urgent necessity to adopt effective measures in order to control stock exchange operations and check hazardous speculations which impair the financial security of the country and the prosperity of its trade and industry.

At the end of the financial crisis which is still fresh in the memory of a good many of us in this House, the manager of the Bank of Commerce in Toronto stated that this was a necessity because people had gone so far in the way of stock speculation that nothing but such an acute crisis would stop the evil. I do not dispute for one moment the opinion of this gentleman, but I believe that the financial régime under which such condition arose, is an evil towards the suppression of which the attention of the government should be called. In 1888 this parliament adopted "An Act respecting gaming in stocks and merchandise," (11 Vic. Cap. 42). This legislation was introduced by Hon. Mr. Abbott in the Senate and it passed through the House of Commons, then led by the late Sir John Thompson. When introducing that measure in the Senate, Mr. Abbott used words which may well be applied to the present situation. He said:

"The evil has attracted the attention of public men; it has been advertised upon very general grounds in the press of the country; and the evil has reached such proportions that it has

become absolutely necessary to do something to check it."

Of course it may be argued now as it was argued then that we have no right to interfere with individual liberty and that speculation in itself is no crime. I admit that. But if wise speculation be no crime there is not the slightest doubt but that wild speculation is one of the most fertile causes of crime. I might well repeat the words which Sir John Thompson, then Minister of Justice, used in the House of Commons when he introduced the Bill:

"I know from experience, and from applications which have been before me, that numbers of persons belonging to respectable classes in the community, are in our different penitentiaries now in consequence of bucket shop transactions, which led them on to embezzlement and frauds of different kinds. It is considered, therefore, in the interests of public morality that legislation of this kind should be adopted, and I to think this can be safely adopted."

To which the hon. member for North Norfolk (Mr. Charlton) added:

"As the honorable Minister of Justice properly says, there are in our penitentiaries today men who have been sent there for crimes committed, the first step towards which consisted of the operations of gambling which are fostered by these bucket-shops, and in a still greater degree by the regular stock exchanges."

I am not here to endorse the opinion of the hon. member for North Norfolk, but I may say that the operations that were carried on at that time by the bucket shops are now conducted on a wider scale and in a worse form by the regular stock brokers; and if Sir John Thompson was right when he said in 1888 that the operations of the bucket shops were a most effective cause of crime, I say that the opera-