

"On Parliament Hill"

(By a Member of The Parliamentary Press Gallery)

Ottawa, April 7th, 1924.—If the observations in parliament of the Prime Minister regarding Canada's refusal to be bound by the Treaty of Lausanne mean anything, they mean, undoubtedly, that this Dominion is not accepting any longer, sight unseen; the products of old-world diplomacy. Mr. King's reading of a mass of correspondence exchanged between his government and that of Great Britain made very clear that Canada, not invited to "sit in" at the Lausanne conference, had taken the ground that she would not accept responsibility for any treaty arrived at by that conference. The Canadian Government from the outset, refused any promise of concurrence in an instrument whose framing no Canadian had assisted in and, when a message came from Right Honourable Ramsay MacDonald, early in 1924, asking if this parliament were ready to vote concurrence, the government notified him that the matter would not even be laid before parliament, in that Canada was not doomed to be involved. The issue is not a vital one, perhaps, but the consistently reasonable handling of it by the King administration will tend to increase the estimation in which the senior Dominion is held by the Mother Country.

Thousands of Ontario citizens who irrespective of political leanings, are friends of public ownership, and sincerely desirous of giving Sir Henry Thornton at least a "square deal" before abandoning Our National system, would have learned much had they spent a day or two of last week in the House of Commons. Most of them, after hearing the inter-partisan attacks on the National management, would have agreed with Honourable George P. Graham in his summary of the arguments advanced against the branch-line bills, viz; that the speakers saw no objection to a National's branch provided it were to be built where it would give service but no dividends, but they objected very decidedly to the construction of any branch that was likely to take traffic from the Canadian Pacific and, possibly, pay its own way. In these phrases, the minister crystallized in a subtle manner much of the opposition to Sir Henry Thornton's spring program of construction.

The bills have not had an easy passage in the lower Chamber and their reception in the Senate will not be enthusiastic. Deprived this session of the excuse it gave, last year, for defeating the Branch Lines Bill, the Senate is apt to take its cues from the Commons and demand such detail as to embarrass the National management. Already it is stated that Sir Henry Thornton will be summoned by the Senate and made to testify, on oath, as to the necessity for each proposed line.

No charge can be laid against the government, this session of delaying legislation, or of failing to be ready with enough business to keep the House employed. Last year, the government was unprepared and dilatory; this year, it is "on its toes" and eager. It made every effort to shorten the debate upon the Speech from the Throne; it instituted night sittings from the day of opening; it has reduced private members' days to one per week; it has kept the order paper filled with government business ready for discussion; it has cut last year's Easter recess of ten days to about half that number; it probably will table the Budget before Easter adjournment and aims to bring the session to a close by the end of June, at the very latest. Considering that parliament was summoned a full month later than 1923, the record of the Ministry this session is highly deserving of praise.

In the corridors and the catacombs that serve as members' rooms, one hears more and more of the moot question of Church Union. Shunned at first by all as a topic of conversation, it gradually came to be discussed in discreet whispers, with here and there an outspoken opinion by some less fearsome individual. Proceedings in the provincial legislatures, however, particularly the events in Queen's Park have emboldened Federal members and now wagers are being laid, in instances, upon the fate of the bill. It is a matter of interest the Presbyterians bulk largest in number in the House, with 76 adherents, followed closely by the Roman Catholic group of 75. Methodists, Anglicans, Baptists and Congregationalists are more evenly divided, but the two denominations first named comprise fully two-thirds of the House membership.

Of particular interest to Ontario was Honourable Ernest Lapointe's statement, during debate on the Good resolution, that the government was prepared to bring in legislation in accord with the "single transferable vote" resolution, Mr. Lapointe urged the member for Brant not to stake "all of nothing" in respect of his demand for adoption of the broader scheme of Proportional Representation, but to make haste slowly—provided the haste sent him in the desired objection. The House generally saw the reasonableness of Mr. Lapointe's argument, which paid a tribute to the manner in which Mr. Good had presented his case, but asked that he be satisfied to proceed by easy stages toward the goal. At all events, it seems a certainty that the next election will see the alternative vote idea given a trial in a number of constituencies.

Quite the liveliest division of the session, thus far, was that of last week on the resolution moved by T. E. Church (Toronto Conservative), calling for a "National Policy in Coal" imposition of duties on that commodity entering Canada from the United States and preferential freight rates in Canada upon coal proceeding from the mines to market. The resolution for which Mr. Church had battled valiantly during two sessions was soon amended and sub-mended out of all semblance to the original. It finally was adopted as its own by the government (less the "duty" and "preferential rates" clauses) and carried by a large majority.

The fight preceding this ultimate happening, however, was full of excitement, not the least of which came about when the government, sponsoring an amendment by W. F. Carroll (Liberal, Cape Breton), was defeated, on a vote of 82 to 81. The division stood on the first count, a tie (82.82) but conservative protests that Honourable R. E. Finn (Liberal Halifax), had entered the Chamber after the question had been called, were upheld. The government lost Mr. Finn's vote, lost the division and sustained its first reverse. This, however, it quickly repaired by a brilliant piece of strategy.

Mr. Meighen, favoring a "National Policy" in coal or anything else—but a little afraid of placing duties on anthracite coal needed in Ontario, was in a desperate strait. He could not support either of the amendments, nor the motion as it stood. He awaited defeat of both amendments and, just when the speaker was ready to call the main motion, nodded to one of his followers to move it—less the duty and preferential rates clauses. A Liberal (Frank Cahill) "beat him to it". He caught the eye of the chair, moved exactly by the amendment Mr. Meighen planned to move, adopted for the government a Conservative resolution (now shorn of its objectionable features), and gallily carried with him the tide of battle under colors temporarily "borrowed" from a less-clever enemy.

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YOUR AD. HERE WOULD PAY! See Page Two For Rates.

Ottawa, April 14th, 1924.—The outstanding event in Parliament during the past week was, of course, the presentation of the Budget. It was this year a Budget that was more canvassed in advance and more eagerly awaited than any since those of pre-war days.

The stage was set for Honourable James Robb, acting Minister of Finance, with unusual regard for political dramatics. The miller from Valleyfield, whose real portfolio until recently was that of Trade and Commerce, was deputizing for the first time for that grand old man of Liberalism, Right Honourable W.S. Fielding; the galleries of parliament were filled with the semi-official lobbyists of scores of manufacturing interests, very much concerned as to the outcome; the country at large was in a state of disquiet—sensible that something was to happen, but confused by inspired propaganda to the effect that there would be tariff changes of a dangerous character; while on the other hand had been the prophesy made at Windsor, two weeks ago, by the Conservative Leader, that the Liberals would not dare to tinker with the fiscal scheme of Canada. All these factors contributed to a stage-setting unique in recent years, the effect of which could not have been lost upon an experienced Minister of Finance, let alone one who was presenting his very first Budget.

Mr. Robb's Well-Told Story. Mr. Robb acquitted himself splendidly. To the extreme satisfaction of the Press Gallery, he overcame the handicap of a poor speaking-voice and for forty minutes read from his manuscript in tones that carried to every corner of the Chamber. Rapidly and logically he built up his clear, concise statement,—a reduction since last year, in Canada's net debt of \$30,000,000; a proposed reduction in taxation, during the ensuing year of \$24,000,000; general reduction of the sales tax from six to five per cent; a fifty per cent reduction of the sales tax on boots, shoes, rubber footwear, biscuits, canned vegetables and canned fruits; complete removal of the sales tax on mining, farming and lumbering machinery, binder twine, milk foods, provisions and breadstuffs; a lowering of the customs tariff, both preferential and general, and by "cuts" ranging from thirty to fifty per cent, on agricultural and dairying implements and on mining and lumbering machinery; and the placing of fertilizers on the free list.

These were the high lights in the most business-like Budget parliament has heard in many years; a Budget that drew prolonged and thunderous applause from government and Progressive benches.

Popular Effect of the Budget

And, in that respect, parliament on Budget day was a cross-section of Canada. In the House, three-quarters of the membership was satisfied, one quarter was dissatisfied. In the country, the propounding mass of citizenship owing allegiance to either Liberal and Progressive principles is pleased; a smaller element—that believing in high protection—is displeased. The nation-wide reaction to the Budget utterance has been on the whole favorable to a degree. Farmers, fishermen, lumbermen and miners see in it a welcome relief from high prices for their machinery of production. Merchants, tradesmen and salesmen welcome it as a release warrant from restricting trade entanglements. Consumers of the necessities of life and taxpayers generally must be impressed with a cut of \$24,000,000 in the cost of the necessities of life. Buyers and sellers of everything that is or can be bought and sold are glad to be rid of at least a part of sales tax oppression and welcome the general reduction in that impost. Even manufacturers of some of the very lines from which is removed a portion of their protection are reasonable in their criticism and are frankly admitting that their loss in direct paternalism may be more than compensated for in the free buying and selling that must result from the sales tax abolitions and reductions. The reaction is favorable, and growing more so as the days pass and the full effect of the Budget resolutions are comprehended.

Another Record Majority Likely.

And in the House itself? A fortnight will tell, when the division bells ring, but already there is growing a feeling that the majority of the government may be nearly that of the record-breaking one it secured on the Address. In other words, there may be very few Liberal "bolters." It had been deemed inevitable, following their declarations on the tariff-clause in the Speech from the Throne, that Messrs. Marler, Euler, Raymond, Mitchell, Laflamme and several other Liberals, vote against their party in the event of that tariff clause being implemented. The clause has been implemented—but the government may not lose these votes. There is a

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possibility—indeed, a strong probability—that the members named above will content themselves with a frank statement of their position, from the viewpoint of their constituents, and let it go at that. They regard tariff-reform as inevitable, even if at the expense, (temporarily at least,) of their particular constituency, and they may see no gain in voting against the great majority of their party who believe that fiscal reform is in the best interests of Canada as a whole.

More than that, the Prime Minister may gain. He may secure not only the voting-strength, but the debating-strength of the strong Independent, Andrew McMeester of Bromo. Andrew may come back to the Liberal seat he left last session and again attend the party caucus. Probably he will. Probably, too, will another Independent-Liberal who has been sitting among the elect but refusing to attend caucuses, Honourable A. B. Hudson of Winnipeg. It is certain that both of these gentlemen regard the Budget as an expression of Liberalism, and welcome it as such.

Attacking The National Railway

Practically all the resolutions covering branch-line construction on the Canadian National Railways were given approval last week by the Commons and now will appear before the Railway Committee. The bitter opposition that met the first few resolutions continued during the discussion of practically the entire lot, growing in bitterness, if anything, as it progressed. The feature of the whole debate—apart from the solicitous attitude of scores of members as to the encroachment of the Nationals upon "holy ground" already occupied by the Canadian Pacific—was the slashing attack on Sir Henry Thornton's Directors by Honourable H. Stevens of Vancouver. Mr. Stevens spared no words in his condemnation of the members of the Board and his words were echoed by many others in his group. It was some what significant, however, that, fol-

lowing his diatribe, the resolutions that remained on the order paper went through with very little debate.

The Home Bank Depositors.

Bank depositors in Canada may wait a while for the scheme of L. J. Ladner (Conservative, Vancouver), to guarantee deposits up to a value of \$3,000. The House debated the proposal for an entire afternoon but strangely enough, showed little interest in the idea. There is little likelihood that the debate will be concluded this session.

Courage to Say "No."

The Prime Minister concluded a week of signal achievement by giving courteous but firm refusal to the prayer of a huge and influential deputation from Toronto which came to demand the expenditure of millions of dollars on the waterfront viaduct in that city. The deputation—which came 120 strong, by special train, and which comprised representatives of every political, social, civic and business circle in the Queen's City—was told very plainly that economy "to the bare bone" was the policy of the government; that public works throughout Canada were being held up for lack of funds; that the government was finding difficulty in securing from parliament approval of Sir Henry Thornton's branch-line program and that first things must come first. The government, he assured his hearers, was in no sense repudiating its contract with Toronto but (this very decidedly) it was not going to be stampeded into implementing that contract immediately and at the expense of other parts of Canada.

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