

ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE EMPLOYS STEAM ROLLER

Proceedings Stricken From Records When Liberals Are Scoring

HEARING NULLIFIED BY CHAIRMAN'S RULING

Remarkable Situation Arises When Mr. Taylor De- clines to Answer

Whatever it may be called—steam-roller, gag, closure or bludgeon—the Public Accounts Committee yesterday witnessed a scene that has not been paralleled since Capt. Sullivan threatened to thrash a member of the then Opposition. Not only were questions ruled out of order yesterday as being irrelevant, but the very fact that the questions had been asked and the witness refused to answer was also ordered to be stricken out. Votes were taken and the members polled, which in the report of the committee will appear anomalous, because there is not a shadow of a subject to show why they were brought up.

The situation arose out of Mr. Proudfoot's further examination of Mr. George E. Taylor of Taylor, Scott & Co., with regard to the settlement under the old Central Prison contract. Mr. Proudfoot asked several pointed questions about threats being made to the Government to expose a Minister if a settlement were not made. Mr. Taylor declined point blank to answer. A further inquiry regarding political contributions met the same fate. Meanwhile Mr. McGarry, who is the member of the Government before the committee, was vigorously protesting that the questions were not relevant. He was sustained by the Chairman and later by the committee. But that was not sufficient. Mr. McGarry having tasted blood wanted more. All the questions objected to, all the argument upon the Chairman's ruling and the discussion of two hours were ordered to be stricken off, and theoretically nothing remains upon which to appeal to the House.

"It is a farce," said Mr. Rowell. "Utterly absurd," declared Mr. Elliott. "Steam-roller methods," and "As bad as the worst of American politics," were some of the characterizations of the action of the committee.

It was not long before Mr. Proudfoot encountered the Chairman. Mr. Taylor stated that prior to his securing the fiat he had seen Sir James Whitney. "What arguments did you use outside of the merits of this claim?" asked the member for Centre Huron.

Declines to Talk,

"I decline to say anything more about it."

"If you did not get the fiat did you say you would expose some member of

the Government?" persisted Mr. Proudfoot.

"If you have any charges to make against anybody the place to do it is on the floor of the House," interrupted Chairman Ferguson.

Mr. Proudfoot protested. The whole transaction revealed a most remarkable state of facts. Here was a dispute in which the witness said he had great difficulty getting a fiat to sue the Government. The fiat was granted on the 14th March, 1911, the statement of claim was filed on the 14th June, and the case set down for trial on the 18th November, just before the election. The whole question was referred to Mr. Thorne on that date as sole arbitrator, and the matter was settled without evidence or counsel being heard on behalf of either party. "To show what led up to such an extraordinary situation I purpose to examine this witness to show what means he took to get the fiat."

"This committee should go slowly," began Mr. McGarry. "Mr. Proudfoot has got on the record his opinion of the case." The hon. member had made a statement in that way which he dared not make on the floor of the House. The Public Accounts Committee was not the place for making such a charge. The question was not relevant to the item under investigation. "I dare my hon. friend to make on the floor of the House, on his responsibility as a member, this afternoon the charge he is now making by innuendo."

Might as Well Talk.

"The committee might just as well stop if witnesses could refuse to answer at any point in the investigation," said Mr. J. C. Elliott (West Middlesex), warming up.

"If it was proper and right for Taylor, Scott & Co. to secure a fiat there was no reason why they should be obliged to make threats. Then there must be some foundation for their threats, and I have a right to get at that, because it was quite clear these threats brought about the granting of the fiat," continued Mr. Proudfoot.

Again Mr. Proudfoot tried for an answer. "Did you threaten to expose any member of the Government in your conversation with Sir James Whitney unless the fiat was granted?"

"I decline to answer any such question," was the firm reply.

Mr. Taylor explained that Mr. McNaught's connection with the matter was on his own appeal. Mr. McNaught took the position that it was foolish to go to trial, and the matter could be better adjusted by arbitration. At the time Mr. Thorne was appointed arbitrator he had been retained by the Government as a star witness.

"Is there anything more at those interviews with Mr. McNaught that you have not told me about?"

"I am not going to answer that question. I think I have answered that question very fully."

The Bomb.

"Did you tell Mr. McNaught that you had certain charges against members of the Government, and unless you got this matter adjusted you would expose them?"

This was the bombshell that caused all the trouble. The witness never had an opportunity to answer. Chairman Ferguson would not allow the question. That question did not relate to the item under investigation, and he would not allow it to be put.

"I think it is time we got on some proper basis here," said Mr. C. M. Bowman (North Bruce), quickly rising. "Mr. Proudfoot is conducting this investigation, and with all due respect to the counsel for the Chairman (Mr. McGarry) this question should be answered."

Mr. McGarry would have it known that he was not counsel for the Chairman, but a member of the committee with a perfect right to participate in its proceedings.

"From the evidence of this witness it is evident something transpired which he refuses to tell this