

# BUYING SYSTEM IS CRITICIZED

## Provincial Treasurer's Explanations Cleared Atmosphere at House

### BUYING AGENT'S POWERS

#### Outbreak of Hostilities Narrowly Averted in Legislature Over Patronage Discussion

The tie that binds the two parties in the Legislature was strained almost to the breaking point when two or three members got "a bit touchy" over the patronage business yesterday afternoon, but after a few tactful remarks and a little humor had been introduced into the proceedings the "spirit of brotherly love," as Mr. Dewart called it, was again in evidence. For over an hour the galleries saw the nearest approach to a scrap that has been witnessed this session. Mr. Carter of South Wellington started it by bluntly protesting against the Government's bill providing for the appointment of a general purchasing agent. His remarks about patronage got under the Provincial Treasurer's skin, and the two engaged in an oratorical bout lasting for several rounds before the Independent Liberal member was appeased by Mr. McGarry's invitation to "come round to my office and see the reports."

The Provincial Treasurer mentioned that the idea the Government now had in mind was that when supplies to the value of over \$200 were to be purchased tenders should be called for. "Our object is to get away from even a hint of patronage," said Mr. McGarry, "and we intend to appoint a very able man to this position."

#### Purchasing Agent's Powers.

Mr. Proudfoot—What jurisdiction will the Government exercise over the purchasing agent? Will he have similar powers to the Provincial Auditor, or will he be under the control of the Government?

Mr. McGarry replied that the bill merely named the Commissioner as attached to the Treasurer's Department. The Government would not retain to itself the right to direct in any way the purchasing agent, but he would be governed by rules and regulations, which would be drafted by the Government with the assistance of the purchasing agent. "The Government has to take the responsibility for him," said the Provincial Treasurer, "and all that I am asking is that we be given a fair opportunity to show how the scheme will work out."

Mr. Proudfoot—How far would the purchasing agent have a free hand in the making of purchases, and would the Government have the right to interfere with him?

Mr. McGarry—My Hon. friend has aptly expressed what we have in mind. The rules and regulations will specify how contracts will be made, and the purchasing agent will have authority to make contracts.

Mr. Proudfoot—In the event of tenders being invited for certain supplies or equipment, will the Ministers see the tenders before the contract is awarded, and will they be able to say to the purchasing agent that the contract must go in a certain direction?

Mr. McGarry (smiling)—No; there has been nothing of that sort for so many years that we have forgotten about it. (Applause from Government benches.)

Mr. Elliott (West Middlesex) urged that if contracts for amounts over \$200 were to be let after public tenders had been invited it should be so stated in the bill.

#### Drafting of Commission's Rules.

Mr. McGarry stated that the rules would not be made until the new purchasing agent was selected. "He will be a man of great experience," said the Provincial Treasurer, "probably from the C.P.R. or somewhere else, and will assist in framing the rules."

Mr. Carter (South Wellington)—The purchasing agent should have the same authority as the Provincial Auditor; he should be appointed by the Legislature and removed by the Legislature, not the Government.

Mr. McGarry—That is hardly possible, because the purchasing agent will have no responsibility to this House or to the country. He would not be able to come into the House and make explanations. The Ministers are responsible at present and must remain so. If the purchasing agent were appointed by the Legislature the Ministers could not be held responsible for his actions.

The member for South Wellington made charges to the effect that bread had been bought by "the Government" for soldiers in Guelph at one cent per loaf more than they could have bought it for from the Co-operative Society. It was a nasty sample of party patronage, the successful tenderer being a good friend of the party in power.

It afterwards transpired that the Ontario Government had nothing whatever to do with the matter, which was a Federal affair.

#### Safeguards Against Patronage.

Mr. Hartley Dewart (Southwest Toronto) feared the Government was not throwing sufficient safeguards around the business if the intention was to abolish party patronage. Liberal members should have the privilege of furnishing the names of non-partisan merchants and contractors from whom Government supplies could be purchased. The member for Southwest Toronto pointed out that on Monday afternoon a sparsely-attended House passed votes for the expenditure of nearly two million dollars in no time, including \$400,000 for public buildings, etc. He thought that was spending money rather rapidly. He wanted to know if the bill applied to the Hydro-electric Commission, the Workmen's Compensation Board and the T. & N. O. Railway and to all the institutions of the Province, and whether it would do away with the bursars at these institutions. Also he would like to know if the new purchasing agent would be required to pass the test of the new Civil Service Commissioner.

#### Scope of the Commission.

He was informed by Mr. McGarry that the bill applied to all purchases for the Province with the exception of purchases for the three commissions named. The bill was wide enough to include purchases of everything but land, and if not the Government would make it wider before the third reading. Dealing with Mr. Carter's suggestion that the new purchasing agent should not be dismissed except by the Legislature, the Provincial Treasurer said: "Supposing he steals our money on the 12th of July. Would the Legislature keep him in office until the next session of the Legislature, or would the House be called in special conclave for the purpose of dismissing him?"

Mr. Dewart—Is that the kind of man you propose to appoint?

Mr. McGarry—No; nor are we going to appoint a broken-down politician.

Mr. Studholme (East Hamilton) was glad of this latter assurance. The Labor member protested, however, against the "order in Council feature of the bill." He reminded Mr. McGarry that when in Opposition the Conservatives preached the doctrine that the Government used orders in Council as a means of "putting it over" the people.

Mr. Dewart—Will the proposed regulations for the guidance of the purchasing agent be submitted to the House for approval?

Mr. McGarry—Certainly; next session.