

PASS ACT TO BAR DESERTERS

Offenders Under M.S.A. Not
Allowed to Vote in
Ontario

DISCUSSION ON BILL

While the members of the Legislature were agreed as to the desirability of disqualifying defaulters and deserters under the Military Service Act, they argued for an hour and a half last night as to the proper definition of the words "deserter" and "defaulter." Finally the bill was put in such form as to meet these technical objections, although not before the military members of the House poured much advice into the ears of the Government as to the proper meaning of army terms, "absent without leave," etc., with which the politicians were not familiar.

Hon. Mr. Lucas stated that the act dealt with three classes of defaulters. There were those men who "being liable for service who were called out, and without lawful excuse failed to report"; and those who "being ordered to report for duty or medical examination under the M.S.A. failed to do so"; and those who "had entered the service and afterward became deserters."

Mr. Proudfoot, the Opposition Leader, contended that while he was thoroughly in accord with having those who failed to serve their country dealt with as provided for in the act, it was contrary to the British constitution that a man should be considered guilty before he had been proven so. He pointed out the difficulty of having all defaulters prosecuted. It was pointed out by several speakers that there were those who were listed on the Department of Militia lists as "deserters" who would be found to be overseas or in some other branch of the service when the truth became known.

Gone to the Woods.

Government speakers said that while this might be true there were many men who had taken to the woods and had not been caught. However, if men did not come out of the woods to vote there would be no penalty; it would only be after they voted that they could be prosecuted under this act. It was felt by Mr. Beniah Bowman of Manitoulin that the names of defaulters should not go on the voters' lists at all. If they did there might be a tendency after the election on the part of some partisans to use the act as a means of scaring away from the polls those properly entitled to exercise their franchise.

Discussion of the punishment to be inflicted on those convicted under the act followed. Mr. Allan Studholme of East Hamilton referred to the Skidmore case in Stratford, and said the measure would provide for punishment of persons convicted of seditious or treasonable offences. While Skidmore had been released after a short period in jail his conviction stood and he would be disfranchised.

The Attorney-General admitted that occasionally there might be an individual case where hardship would result, but his answer was that individual cases could be cited against any law of general application. The bill was finally passed.