

OPPOSITION BRANDS HARRIS

**M. M. MacBride Declares
New Commissioner Is
Closely Linked With
Private Power Interests
and Not Proper Man to
Probe Hydro—"Will Ask
Him," Says Drury**

"DECLINE POSITION," SAYS MR. FERGUSON

Mr. Lloyd Harris' business affiliations and his attitude toward public ownership and Hydro formed the basis for a strong Opposition attack in the Legislature yesterday afternoon on Mr. Harris' appointment as one of the Chippawa inquiry commissioners. M. M. MacBride (South Brant) seriously questioned the advisability of having Mr. Harris on the Chippawa inquiry. He stated frankly: "I know that in back of Mr. Harris' mind is the desire to unload certain power companies in which he is financially interested." The South Brant member ventured the prediction that at the end of the Chippawa Commission sittings Mr. Harris' decision would be absolutely opposed to the whole Hydro policy.

Mr. MacBride further stated that a month ago he had travelled from Brantford to Toronto on the same train as Mr. Harris, and claimed on that occasion he had "heard him condemn the whole Hydro project—its power development, its Chippawa, its transmission lines and everything connected with Hydro."

Opposed to Hydro?

This statement was made during the course of the debate on the question raised by the Opposition on the propriety of Mr. Harris being a member of the Royal Commission to investigate Chippawa, as he was alleged to be a director of power companies in opposition to Hydro.

The question came before the House following the answer to a question put on the order paper by Mr. MacBride, asking if Mr. Harris was a director of the Dominion Power and Transmission Company, if he was financially interested in the Montreal Heat, Light and Power Company, and upon whose recommendation had he been appointed to the commission. The reply was that the Government had no official information on the subject, and that Mr. Harris had been recommended to the position by the Prime Minister.

Mr. MacBride took exception to the answer, saying that it did not give the information asked for, and in this he was joined by Hon. Howard Ferguson. A brisk debate followed on the subject for an hour and terminated when the Premier announced that he would inquire of Mr. Harris himself about the questions and try to obtain the information for the House. Mr. MacBride said that he was satisfied that, if the Premier asked Mr. Harris, Mr. Harris would give him the information he wanted.

Defended by Liberal Chief.

The debate was marked also by a defense of Mr. Harris, made by Wellington Hay, Liberal Leader, who said that he thought they wanted examination of the project by big men. Mr. Harris was a man of such reputation that he thought his judgment would be the unbiased judgment of a man deserving to serve his Province.

Mr. Ferguson, in opening the debate, said it looked as if there was no desire on the part of the Government to afford the public the information asked for. If it were so that Mr. Harris was interested in companies competing with Hydro, then the public would conclude he was not the best kind of a man to be on the commission. Mr. Ferguson recalled what he termed a similar case of Hon. Frank Carvell, who was criticized for acting on the Railway Board on a telephone rate case. Mr. Ferguson read out the various parts of Mr. MacBride's questions, and said that the Government, when it selected a man of this kind on the commission, was bound to give the public the information asked for concerning him. The Government should have known before he was appointed "if he was tied up to one of the biggest aggregations of private power companies in America, fighting public ownership interests as long as they had existed."

Suggests Resignation.

Mr. Ferguson said he would suggest to the Premier that the suggestion might be made to Mr. Harris that he decline the appointment, in view of the position he occupied.

W. H. Casselman, U.F.O. member for Dundas, announced his agreement with the views of Mr. Ferguson and Mr. MacBride. "If Mr. Harris is a person such as one would be led to think by the character of the questions, then I submit that this gentleman would be no more fit to sit in unprejudiced judgment on this commission than members of this House would be to sit in unprejudiced judgment on this matter."

Premier Drury said that the Government had no desire to hide anything, but it had not considered the whole record of Mr. Harris. He was a man of integrity, ability and fair-mindedness. The appointment was not parallel to the case of Mr. Carvell. Public ownership was not on trial.

Mr. MacBride asked if the commission decided to put up the rates, say, 10 per cent., would that not benefit competitors of the Hydro? Mr. Drury said the commission had definite questions to investigate, and the one raised by Mr. MacBride was not included.

Will Ask Harris Himself.

Opposition members thought otherwise. "I will reconsider the question and see what information I can get," said the Premier. "I will ask Mr. Harris himself, because he is an honorable man and will tell me."

H. H. Dewart said they had no knowledge as to how these commissions were appointed. All they knew was that a gentleman interested in large undertakings at variance with the Hydro was appointed. He wanted to know if Mr. Drury had gone to Ottawa and had joined the Government, would he have consented to Mr. Harris being on a commission to investigate reciprocity with the United States, in view of the fact that Mr. Harris left the Liberal party on that issue in 1911? The point was this: "Why on this commission should there be a man who has interests so absolutely adverse to the Hydro?"

F. Wellington Hay said that from what he had heard that afternoon it was quite evident Mr. Harris was a man of strong parts. He must be a strong man, indeed, went on Mr. Hay, if it was thought that his mind could dominate the minds of the other four men on the commission. He had known Mr. Harris a long time, he said, and had known him favorably. "I don't think he would be biased in his consideration because of any mercenary interests he might have in any other company."