

The OBSERVER IN QUEEN'S PARK



Once again the Legislature has gone through an entire afternoon without reaching the orders of the day. J. W. McLeod (Liberal, Stormont) started as interesting an afternoon's scrap as has been heard in a House noted for providing excitement upon the least excuse. Mr. McLeod waved aloft a newspaper clipping of the proceedings before the Gregory inquiry on Tuesday, in which it was related that the Hydro Power Commission had spent \$11,000 for propaganda during the recent Hydro-radial controversy. Mr. McLeod had no particular quarrel with the amount, but he wanted to know why his question, on the order paper for days, seeking the same information, had not been answered. As a member of the Legislature, he thought he was entitled to an answer before he had to get it from newspaper reports. Premier Drury, in reply, said it was not possible to answer Mr. McLeod's question with exactitude. It was one of the mysteries which the Gregory Commission was trying to solve. No authority from the Government or from the Hydro Commission had been given for this \$11,000 expenditure for propaganda. The Premier's explanation was far from satisfactory, as he was to find out many times before 6 o'clock. Replying to further questioning, the Premier said that last fall Sir Adam Beck had come twice to see him, but Sir Adam had been told the Government had no objection to an expenditure for educational work, but it did object to payments for propaganda. The amount had been spent in direct opposition to the wishes of the Government.

Mr. Brackin's Defense.

And then the afternoon's fun started. G. G. Halcrow claimed the Government should not try to climb from under, while Col. Currie had harsh words for the Gregory Commission. Then suddenly the Government found a vallant champion in R. L. Brackin (Liberal, West Kent), who tried to interpret public opinion outside of Toronto. Mr. Brackin had an enjoyable time for several minutes, claiming that Col. Currie had been taken into the political house of refuge in Southeast Toronto. He told the House the Conservatives were constantly trying to stir up strife between the Hydro and the Government, whereas the former Conservative Administration had never "dared to put a curb on the Hydro." Speaking for public opinion outside of Toronto, Mr. Brackin said: "We believe these commissions were justified. The Hydro is the creature of the Government, and should be controlled by the Government."

Next Mr. Brackin added another phrase to the already long list which must not be mentioned by honorable members. He was speaking of Hon. I. B. Lucas, as solicitor for the Hydro, giving legal approval to certain huge expenditures, and mentioned that Mr. Lucas, as a former Attorney-General, was a "partner in crime" with the rest of the Conservatives. Col. Currie, who had been rudely rapped over the knuckles by Mr. Brackin, objected to this phrase, "partner in crime," asking for a withdrawal, which he obtained.

Then, as though to indicate further that this Government finds friends in strange places, and opponents just behind the Ministerial benches, J. W. Casselman (U.F.O., Dundas) bluntly stated he was opposed to both the Sutherland and Gregory Commissions. It seemed to him that the Government representative on the Hydro Commission,

Col. D. Carmichael, should have had knowledge of Hydro expenditures, and everything could have been given the House. This was too much for the Premier, who wanted to know if it was Col. Carmichael's duty to delve into all Hydro details if the engineers did not give him the facts. Mr. Casselman pointed out that a year ago Col. Carmichael had tendered his resignation as Hydro Commissioner, but this resignation had never been accepted.

Conservative Battle Plans.

From the next few speeches it was evident the Conservatives are to make a concerted drive on the Government. "If I disagreed with Sir Adam Beck as much as this Government I would fire him," said Col. Price, Parkdale, a sentiment which seemed to be echoed by other Conservatives, who possibly think that Sir Adam's popularity might be made to yield them votes next election at the expense of the Government. There are rumors, too, that some Conservatives would welcome the idea of Premier Drury dismissing Sir Adam, so that they could welcome him back to their party and place him high in their councils. These men think they could win Ontario with the name of Sir Adam Beck. What will Premier Drury do? There was nothing yesterday to indicate his line of action with respect to the Hydro Chairman, but perhaps the answer may be found in the statement that Premier Drury can see as far ahead as most of them when it comes to practical politics — the emphasis being on the "practical."

Some views expressed by Liberal members are worth attention. J. W. Currie, Southeast Toronto, claimed a large part of public opinion favored the idea of the Sutherland and Gregory Commissions. He said the attitude of Liberals was that Hydro-electric affairs required attention. W. E. N. Sinclair, South Ontario, claimed the Government ought to have been able to "ferret out" the Hydro-radial situation for itself. Wellington Hay, Liberal Leader, repeated his previous contention of separate boards for Hydro-radials and Hydro power. He alleged the Government could have called off the Hydro propaganda had it desired. Mr. Curry, when speaking, was twitted about being the "junior member" for Southeast Toronto, and retorted that his majority had been bigger than the total vote accorded Col. J. A. Currie for the other part of that seat.

A Ferocious Attack.

However, the real excitement of the afternoon was provided by W. F. Nickle, Kingston, who made a ferocious attack on Hon. D. Carmichael. This Minister, a member of the Hydro Board, should have told the House something, and the people had a right to know his explanation, in view of his salary of \$6,000. The Prime Minister sat almost silent, while the Minister of Power was "as silent as an oyster, and without as much spine." If the Minister of Power retained his \$6,000 position the House expected him to have some opinions, and express them, so that the House might reach some conclusions. He wanted to know where the Minister of Power was when the Premier and Sir Adam had some correspondence over the \$11,000 for propaganda. This, and some more along the same lines, couched in Mr. Nickle's classical language, started things.

Frederick George Sandy (U.F.O., South Victoria), sitting opposite Mr. Nickle, could not stand it. With

visible agitation he told the House the U.F.O. were just as much in favor of Hydro as anyone. He claimed Col. Carmichael had just as much principle as anyone, and Sir Adam Beck had not consulted the commission. Mr. Sandy need not have rushed to the rescue, because Col. Carmichael himself rose to reply. He made no apologies for his silence, beyond stating that "silence in this House is like a great drop in a weary land." The expenditure had never come before the commission, and there were no funds for Hydro-radials. The accounts had never been properly before the commission.

Withdrawals Are Asked.

Indignantly he repudiated a statement by Mr. Nickle, to the effect that he (the Minister) had offered his resignation a year ago, but he kept quiet because, if another Hydro outburst came like that of a year ago, the resignation might be accepted, and the Minister lose his salary. There was much dispute concerning the exact wording of Mr. Nickle's aspersion. In any event, Col. Carmichael, as a matter of courtesy, asked Mr. Nickle to withdraw the "offensive and untruthful statement." Mr. Nickle, instead of withdrawing, asked for a retraction of the words "offensive and untruthful." This Col. Carmichael did, but Mr. Nickle could not see why he should withdraw his statement.

"You called me spineless. I am not spineless," called out the Minister, after much cross-fire.

"I withdraw that. I admit that the honorable gentleman has backbone," added Mr. Nickle. Col. Carmichael, who had made an excellent impression by his self-control under the most bitter taunts, said he had once told Sir Adam Beck he wanted a resolution entered on the Hydro minutes whereby no commissioner should enter into propaganda.

"I still think the honorable gentleman (Mr. Nickle) owes me an apology," added Col. Carmichael, who hinted there were other methods of settling such disputes, if it were not in the House.

Then the Premier stepped into the breach. He was angry, as the House could not help noticing. He said Col. Carmichael's resignation as Hydro Commissioner had been put into his hands, and he had had no reason to accept it. He praised Col. Carmichael's ability and character highly, and as for the virtue of taciturnity, it was one many others might emulate. "I have no reason to repent of my act in not accepting that resignation," concluded the Premier.

Here Hon. Mr. Ferguson assumed a new role. Instead of opening wider the verbal wounds, he brought the House back to the original discussion, Hydro propaganda, or Hydro educational work, and what was the line of demarkation.

The Premier said the Government forbade the expenditure of public funds for Hydro propaganda. Canvassers' and speakers' expenses were not legitimate, he claimed. Then, defending the Gregory Commission, he said the Government wanted to know if a "ring of Hydro officials, with or without the consent of the Chairman," could engage in propaganda or spend money for such purposes. He could not justify the spending of public money to influence the public mind.

Mr. Dewart opined that the failure of the Premier to reorganize the Hydro Board three years ago was responsible for the present situation.

There were other speeches, and scores of other interruptions, but to return to Mr. McLeod of Stormont, who raised the question. He has yet to learn why he had to get his question answered through the newspapers, instead of on the floor of the House. At 6 o'clock, however, he had no complaint that he had not heard enough talk, and perhaps he enjoyed an afternoon's entertainment.