

The OBSERVER IN QUEEN'S PARK



The redistribution issue will not remain quiet until Premier Drury makes his announcement of policy some time next week. It bobs up in the Legislature every now and then, and few Opposition members overlook any opportunity of trying to get advance information. Such eagerness to know what is going to be done in setting the election stage can be taken as a reflex of what the people are thinking and asking.

Before the orders of the day were called yesterday, George G. Halcrow (Independent Labor, East Hamilton) picked up a copy of The Globe and proceeded to interrogate Premier Drury concerning this paper's information that a redistribution bill would be introduced. Anyone could tell from Mr. Halcrow's expression and the manner in which he asked the questions that he knew full well he would get no definite reply. He was not disappointed. He saw the Premier display his most complacent smile, and he heard him say nothing would be revealed before his (the Premier's) speech on the Budget.

Mr. Halcrow's Complaint.

However, Mr. Halcrow got rid of his complaint. He argued that he had a redistribution motion on the order paper for two and a half months, which he thought was quite a "reasonable time," and, besides, he had submitted an amendment to the Speech from the Throne on the same subject, which had been ruled out of order. He claimed, like some other members, that redistribution was "one of the most pressing questions," while he could not see any justice, "in any shape or form," in the present allotment of ridings.

Mr. Halcrow had prepared a list showing the voting irregularities of Ontario ridings based on the last election. There were two ridings in which the total vote had been less than 3,000; three between five and six thousand; two between six and seven thousand; five between seven and eight thousand; seven between eight and nine thousand; eleven between nine and ten thousand; fourteen between ten and eleven thousand; nine under twelve thousand; eight under thirteen thousand; five under fourteen thousand; three under seventeen thousand; four under nineteen thousand, and so on up to one riding, Northwest Toronto, where the vote was slightly less than 45,000.

Perhaps Not Correct Basis.

Of course, the numbers of votes cast show greater discrepancies than populations, owing to local conditions at election time. Personal popularity of the candidates, the keenness of the fight, the efficiency of organization, and even the weather, all affect the number of votes recorded. Some authorities claim that redistribution arguments should never be based on the number of votes cast, while others say that people who neglect to vote should suffer in representation. In

any event, Mr. Halcrow's list of figures was quite illuminating, though possibly familiar to the members of the Cabinet, who show signs of having given these and the census statistics some recent study.

A Dangerous Passage.

After an extraordinary career of delays, Hon. Mr. Raney's blue sky bill received second reading yesterday afternoon. On previous occasions the same measure has had to be dropped for want of a quorum, but a sufficient number of members stuck to their posts yesterday to see it safely through the most dangerous passage. A start was made on the blue sky matter shortly after 4 o'clock, and it was after 6 when second reading was given. This was the first Friday afternoon in which the House has lasted until six. Even Premier Drury remained, though he generally hears the whistle of the train for Crown Hill before five on Fridays. Half a dozen times it looked as though Mr. Raney would meet with ill-fortune again. On one occasion the House contained only 21 members, and second reading was accorded with the bare quorum, 20.

The members kept coming and going, adding to the continual uncertainty. Mr. Drury set himself the task of acting as party Whip, owing to the absence of the trusted Andrew Hicks. Half a dozen Opposition members were obliging enough to remain in their seats, though the debate was confined to three or four of them. Had not Mr. Raney given assurances that the mining industry would be amply protected in the application of the measure, it is likely he would not have been successful yesterday. From what could be taken from the Attorney-General's remarks, the bill is in for some very violent alterations when it comes before the Committee of the House. The fact that Mr. Raney was disposed to accept some of the views of Northern Ontario men kept them in their places. Now that the example has been set, possibly the Premier will make more use of Friday afternoons hereafter.

Some of the Work Ahead.

A little analysis of yesterday's order paper, in addition to the prospect of redistribution, indicates that there will be many busy days ahead before prorogation and the campaign picnic season. There are 25 bills for third reading; two Government notices of motion; 17 Government orders, mostly second readings; 17 public bills and orders, mostly second readings; about 30 questions to be answered; 21 notices of motion from private members, and six private bills. That list of business alone seems good for weeks and weeks of talk, to say nothing of the matters of current moment which several members are so fond of debating. If one were disposed to guess, it is that there may be some sort of resolution to vote a members' bonus in addition to the ordinary sessional allowance of \$1,400.

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If a redistribution bill is actually placed before the Legislature, and at present everything points that way, it is taken for granted that the Province will be given a trial of proportional representation. Plenty of feelers have been thrown out from Drury Government circles that the time has come for some application of P.R., if for no other reason than for educational purposes.

The Premier is believed to be a thorough convert to this system of voting, perhaps not favorable to its being put into operation all over the Province immediately, but favorable to trying it out to the extent of making its intricacies more or less familiar to the great body of the electorate. It is reported on good authority that two-thirds of his followers in the Legislature share his views, though it must be admitted that rather vigorous opposition comes from the remaining one-third. However, that is one reason, and a rather strong reason, for believing that some people must get ready to vote by choices under P. R.

The Party Platforms.

Another reason, referred to frequently in this column, is that the principle of P.R. is a plank in the platforms of three parties—the Liberals, the U.F.O. and the Laborites. True, the Province has witnessed on more than one occasion of late a remarkable drift from party platforms by men from all of these three groups, but there are still members who regard a platform as a given pledge, and not a mere chart, to be departed from under political exigencies.

There is a possibility that when the redistribution problem is being dealt with behind closed doors the outstanding reason for a limited application of P.R. will be found to lie in the supposition that it will be one way out of a serious difficulty. The hint from Government circles that P.R. was to be tried out on the dog—that is, Toronto—called forth an immediate protest from the Conservatives. They threatened, and still threaten, to stage the greatest filibuster the Legislature ever saw if an attempt is made to follow any course like that. Supposing that, in addition to Toronto, the Premier proposed to try out P.R. in some rural ridings, any Conservative protest would immediately lose much of its advertising or campaign value. In fact, the members of that party would almost be bound to accept such a compromise, though doubtless they would shout lustily for a considerable period, particularly if they thought organized obstruction would provide campaign literature.

On the other hand, it is pointed out that under P.R. or the single transferable vote the unparalleled disparities in rural ridings could be made to disappear and county boundaries not be particularly disturbed. Those who have been giving the problem some study claim that a plan advocated by Liberals in Britain is applicable to rural Ontario. It is also said that this plan would meet with fewer local objections than if townships or villages or towns were rudely transferred from one riding to another.

Dufferin and the Greys.

Let us take Dufferin county, for example, and work out a concrete case along the lines now being talked of in some quarters. Dufferin, represented by one member, has a population of 15,415, which is away down the scale when compared with other rural ridings of 27,000 or 28,000. With a representation unit of around 16,000 Dufferin could not hope to retain one