

The OBSERVER IN QUEEN'S PARK



For several hours yesterday the obstruction in the Legislature entered the stage of dreary, monotonous talk. All afternoon and early evening Major Alex. Lewis held forth for the Conservatives, evidently trying to make a record for long-distance speaking. Few interruptions were heard, the U.F.O. members having learned that in filibusters interruptions and questions help those trying to block legislation. Again the Government followers were working in relays, guarding against any opportunity for a snap division. So far the result cannot be foretold, but the air is beginning to clear just a little. Two matters contributed to the general interest yesterday:

- (1) The increasing irritability evidenced by the Government.
- (2) The ardent desire on the part of the Conservatives not to be blamed for the filibuster.

An Unsteady Effect.

It would be a thick-skinned Ministry indeed which could avoid a show of nerves after the events of the past week. The Drury Cabinet members have ever taken their duties seriously, and it was no surprise yesterday to see them jumpy and curt. Right at the beginning of proceedings a flare-up occurred between the Premier and Mr. Ferguson, the language of which was not strictly in accordance with the ideas of Courtesy Week. Several members had asked when bills in which they are interested would be called, only to hear the Premier reply that the Government thought redistribution should have precedence. In this connection he also used the word "emergency." Naturally, the members protested, among them being Mr. W. H. Caselman, who has a promise from the Minister of Education that the clauses of the Adolescent School Attendance Act will not be pressed. However, Hon. Mr. Ferguson thought it his duty to remind the Premier that private members had rights and privileges. Both the Premier and Mr. Ferguson were talking at once, showing that filibusters have an unsteady effect on able-bodied men.

The Conservative Leader took advantage of the opportunity to tell the House how his party was not responsible for the obstruction. He again went over the matter he is so anxious to get before the public: that redistribution should have been brought down earlier; that it should have been mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, and that the Government was trying to force something through the House at the last moment. There is no doubt that Mr. Ferguson sees the danger that obstruction may place his party in a bad light in the eyes of the electors. He never misses the chance of trying to shift that blame onto the shoulders of the Druryites, to all of which the Premier muttered, "Rot." On the other hand, Mr. Drury seems to feel well satisfied that the public will understand quite fully where the responsibility for the present farcical proceedings is to rest. He evidently thinks the voters are quite capable of judging for themselves in such matters, and he is certain in his own mind the verdict will be against Mr. Ferguson. The Premier took occasion to characterize the debate as the "tyranny of talk," and that things had come to such a pass as to send the Government to the country early.

Did Col. Currie Lead?

It is just a matter of doubt whether Mr. Ferguson himself actually favored obstruction. Many of those who have been watching proceedings carefully wonder if Col. J.

A. Currie did not grab more than his share of leadership and swing a ginger group in behind him to start on the rampage of a filibuster. Just now this has not got beyond the suspicion stage, but the fact is Mr. Ferguson does not want to take the blame for something his followers are doing.

Major Lewis' effort yesterday was his second speech against proportional representation, this latest being to the amendment introduced early Tuesday morning. However, the Major did labor the House with some new argument. For instance, he read several thousand words from an encyclopaedia on the history of representative government. Of course, objections were taken to such elocution, but the Speaker ruled the matter was relevant, and the reading continued. Hon. Mr. Raney gave vent to almost audible disgust at the ruling. Not content with reading the choice, concise language of the encyclopaedia, Major Lewis frequently removed his glasses and gave the House the benefit of his own interpretations. When he had concluded, after four hours' talk, Mr. Raney asked him what side he was on, for P.R. or against P.R.

Gather All Material.

The Conservatives have taken everything out of the Parliamentary Library that refers to any system of representation. If they read it all they may consume weeks of talk, but if they found anything favorable to P.R. they have carefully refrained from using it. In this connection it may be stated that for every word against P. R. perhaps a score have been written favorable to the system, because it has always been the object of an active propaganda.

On Monday H. P. Hill returned to the Conservative benches, after a few weeks' absence on account of flu. Mr. Hill, who represents West Ottawa, is a firm believer in P. R. and was Chairman of the special House committee which filed a majority report favoring a try-out of the idea. He has not changed his mind, and yesterday he almost scared the Premier by telling him he would like to make a six-hour speech extolling P. R. virtues. And this from a Conservative seat. Mr. Hill will not speak to this Redistribution Bill, but intends putting his effort behind a special bill dealing with P. R. if it ever comes up again.

Conservatives, too, are complaining about a document the Government had distributed to members giving what are claimed to be the exact 1921 census figures for each riding and each municipality. They allege they have discovered several serious errors already, by which some municipalities have been left out of the totals entirely.

Leader Hay to Speak.

Meanwhile the Liberals are saying very little. The Liberal attitude is that there should be a redistribution, with sane application of P. R. and the single transferable vote, but they do blame the Government for delay and unpreparedness. Leader Hay will likely make a short speech defining his party's position. Now that an amendment has been introduced, it is said that the Premier, too, wants to speak when he can rid himself of harsh thoughts he has treasured up against obstructionists.

Last evening in the House Hon. Manning Doherty had a lengthy confidential chat with Hon. Mr. Ferguson. It was an edifying spectacle, the Minister evidently arguing like a high-pressure salesman, and the Conservative Leader drawing his hat down closer over his

eyes as the talk proceeded. It did not look as though Hon. Manning had sold his proposition, whatever it was.

More Election Talk.

Out in the lobbies men talk constantly of election prospects. Local party leaders are constantly coming and going from little consultations with members. Would-be candidates are airing their ambitions and boasting of their chances. Many of them have it all figured out, but, unfortunately, figures in a pocket-book do not count like marked ballots. Then, too, some saw-off agitators are hovering around. They say the U.F.O. candidate is a Liberal or a Conservative, so why oppose him—and all that line of talk. It must be stated that the saw-off propagandists are meeting with little encouragement. This election is a fighting election, and the two old parties are not in any mood to make arrangements. Early next week the Liberals promise to have 20 candidates in the field and fighting, with the remainder coming forward rapidly.