

GREGORY'S HYDRO PROBE MAY BE GIVEN VACATION UNTIL AFTER ELECTION

Solidarity of Opposition to Continuance of Inquisitorial Procedure While Campaign Is Being Waged Moves Premier to Promise Consultation With Chief Commissioner to See What May Be Done

TO BE NO REPORTS MADE IN MEANTIME

Confronted with an apparent unanimity of opinion among Opposition members that the Gregory Commission should not continue its public hearings during the heat of an election campaign, Premier Drury undertook in the Legislature last night to take up with Chairman W. D. Gregory the possibility and economic advisability of abandoning all but technical research until after the election. In addition, the Premier definitely promised that no report would be received from the commission between dissolution and the election.

Discussion upon the ethics of continuing public hearings of the commission during the campaign was precipitated in the House last night by a want-of-confidence motion moved by H. H. Dewart, K.C., Liberal member for Southwest Toronto, as an amendment to a motion to go into supply, and seconded by G. G. Halcrow, Independent Labor member for Hamilton. After the Premier's undertakings in respect to the future course of the commission, however, Mr. Dewart withdrew his motion, which read:

Mr. Dewart's Motion.

"This Legislature records its strong disapproval of the present Government's failure to accept Ministerial responsibility by delegating its powers and authority to unnecessary commissions to deal with matters that should have been the subject of Governmental action, and particularly the declaration of the Premier of Ontario that he proposes to allow the Hydro-electric Inquiry Commission, headed by Walter D. Gregory, K.C., appointed on the 13th day of April, 1922, to continue to sit and report under its delegated authority after the Premier had decided to appeal to the country, and after the dissolution of the present Legislature at its last session before a general election, at a time when the Legislature has no control of or power of protest against its conduct or findings and during the progress of a general election."

In speaking to his motion, the member for Southwest Toronto hit out in characteristic two-fisted style, declaring that the Legislature ought to state clearly that when the Government is dissolved the Gregory Commission, the creature of the Government, should be dissolved, and, "in ordinary decency and fairness, should not be allowed to continue to manufacture political capital for my honorable friend, the Premier of this Province, and his colleagues. . . . Is it fair, is it honest, is it decent politics, that this Gregory Commission should continue to sit and grind out political ammunition for my honorable friends across the House?"

W. H. Price, Conservative member for Parkdale, declared that there was no necessity for permitting the commission to proceed with its in-

vestigation during the election, inasmuch as "the next Government of this Province will not need to be advised by commissions like the Gregory Commission." Even, he said, if the Government was incapable to such an extent that it had to have the commission, it would be unnecessary and "unseemly" to have the commission going on gathering evidence during election.

Propaganda Charged.

If the Government deemed investigation necessary, Mr. Price said, it should have gone about it in a way that would have commanded the respect of the people, instead of having a commission "going for months and months, and prepared to go for months more, without any return to the House or to the people just for the purpose of political

Attorney-General—Would the honorable member call the report on the Nipigon project political propaganda."

Mr. Price—That report could have been ascertained by the Government by sending up a competent engineer without getting a permanent commission and everyone before the commission.

Mr. Price said that if the Premier thought there was anything in particular that needed investigating he ought to come out and say so.

Premier Drury reiterated arguments made previously as to the justification for the appointment of the Gregory Commission, pointing to excess of estimates and a general situation, he said, which left the Government "no other course in the world" but to investigate.

Two things the Government desired to know, the Premier said: "Whether we can rely on the estimates that are given by Hydro engineers, which must be a guide for the Government. We must not have estimates being exceeded two and three times their original figure. That would mean the death of public ownership. Then we must know whether the methods employed in construction of the Chippawa project and the Nipigon were the best.

"Whether in other words, the Hydro enterprise, the Hydro Commission, is fitted to function as a builder of this enterprise or whether it would be better to adopt the method of letting them by contract, and having them built by others. In other words, whether we have an efficient estimating machine in the Hydro organization."

After emphasizing the importance of the work remaining to be done, the Premier explained, in answer to a question, that the work constituted the preparation of the main report, which would be of immense value.

Commission May Continue Work.

"Under these circumstances," he said, "and because the work is progressing, and cannot be dropped, I do not intend, with my will, to ask the commission to cease its labors. I am prepared, however, to fight fair, and I will make this concession: I won't undertake to stop the commission in its work, but I will undertake after the House dissolves and appeal is made I will see that they do not make any report until the election is over."

The Premier withstood the appeals of Mr. Dewart at this point to have the commission cease holding public sittings, which, he said, would tend to the efficiency of the investigation, and would be wasteful, inasmuch as the organization would have to be kept up.

Hon. G. H. Ferguson added his voice to the appeal for a cessation of "political propaganda" from the commission, declaring it would be an unheard-of thing to permit it to proceed with public sittings during the election. If any good at all was to come from the commission's activities, it could not come if the commission were to take evidence when prejudices and political feeling on all public questions will

run abnormally high.

Has Faith in Hydro.

F. Wellington Hay, Liberal Leader, thought some parties were attempting to make political capital out of Hydro. "So far as we are concerned," he said, "we have absolute faith in the Hydro, and no matter how many parties attempt to make political capital out of it, we believe that Hydro is going on, and Hydro is going to be a success, and Hydro is a success."

Nobody had ever anticipated, he said, that the Gregory Commission would take as long as it has taken in its inquiries; much less that its activities would continue on into the election. He agreed entirely with the Conservative Leader, he said, that "public hearings ought not to take place during the next 60 days, and that no report should come in."

In so far as estimates were concerned, the Liberal Leader declared, the Minister of Agriculture, in building a little dairy school at Guelph had doubled or trebled the estimate that had been submitted.

Appeals for Fair Play.

Whoever might have attempted to make political capital out of Hydro, Mr. Hay said, the Liberal party certainly did not. "But," he added, "in all fairness, we appeal to the Prime Minister and his Government and ask him that there shall be no opportunity given to any party in this Province, to any people who are opposed to or are in favor of Hydro, to make political capital out of public hearings of this kind during the heat of battle."

Premier Drury thought the Government did not cease to function after dissolution, as Opposition members had argued. As for Mr. Hay, he said, he felt himself constrained to vote for him as the next Premier, because, he said, he was going to carry on public enterprise and reduce capital expenditure, to which the Liberal Leader gave a hearty "Hear, hear."

As regards the continuation of Gregory Commission hearings, he said: "There may be hearings that ought to be held, but I will take it up with the Chairman and see, at least, that no unnecessary hearings are held."

Will Go No Farther.

In response to Mr. Ferguson's interrogation, the Premier, however, declined to undertake to suspend commission activities after prorogation, rather than dissolution, because, he said, something might transpire—such as blockade of supply by the Conservatives—that would throw the election over until the fall. The Government, he declared, intended to go to the country in June. "But there is no telling what my honorable friends will do, and, as they very well know, they have the major say as to whether there is to be a June election—and an election in July, when many people are away and when the farming people are busy, is out of the question."

Repeated appeals from the Conservative Leader failed to move the Premier from his position, and his concluding undertaking was: "I will undertake that between the date of dissolution and election there shall be no reports made, and I will undertake to speak to the Chairman of the commission and see if during that time it is possible to avoid public hearings that would be anything but technical."

J. W. Curry, K.C., agreed with both party Leaders that there should not be a continuation of public hearings of the Gregory Commission during the campaign.

G. G. Halcrow concluded the debate by urging a cessation of the commission's sittings during the campaign.

Mr. Dewart said he accepted the Premier's undertakings and withdrew his motion, although the Premier had previously expressed a desire that it should be put. In response to a question the Premier said that, while it was his hope that the House would rise this week, the longest it could go and hold a June election was the middle of next week. The House then went into supply.