

Friday, March 7<sup>th</sup>

# PROPOSED O.T.A. VOTE IS "A BLANK CHEQUE" FOR PRIME MINISTER

## Leaves Everything to Government, and Liberal Leader Says There Are 36 Alleys Up Which Cabinet Can Go

### MR. DOHERTY MOVES SIX MONTHS' HOIST

### Raney Charges Ferguson With Being "Friend of Wets" — Debate Rages All Day, With Liberals and U.F.O. United

For seven solid hours yesterday the Legislature debated the second reading of the Government's enabling O.T.A. referendum measure. At midnight the Government gave up the effort to secure second reading, and Premier Ferguson granted an adjournment of the discussion until Tuesday next.

Although the debate was on the issue of whether the Government should receive wide-open powers to hold a plebiscite or referendum, members discussed at length the merits of the Ontario Temperance Act with all the vigor and vehemence which has characterized the subject since its introduction by the Hearst Government in 1916. Except in two or three cases, members endorsed the act, but Conservative members denounced its administration under former Attorney-General Raney.

#### Moves Six Months' Hoist.

Early in the night session Hon. Manning Doherty moved the six months' hoist for the measure, and was supported by Progressive contributors to the debate. Liberal members, however, showed no disposition to support the motion, maintaining a solid formation behind their Leader in his expression of opinion that he was prepared to trust the people, but that the Government should not arrogate to itself the wide-open power to take the vote when, and under what conditions, it saw fit. On this ground Liberal speakers generally opposed the bill, but not the principle of a referendum.

#### Raney in Hot Water.

Former Attorney-General Raney was continually in hot water during a four-hour speech, in which he addressed barbed sarcasm in the direction of Premier Ferguson, whom he termed "a friend of the wets." Conservative members, however, had a retort for every thrust of the former Attorney-General, and when Mr. Raney charged Mr. Ferguson with being "the friend of the boot-leggers" he was told that the former Attorney-General had created them.

There was not a little acrimony during Mr. Raney's lengthy and vigorous address, notably when the former Attorney-General twitted the "wet" element in the Conservative party for its applause of some of the Premier's platform statements. E. C. Graves, Conservative member for St. Catharines, interrupted to say that he didn't desire to be classi-

fied as a "wet" because he did not have Mr. Raney's viewpoint, and Mr. Raney asked how he had classified him.

"I don't want you to classify me at all," tartly responded the member.

#### Mr. Nickle's Exposition.

In opening the debate on second reading of his Ontario Temperance Act amendment, Attorney-General Nickle reviewed the attitude of the Conservative party in days gone by toward temperance, and summarized the events leading up to the prohibition law of 1916, which remained on the statute books.

"Time passed, and possibly conditions changed," Mr. Nickle stated, after noting the decision in the 1919 referendum. "Possibly what the people thought at one time they do not think today, and the question of whether or not the Ontario Temperance Act is the best possible legislation that this Province shall have is still a matter of keen public interest."

Referring to the divergence of opinion in relation to the O.T.A. during the last election, the Attorney-General said that there were those who held that the O.T.A. should not be passed in review at the present time, but that, inasmuch as the people had spoken, they should be considered to have spoken for a protracted period, if not for a very long time.

"But I think," he said, "it is sound public policy to state that temperance, no more than tariff, or the administration of our railroads, or the problems of immigration, can be considered as settled by no one generation or no one expression of public thought. Democracy demands, if it is to continue, that when public opinion is expressed from time to time it shall be respected, and the problem that faces Governments, and will continue to face Governments, is how best to secure an interpretation of the people's desires."

The Conservative Government, he said, had been consistent in its pledges to the people that it would give consideration to public sentiment, and in office the Government stood true to the pledges it had given the people.

#### Faced With a Condition.

While the Attorney-General declared himself as entirely sympathetic to the principle of responsible government, he found himself confronted today with a condition rather than a theory, inasmuch as the people had placed the statute on the books by referendum, and the Premier had pledged the submission of the issue when public sentiment warranted it.

"The bill before the House," he said, "is simply an enabling piece of legislation. Without that bill becoming an act the present Government is not in a position to take the opinion of the people, and, therefore, the Government asks this House, its followers behind it, and those who may sit opposite, to give the Government the privilege it requests, when the sentiment of the people demands it, of asking their opinion at such a time and in such a way as the Government may think best."

"Referring to the principles of government to which I directed your attention, permit me to say that I believe the Government should accept the responsibility of preparing questions.

#### Are the People Behind It?

"The problem is not a question of undue indulgence as against temperance, drunkenness as against prohibition. The problem is: Are the people still behind the O.T.A.?"

Mr. McCausland—No.

Mr. Nickle—The honorable member speaks possibly from a full knowledge of the subject, which is within our gift.

"Do the people want the Ontario Temperance Act enforced? If so it must be, and should be, enforced while it is on the statute books. This is the attitude of the Government. The wishes of the people must fairly and fearlessly be made effective.

"Another question is when, if at all, this plebiscite shall be taken. The Government again asks its followers and the members of this House to leave that matter to the discretion of the Government, for the reason that I have emphasized: that this Government is prepared to accept the responsibility of dealing justly between all groups in the community, and if, in endeavoring to attain that high ambition, we fall, we ask, when the next general election comes, that we may be deprived of that rare gift that the people gave us only a few months ago of making our will felt in the government of this Province."

#### Ferguson Opposes Delay.

Following the presentation of the bill by Attorney-General Nickle, Hon. Manning Doherty, Progressive Leader, arose and requested that, in view of the fact that members had not had opportunity to consider the bill, and in view of the light thrown upon it by the Attorney-General, the discussion be adjourned. Premier Ferguson, however, declined the suggestion, stating that the bill had been printed and been before the members for many days.

#### Liberal Leader Speaks.

W. E. N. Sinclair, K.C., Liberal Leader, said that, while it had been very interesting to listen to a resume of temperance history, the main issue was the bill before the House and the reasons for its submission in the form in which it appeared.

"At the end of my honorable friend's address," he said, "he stated that the Government wishes to have in its hands everything connected with the vote, and does not wish to take into its confidence the elected representatives in this Legislature, and indicates, if a vote comes, that

the majority will be 47, just as took place in the House last evening.

"This bill has something of the appearance of the fulfilment of the prophecy which was reported in the press as having been made by the Premier a year or two ago—that, when the proper time came for this matter to be brought up before the public, something would be produced which would please everybody. At first blush one might think that within the four corners of this act there is something which might please everyone.

#### The Fergusonian Era.

"It looks to be characteristic of what I might term the Fergusonian era of Provincial legislation, because the Government is retaining to itself all the powers and authority which it possibly can. The private members in the Conservative ranks feel that they have some status left. Surely they feel that they have some judgment within themselves with which they can tackle legislation, and I do sympathize with them from the bottom of my heart if they are to be so restrained throughout the whole of these four years."

Protesting against the unlimited powers conferred by the measure, the Liberal Leader proceeded: "The policy of the Liberal party always has been to trust the people, and it would not be Liberal policy if permission was withheld from the people to express their opinion on this or any other great question. But when this comes before us in the shape it now does the Liberals in this House must say that this Government is not acting as a Government should act, and is not taking the Legislature into its confidence as a Government should."

"The Government is the one that should say whether there is to be a vote or not, because it is entrusted with the carrying on of the affairs of the people. The Government should set the date, and, as