

Friday, Mar. 7th

Asks Pointed Question.

The Premier, said Mr. Raney, had made no announcement prior to the coming into power of his Government of an intention to hold a referendum, but had announced that any action would be dictated by a manifest desire of the people, to refuse whom would be autocratic. "I want now to ask the Premier if he thinks there has yet been a sufficiently manifested desire on the part of the people for a change," Mr. Raney continued. "I would like him to answer me now."

Called on by the Speaker, Premier Ferguson gave the answer that the Government would decide when the time for decision came.

"That," said Mr. Raney, "is probably what you have told your followers. The Prime Minister has, I have no doubt, told his supporters that there may never be a referendum under this bill, that there will not be a referendum unless there is a 'sufficiently manifested desire for a change.' But, I tell them now that if this bill passes there will be a referendum before the snow flies again, and that that matter has been settled—the riddle is already read. If not, why this bill at all? Why not wait until there is a sufficiently manifested desire for a change, as has always been done in the past in the cases of liquor referenda?"

"The answer is simple. Ministers and members on the opposite side of the House promised the liquor trade a referendum—not conditional upon a sufficiently manifested desire for a change, but conditional on the election of a Conservative Government, and the Conservative Government is here and the liquor trade won't wait.

"Then there comes from supporters of the Government the suggestion of a return to local option and the submission of that question to the electors than which nothing that could be suggested would be more satisfactory to the liquor trade. And this Legislature is asked, by this bill, to authorize this Government to legislate on all these subjects. It is the negation of responsible government. It is government by Order-in-Council. If the Conservative members of the House lend themselves to it they will be false to the electors who sent them here to make the laws of the Province, not to delegate other men to make the laws."

Premier Protests Again.

Here again the Premier took exception to the remarks of the speaker. "I am sure," he said, "that the honorable member does not desire to make a statement not in accordance with the facts. His statements which he has just made are entirely untrue."

"I repeat," replied Mr. Raney, "that this Government is asking power to legislate by Order-in-Council. (Cries of 'No! No!') How, then, are you going to get these questions across? And then there is, of course, the financial side. The Provincial Treasurer tells us there is going to be a deficit of \$5,000,000 next year. Where is the money to come from? The Provincial Treasurer tells us there are to be no new taxes. Other members on that side of the House let the cat out of the bag. The Budget is to be balanced by revenue from the liquor traffic. That is to be the bait to lure the people of Ontario back to the fleshpots of Egypt."

"The speaker must know that he is absolutely incorrect," interpolated the Premier. "I think he should confine himself to reasonable accuracy." "I omitted to say the Government was going to use this bill as a bait," replied Mr. Raney.

"Mr. Speaker, I denounce this bill, in the first place, as a betrayal of the electors, and especially the temperance Conservatives of Ontario, by the Prime Minister, and as a betrayal of this Legislature, and particularly of the Conservative party, to the liquor interests, which, if this bill is passed, will dictate the matters that are reserved by the bill for the determination of the Government.

"And, in the second place, I denounce this bill as an attempt by the Prime Minister to usurp the powers and functions of this Legislature. If there is to be a referendum, it ought to be a real referendum. The proposed amendments to the O. T. A. ought to be drafted and brought before this Legislature for approval and then submitted to the people.

Moreover, there ought to be only one referendum, not referenda from time to time at the dictation of the liquor trade, and the Legislature should fix, approximately at least, the date of the submission of the questions. As it is, the Legislature is asked to give a Government headed by a Prime Minister, who is hostile to the Ontario Temperance Act, as I have shown by his utterances, an irrevocable power of attorney to do with the act what he pleases.

"If the Legislature passes this bill, it will vote with its eyes shut, but with the eyes of the liquor trade and the Moderation League wide open.

"The present bill runs counter to all precedents. I appeal to the temperance men in the Government's following to stand by the Ontario Temperance Act of Sir William Hearst and to demand of this Government that this bill be withdrawn and that no other bill be introduced in its place until the Government can show to them a sufficiently manifested demand for a change in the law; and when that time comes, if ever it does, I appeal to them to insist that the Government bring down

a bill by the terms of which both the Legislature and the electors will be taken into the confidence of the Government."

Mr. McKeown Speaks.

Charles McKeown, Conservative member for Dufferin, declared that, although a dry himself, the former Attorney-General could not, and "never will," speak for the temperance Conservatives whom he represented. Mr. Raney's eloquence, he said, had been directed toward making the people believe that the Conservative party was today catering to the liquor element, whereas Mr. McKeown took no second place to any person in the House or Province on the liquor question.

Defending the temperance record of the Conservative party, of which he said he was extremely proud, he asked when legislation had ever followed referenda put to the people by Liberal Governments. The Conservative party had furthered the temperance cause by sane legislation which culminated in the act of 1916. When he entered the Legislature, he said, he was opposed to the three-fifths clause, but the late Sir James Whitney and the late Hon. W. J. Hanna had convinced him of the necessity for a substantial majority of public opinion in the enforcement of such legislation.

"When we start to make a man moral by act of Parliament, we should have at least a good body of opinion behind us, and if a good majority are not prepared to stand by the O.T.A., I will say let us get back to where we belong, and the late Attorney-General and I have got to educate them again and bring them up to our standard," he said.

Hon. Manning Doherty, Progressive Leader, said he was sadly disappointed in Attorney-General Nickle's failure to give any idea of the policy of the Government in regard to the referendum or plebiscite.

Moves Six-Months Hoist.

"If the Government feels," he said, "that there is sufficient demand from the people for a vote, I have no objection. I am prepared at all times to trust the people. If the people are informed, it is better that they should have their will, even if they prove wrong. But I would have liked to have seen the Government bring in a bill which set forth the questions which are to come upon the ballots on the day of polling. The crux is the wording of the ballot. I say that the ballot can be worded to get any result that may be desired. Because of the fact that the bill does not meet these requirements, I must oppose it, and I move, seconded by Hon. Mr. Raney, that this bill be not now read a second time, but that it be read a second time six months hence."

F. W. Wilson, Conservative member for Windsor, held that the Government had a clear mandate in the elections to place a referendum on the issue of the O. T. A. before the people. He declared himself to be, without quibbling against the Ontario Temperance Act's "vicious features."

Mr. Raney, he told the House, was not to be taken too seriously on the issue, because he had been discredited last summer, and for a protracted period had acted in a paid capacity

to uphold the local option laws. Consequently, Mr. Wilson said, he probably had a biased viewpoint, coupled with an utter lack of a sense of humor. (Government applause.)

Good Word for Act.

H. Fisher, K.C., Ottawa, did not think the act was perfect. "I am willing to admit," he said, "that there are some people who can drink liquor and come to no harm, and I'd like to have it so that they could get it. In some respects I don't like the act. But, after observing its operation, I can come to no other conclusion than that it is an infinitely better law than we have ever had and a far better law than rules in any other place."

By the bill which was under discussion the Government had decided that it would not take the views of the members of the House, but would leave decision entirely with the Cabinet, which meant, effectively, entirely with Premier Ferguson. The people, he declared, should understand what an arrogant, insolent, arbitrary measure it was that was being thrust on the House. "Someone asked Premier Ferguson when the vote would be taken," he continued. "The Premier remains as mum as an oyster."

"You're getting curious," interjected the Premier.

J. F. B. Belford (Northumberland

Last) pointed out that there were those whose temperance views were not blinded by personal prejudice who did not oppose a plebiscite. The measure before the House was simply a bill to enable the Premier to carry out a solemn promise made to the electorate before the last election.

J. W. Widdifield, Ontario West, declared himself an out-and-out supporter of the O.T.A. He criticized the Premier and his Cabinet for taking upon themselves the responsibility they sought of framing the plebiscite questions. He wished that the question had not been submitted as a Government measure.

What's the Rush?

D. J. Taylor (Progressive, North Grey) asked why there should be such a rush to obtain such powers under the bill: If the Premier was surmising the future sentiment, he was not fully taking temperance members of his party into his confidence. The value of the vote would depend on the form of ballot. All members of the House should have the opportunity of a voice in its framing.

E. P. Tellier (Lib., Essex North) said he was opposed to the bill because it was vague and did not define anything.

A. C. Garden (Con., Hamilton West) claimed the temperance issue had defeated three Governments. If prohibition prohibited, he would stand for it. The change to total prohibition was too great, and a better Province would arise under a wise, moderate beer law.

J. J. Lethbridge (Prog., East Middlesex) registered his opposition on the ground that the bill was too "wide open."

T. A. Thompson (Lanark, North) pointed out that the bill was simply carrying out promises made on every Conservative platform during the recent election.

At midnight the House adjourned.