

Wednesday, March 16th

Amendment Is Offered To Score Government For Delegating Powers

Raney to Divide House on Liquor Bill — Premier Moves Second Reading and Says Permit-Holders Will Be Able to Order by Mail

LIBERAL LEADER DEFINES POSITION

Sinclair Is Not Without Misgivings as to Result of December Vote—Pro- gressive Leader Criticizes Wide Authority Given to Control Board

Debate on second reading of Ontario's new Liquor Control Act began in the Legislature yesterday, with Premier Ferguson speaking to his motion, and with Liberal Leader William E. N. Sinclair and Hon. W. E. Raney, Progressive Leader, trailing in the order named. The debate will go on continuously.

This afternoon Karl K. Homuth, former Independent-Labor member for South Waterloo, and recently "turned Tory," will resume the discussion on this important reading.

To Order by Mail.

Features of yesterday's debate—before crowded galleries and a crowded Chamber—were the Prime Minister's reiteration of many of his pre-election statements with respect to the "rising generation" of Ontario and his intimation that permit-holders will be able to order liquor by mail; an amendment to the motion, moved by Mr. Raney during the course of a slashing attack on what he termed "an act which, beyond the shadow of a doubt, will encourage and promote drunkenness in Ontario"; and the unexpected brevity of Mr. Sinclair's comment, and his attitude of not accepting the will of the people, as expressed on Dec. 1, "without some misgivings for the future."

Amendment Offered.

Mr. Raney's amendment, which was seconded by Hon. Harry C. Nixon, Progressive member for Brant, was based on his contention that many of the powers of office entrusted to the new Liquor Control Commission were too sweeping and should have been fixed by the Legislature. In effect, it read as follows: "This House is of the opinion that all the substantive provisions of the proposed act to be known as the Liquor Control Act ought to be included in the statute, and that the authority to be given by the act to the Liquor Control Board of Ontario to make regulations ought to be confined to matters of administration, and ought not to empower the board to enact provisions by way of substantive additions to the law."

Cites Wide Powers.

The Liquor Board, he told the House, had been given authority to make laws for the Province on "such important matters" as the fixing of the hours of sale by liquor stores; the deciding of the alcoholic content of beer; the deciding of quantities that may be purchased by individuals; the granting of special permits for banquets, picnics, yachts, dining cars, and to anything or anybody or anywhere else; advertising by the brewers and distillers and liquor stores, and the division of fines between the Province and the municipalities.

Mr. Raney could not see why the Government proposed to fix the salaries of members of the Control Board, when the Legislature fixed the salaries of the Hydro Commission, the salaries of members of the Workmen's Compensation Board and the Ontario Railway and Municipal Board, and only recently had rearranged the salaries of the T. & N.O. Commissioners.

Easy Task, Says Premier.

"In rising to move second reading of this bill," said Mr. Ferguson, "I find my task a very easy one this afternoon, and for that reason my observations will be very brief."

He referred to his remarks, sketching the legislation, when the bill was introduced. "Now," he went on, "I take the occasion to further emphasize some of the outstanding features of this legislation, and portions that I think should appeal directly to the people of the Province who have the well-being of the Province at heart."

After a long period of trial of the O.T.A., said he, with changes of public sentiment, "the people of the Province on Dec. 1 last, in a very emphatic way, said they desired to try some method of handling the liquor problem other than prohibition." The people, he emphasized, had given the Government a mandate to control the liquor traffic rather than enforce "prohibitive or coercive methods of suppression."

Control, Not Suppression.

"This legislation," he went on, "is designed, not to suppress the liquor traffic entirely, but to control it so that as the years go by and as we carry on an educational campaign we will not only eliminate the abuses and excesses but change the attitude of the people toward the use of alcoholic beverages altogether."

Wherever prohibition had been adopted, he went on, it had been followed by a revulsion of sentiment. He referred to Government control in other Provinces, and added: "So our Province is not unique."

"This bill," he said, "is nothing new. Those who followed the discussion on the public platform by members of this Government were able fairly well to forecast this legislation. There is nothing novel in the bill except some details that will be discussed in committee. Nor do I say that this bill is entirely perfect. This Government has never claimed, and I hope it will never claim, that it has a monopoly of the wisdom of the Province of Ontario or the Dominion of Canada. Nor has this Government claimed—even though we had the right to—a monopoly of the wisdom in this Legislature."

"You've come very near it," interjected Liberal Leader Sinclair.

"You must keep in mind the temptation is very great," retorted the Premier.

"I've seen in some places," he went on, "the view expressed that those who still believe in prohibition are made to abandon their views and principles. Nothing is farther from the truth. We have tried to bring about prohibition in one way, and it has failed lamentably. It has failed after a fair trial, under, not one, but four Administrations; after a trial under law officers and officials who were entirely in sympathy with the principles of prohibition."

Commission to Control.

"Now, what is being done to control? We provide that no one can sell intoxicants without the permission of the Commission. No one shall have or sell intoxicants unless the Commission knows about it, and gives permission. No one can buy without permission of the board. So far as it is humanly possible, we are endeavoring to keep in the hands of the Commission the entire transaction, sale and purchase of liquor. We have entirely eliminated the feature of private gain in liquor transactions."

"Any one buying liquor without the permission of the board is liable to a severe penalty. Any one selling

liquor without the permission of the board is liable to a more severe penalty—going to jail for the first offense. For we are determined to deal ruthlessly with people who do not obey this law. They will not be entitled to any sympathy for their private views on the liquor problem."

Right to Cancel Permits.

Mr. Ferguson dwelt at considerable length on the wide powers vested in the Control Commission. He laid great stress on the fact that the Commission had the right to cancel, at its own discretion, any one's right to sell liquor, and to suspend or cancel any one's permit.

"In other words," said he, "we propose that people shall get liquor only as long as they behave themselves, and do not prove nuisances to themselves, their families, or to the general public."

The Commission, he said, intended to control sale, purchase, and consumption of liquor—in short, to establish a monopoly in the handling of liquor in Ontario, and not permit any one else to do it.

For years, said Mr. Ferguson, the cry had been: "Take the liquor question out of politics—and out of the hands of the Government, where it will not be subject to any undue influence." That, he contended, had now been done; and the Commission, to whose hands it had been entrusted, was supreme in authority, and its decisions could not be made subject to review by any court in the country, or any Government.

Criticizes Critics.

And yet, he said, there were people who now claimed that the country was going "to have government by Commission." This sort of argument, he said, was typical of people who were "political prohibitionists," and who had a "motive" in opposing the Government's action. There were some people, he said, who would never be satisfied, no matter what was done.

"I may say frankly," he added, "that this Government does not propose to consider views of that kind of people at all. If a person cannot get up and offer some constructive criticism his argument isn't worth very much. And I don't propose to extend any sympathy or consideration to a man of that type."

The Prime Minister said that the act not only provided that localities that were "dry" in 1916, prior to the advent of the O.T.A., might appeal for a vote for a Government shop, but that municipalities which were "wet" could likewise invoke a vote with the hope of abolishing the store. He emphasized the fact that because a "dry" locality voted for a store it did not necessarily follow that the Commission would establish the store.