

Friday - February 8th.

SLASHING CRITICISM OF ALL TORY FOES; PREMIER IS DEFIANT

Ferguson Launches Out Against All Opposition Attacks

MAKES ANNOUNCEMENTS

Further Aid for Research Fund—Prisoner-Probation Revision

From Premier G. Howard Ferguson the Ontario Legislature yesterday heard just as good an election campaign speech as any he may deliver later this year—in 1930, or whenever the next Provincial appeal to the country is launched.

In upward of two hours' forceful debate—argument that was cynical, critical, bold, biting, humorous and "hefty" in turn—the Prime Minister covered the whole map of Government achievement and Opposition "weakness"; swung a couple of formidable fists at the Federal Government at Ottawa, and even dragged the United States in by the heels, so to speak, to contrast the "evil conditions" existing there under prohibition with the "law-and-order-creating sentiment" existing here under "the best Liquor Control Act in the whole Dominion."

Aid for Prisoners.

In one respect, in particular, did Mr. Ferguson strike a pre-election promissory note. The Government, he stated, would put an official in the Ontario Reformatory at Guelph whose job would be to study the prisoners and their adaptabilities for trade, so as to aid in their rehabilitation once they were released. The Government would broaden the scope of the Research Foundation by meeting personal contributions to the fund with dollar for dollar.

The Government, next season, would undertake, in connection with his mooted soil survey, projects that would materially benefit the agriculturist.

For the immediate present Mr. Ferguson had nothing to offer, although on several occasions he had the House with breath bated, so close to his fingertips did a big "news" announcement seem to dangle.

Comes Back at Liberals.

The afternoon's debate—an afternoon in which John G. Lethbridge had, despite the timeliness and tenor of his remarks, and his launching of an amendment to the Sinclair amendment, to play second fiddle to the Government head—did not pass without Mr. Ferguson returning, tit for tat, and slap for slap, the criticism directed at him on Tuesday by Liberal Leader Sinclair, and the gentler attack thrust at him yesterday by the Progressive pilot. Mr. Ferguson characterized Mr. Sinclair and his policy as suffering this year from "incipient political paresis"; twitted him for his "usual lack of constructive criticism"; and again went to the mat, vigorously, with him over the twice-told story of the Boston Artillerymen and the wire permit they thought they had, but hadn't.

Of Mr. Lethbridge and his "benevolent old dome," and "agricultural pessimism" that came out of it, the Premier was also deprecative. "Look at the sun," he told the Progressive Leader. "The rising sun—not the setting one." Mr. Lethbridge went after the Gov-

ernment specially for failure to help the farmers in various ways, ending up an attack with his want-of-confidence motion, which in effect, condemns the Government "for its failure to carry out the recommendation of the Agricultural Committee for the appointment of a Co-operative Council for Ontario, and for its failure to give any particular assistance or encouragement toward the formation of co-operative enterprises."

Mr. Ferguson spent practically 20 minutes—if not speaking directly to the amendment—in at least deploring the pessimistic note embodied, stressing what Ontario had done for the farmer; and intimating what it would do—prepared, as he said, even after Ottawa had abolished its grant to the Province, to carry the full load, and to do Ottawa's share in any other capacity in which she might forsake her Provincial obligations.

Aurelien Belanger (Liberal, Russell) adjourned the debate and will continue it next Tuesday.

State of Agriculture.

After brief reiteration of his pleasure at the King's recovery, and expression of congratulations to Hon. Edward A. Dunlop and Hon. Frederick T. Smye on their elevation to the Cabinet, Mr. Lethbridge turned to the question of agriculture, stating that, in spite of the very prosperous year enjoyed by the Province in this respect, "the farmer was not without his troubles."

"One which he was frequently up against," outlined Mr. Lethbridge, "was a fluctuating market—especially in live stock. This was very manifest during the latter part of 1928, when many farmers lost heavily. This is one of the great problems of agriculture. If the farmer was assured of a stable market, with a fair margin of profit on his product and a reasonable dividend on his investment, some of his troubles, at least, would be solved. I trust the Government will take up the suggestion of the honorable member from South Bruce and take over some farm in that or some other county, work it under the supervision of the District Representative, and produce, if they can, 5 per cent. dividend on the investment. This, I believe, would be a very interesting test of the profits made in farming, and might solve the problem of so many leaving the farms and drifting into industrial life.

While realizing, he said, that good roads were a great asset to Ontario, it would be well, he advised, "to slow up a little" on both county and Provincial systems, in view of the present burden of taxation with which the people are saddled.

Increased Grants Urged.

"With the proposed increase in gasoline tax, and the large revenue from auto licenses and drivers' permits, it would seem the right thing," contended Mr. Lethbridge, "to raise the grant to townships to 50 per cent."

Mr. Lethbridge argued warmly that any increased gas tax should be followed with a proportionate decrease in the price of automobile licenses. Personally, he would support a very low price for the license, just sufficient, he stated, to pay for the cost thereof and for registration purposes, and he would collect practically all the revenue necessary for road purposes through the gasoline tax.

Regarding tax burden on rural municipalities, he pointed out that in 1906 the total taxation in Ontario, for all purposes, was a little over six and a quarter million dollars. In 1926—the last year for which official figures are available—the total was upward of \$27,500,000, or more than a 400 per cent. increase. This increased taxation was levied, however, on a population of practically the same number as in 1906.

"Now," said Mr. Lethbridge, "how does this increased rural taxation compare with the earning power of Ontario farms? In 1906 the money value of all field crops in Ontario, as given in an official report issued by the Government, was \$144,000,000. In 1926, from the same official report, the value of all field crops produced was \$257,000,000, approximately an increase of 80 per cent. We have been increasing our taxation to meet our program. It is high time we were reducing our program to meet our taxation."

Public Safety on Highways.

On the question of public safety on highways, the Progressive Leader commended the "safety campaign" that has been conducted during the past year, and then drew the Minister of Highways' attention to "one source of danger on Provincial highways" which, he believed, should be attended to "without delay."

"That," he stressed, "is the removal of all telephone and Hydro poles at least 15 or 20 feet from the travelled road. I understand that the Bell Telephone Company have an agreement with the Province that they can place their poles 17 feet from the centre of the travelled road. This is a dangerous thing."

Mr. Lethbridge defined old-age pensions as probably the most important legislation that would come before the House this session, and one to whose principle the Progressive group was committed. Until the actual bill was introduced by Premier Ferguson, he and his party would reserve judgment, he stated, "prepared to receive it with an open mind, and to support it or reject it as our best judgment dictates."

"I was pleased to hear the honorable member for South Bruce speak his mind so clearly," declared Mr. Lethbridge. "Why Niagara Falls should get their power for \$19 per horsepower and Courtwright have to pay \$95, Alvinston, in Lambton County, \$90, and Brigden \$88, is a question that has been troubling the people of this Province for years, and a question for which they have been seeking a solution."

Says Province Owns Sources.

The Province owned the water powers from which the electrical energy had been developed, stressed the speaker. It had advanced \$130,000,000 in cash. In addition it had guaranteed over \$24,000,000 in debentures issued by the Commission. "That means," he said, "so far as the power development is concerned, the Province has, in effect, been the creator. The question therefore naturally arises: Why should there be this vast difference in prices at the borders of different municipalities throughout Ontario?"

"One solution offered in some quarters is that the Province assume the cost of delivering power to the border of every organized municipality (rural or urban) in the Province at a flat rate, or nearly so, and then let each municipality pay for and control its own distribution within the municipality, under the supervision of the Hydro engineers.

"That there is a grievance in this inequality of rates is readily admitted, and that it reflects very adversely on the smaller urban centres and finally on rural districts is also evident. The solution of the difficulty may be hard to meet owing to the present system of administration, but nothing is properly settled until it is settled right."

Mr. Lethbridge said that the present cost of rural-line building seemed high. The average cost per mile was \$2,331 to the municipality. As far as work of construction was concerned, the rural municipalities, he believed, could build them for about half the cost.

Liquor Control Law.

While there had been no mention of the working out of the Liquor Control Act in the Speech from the Throne, said Mr. Lethbridge, both William Morrison (Conservative, East Hamilton) and Foster G. Moffat (Conservative, South Bruce) had emphasized very strongly the opinion that conditions