

Thursday - March 28th

HIGHER GAS TAX BILL GETS SECOND READING ON STRAIGHT DIVISION

Sinclair Charges "Railroading" and Change in Collection Policy, With Money Being Used to Stave Off Deficit—Premier and Henry Vigorously Deny and Explain

LETHBRIDGE URGES LOWER LICENSES

Hon. George S. Henry's bill to increase the gasoline tax from three to five cents, effective forthwith, got a lusty thumping in the Legislature yesterday from the Opposition groups, and Liberal Leader William E. N. Sinclair forced a 62-28 division of the House before the Minister of Highways was able to pilot the measure past second reading.

Mr. Sinclair not only attacked the principle of the legislation at this reading, but earlier in the afternoon, when the resolution heralding the measure was up for consideration, he took his first "lusty licks" at it. It was his charge that the Government was endeavoring to railroad the bill through in a last-minute drive; that the Government was changing its policy in collection of the tax, and that the same was now to be devoted to "Provincial purposes" rather than road maintenance, as heretofore prescribed, in an effort to stave off a deficit at the end of the next fiscal year.

Progressive Leader Lethbridge agreed with the principle of gas tax, but felt that the Government should not have provided for the two-cent boost without being prepared to follow it with a corresponding reduction in the license plates. It was his appeal that application of the rise should be held off until such time as the cuts in markers could be put in operation.

No Chance to "Load Up."

Both Premier Ferguson and Mr. Henry got into the argument, with the latter, in particular, vigorous in denials of Mr. Sinclair's allegations. He claimed that the Liberal Leader's objection to the bill on a technical point on Monday last was one reason for its late introduction. As a second reason he

cited the Government's fear that earlier introduction—inasmuch as it was always intended to put it in effect at the end of March—would have given the gas stations a chance to "load up" in advance. In that way they might not only escape the two-cent rise in the tax on their advance purposes, but might embrace the tendency to "hook" the purchasing public.

There was no doubt as to the outcome of the vote which Mr. Sinclair precipitated. The division was a straight party affair, with Farquhar Oliver, sole Progressive member in the House, casting in his lot with the Opposition.

When the gas tax bill was called for second reading Mr. Sinclair let loose on the Government a flood of sarcasm. He recalled that the measure had been forecast in the Speech from the Throne and he declared that it was "hard to understand" why there had been "delay" in bringing in the bill and why it came in in the "dying moments of the session." He believed that the Government was "trying to put it through without full discussion and without giving the public full information," and charged the Government with being "derelict in its duties."

In the same vein he pictured the bill "lying in the pigeon-hole" throughout the session, and the Government trying to "shove it through under pressure in eight or ten hours." He spoke of Mr. Henry as planning to "fool the fellows on the other side," and of "taxing the people as I like."

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