

debate was that by Dr. L. J. Simpson (Liberal, Simcoe Centre), who urged that Conservative members, responsible for the Liquor Control Law, should bring all their influence to bear on the Government to adopt measures to reduce spending on liquor by at least one-third of the present amount.

Although the Liberals present voted solidly for the motion, the following were not in the House: Thomas P. Murray (Renfrew South), Norman O. Hipel (Waterloo South), William J. Bragg (Durham), and S. C. Tweed (Waterloo North).

Those taking part in the debate were: Mr. Nixon, Thomas J. Mahony (Conservative, Wentworth South), Dr. George A. McQuibban (Liberal, Wellington Northeast), Wilfrid Heighington (Toronto-St. David), Dr. Simpson, A. E. Honevwell (Conservative, Ottawa North), Mr. Sinclair, Premier Henry, and Mr. Nixon in reply.

**Principle Thrice Affirmed.**

Within the experience of many members present, said Mr. Nixon, the Legislature had affirmed the principle in his motion on three occasions. Never had the principle been repudiated by the House.

"My only reason for introducing the subject at this time is to clear up any uncertainty in the public mind as to the interpretation of the Liberal platform, and whether the statement of former Premier Ferguson on Sept. 20, 1929, at a Conservative banquet in this city, is to be considered binding on the party today, and finally, of course, to put my own attitude and that of this group unalterably on record," he said.

He explained that he had included both the words plebiscite and referendum in his motion because in principle they might be regarded as synonymous. The Progressives favored a referendum, in which the people dealt with a definite project, while a plebiscite merely furnished a guide for the Government. He mentioned the referendum bill of Sir William Hearst when the present Prime Minister was one of the Cabinet. Other Conservative members now in the House also supported that bill.

**By Direct Vote.**

He quoted Sir William on that occasion as saying:

"I am of the opinion, and strongly of the opinion, that this question should be decided by the direct vote of the electors of the Province by means of a referendum. It seems to me a question of this kind, so closely affecting the people, is particularly one in which public opinion should have an opportunity of expressing itself in the ballot-box as freely and as untrammelled as possible."

Again in April, 1920, the House adopted a resolution asking the Dominion Government to take a referendum on the importation of liquor, which was also supported by several present Conservative members.

Mr. Nixon continued:

**Plebiscite Bill of 1924.**

"Then on March 12, 1924, the previous Administration under Hon. G. H. Ferguson passed a plebiscite bill through the House. This is a matter of recent history. Many honorable members present in this House have personal knowledge of this matter. In speaking of this bill Mr. Ferguson said: 'How was the Government to test public opinion? There are only two ways. The first was to consult one's friends, and those who are in touch with public opinion, and the other was to ask the people to express themselves on the matter. We chose what we thought was the more democratic way. There is nothing simpler can be conceived by any man who wants to give the Government credit for honesty of purpose.'

"And I note that on March 12, Major Alex. Lewis, whose seat was one of the Toronto districts, said:

"This method was in keeping with the best traditions of the British Parliamentary practice."

**Not an Attack on Control Act.**

"Now, this resolution, Mr. Speaker, is

not in any way intended to reflect on the Liquor Control Act," Mr. Nixon proceeded. "I am very careful not to say anything that will alienate the great support I am sure it will receive from the honorable members opposite. I hope no one will get up and say it is un-British. We have had such outstanding Conservative leaders in this Province as Sir William Hearst and Hon. G. H. Ferguson not only approving of it but using it.

"Last year, while the House was in session, Mr. Stanley Baldwin, Conservative Leader and ex-Prime Minister of

the British House of Commons, pledged his party, when and if returned to power, to submit a referendum on food taxes or tariffs. The great majority of the Provinces of Canada, in fact all but Quebec, have used it under Liberal, Conservative and Farmer Governments."

Mr. Nixon quoted a speech made Tuesday night by Sir George Foster urging his hearers to press for the privilege of a referendum on prohibition. In conclusion, he declared:

"Those who claim such great popularity for the Liquor Control Act should not fear to submit it to the vote of the people. Those who are opposed to the act are prepared, as always, to trust the people and abide cheerfully by the result. This resolution leaves it entirely with the Government to say when a sufficient public demand for such action is apparent, and should not in any way force action on the Government except in this.

"Should the people of Ontario, in the course of time, express their desire for the continuance of the Liquor Control Act, I will promise you, for the next ten years of my life in this Legislature as a member for Brant, to leave this subject off my agenda for discussion in this House, which, you will admit, will be something gained."

**Cites Mowat Precedent.**

"As a farmer I realize the uselessness of threshing old straw," said Thomas J. Mahony (Conservative, Wentworth South), who followed Mr. Nixon. He stated that the Progressive Leader in referring only to the plebiscites and referendum in recent years had not gone back far enough in the history of the prohibition movement. "Sir Oliver Mowat, a great Liberal statesman, held a plebiscite in 1894, and prohibition carried by a large majority. Sir Oliver did not pass a prohibitory law, however. He passed the buck. He referred the question to the courts to decide whether the Province had the power to pass such a law. And after the question was in the courts for five years Sir Oliver was in the Federal Government. Another plebiscite was held when Sir Wilfrid Laurier was Premier, and although prohibition received a large majority it was not implemented by a prohibitory law. Similar inaction followed a plebiscite held by Sir George Ross in 1902. These three outstanding Liberal statesmen could not be charged with misleading the public or double-crossing their prohibition friends. But they realized that, in spite of the majorities for prohibition, public sentiment was not sufficiently strong to enforce a prohibitory law as it should be enforced in order to improve conditions."

He traced the history of the introduction of the Ontario Temperance Act by Sir William Hearst, who, he said, well knew that by this action he was taking his political life in his hands.

**Fate of Hearst.**

True to his promise, Mr. Mahony continued, Sir William Hearst held a referendum in 1919. "The result of that referendum did much to discredit referenda and plebiscites, and set back the cause of true temperance," he averred. "The electors supported the O.T.A. with a tremendous majority. And on the same day in the same polling booths these zealous prohibitionists

crucified the Government that enacted the law."

While the Government which succeeded the Hearst Administration professed sympathy with prohibition, he said, it discredited the O.T.A. by the manner of its enforcement, and doubled the permits for wineries. "Of that Administration, the only survivor in the

House today is the honorable member who sponsors this motion."

Mr. Nixon—Survival of the fittest.

Plebiscites, Mr. Mahony continued, were not an honest expression of opinion. In the last plebiscite, he said, many Liberals opposed to the O.T.A., had voted for it in order to embarrass the Government, and force it to seek re-election supporting the discredited act. Plebiscites, he declared, were inimical to the principle of responsible government. "No Government," said Mr. Mahony, in conclusion, "should fear to take responsibility for important public measures. It is fairer, more honest, and more reasonable to get an expression of public opinion through an election issue than by a plebiscite."

**Confused With Party Politics.**

George A. McQuibban (Liberal, Wellington N.E.) expressed regret that a social problem such as the liquor question should be confused with party politics. The question had proved a stumbling-block of some political parties and had been a stepping-stone to power for others. "In 1923 former Premier Ferguson declared that he would not change the existing order without a reference to the people," said Dr. McQuibban. Rural districts, he said, were in favor of plebiscites, especially since the last redistribution had reduced rural representation in the Legislature and increased the representation of urban centres.

Referring to the Fort William speech of Mr. Sinclair, Dr. McQuibban declared that it had resulted in a hue and cry that the Liberal Party had gone wet. Opponents of the plebiscite had claimed that such a system was not British. "The Riding of Northeast Wellington is no whit less British because it believes in the principle of the plebiscite," he declared. "The only way to get this question out of politics is by means of the plebiscite." He concluded with a plea that the question be settled "by getting around a table and talking it over from the economic, business, social and moral aspects."

**"Worn-Out Theory," He Says.**

Mr. Heighington, in vigorous tones, dubbed the plebiscite "a discredited and worn-out theory"—simply the refuge of parties that had lost the power to decide things for themselves, and which had neither the courage nor the foresight to trust themselves and their records to the voice of the people. No party had given the plebiscite theory a greater chance than had the Conservative Party in Ontario, and the public, generally, had pronounced on it with finality.

At some length Mr. Heighington quoted references of Mitchell Hepburn to the attitude of the Liberal convention which had elected him Provincial Leader. Mr. Hepburn had declared emphatically that prohibition was no longer an issue—that the Liberal Party had got "out in the open" at last and could fight on its record.

"I'm sorry Mr. Hepburn is not in the House today," said Mr. Heighington. "It would be interesting to hear what he would say here."

**"Quite Unnecessary."**

Dr. Simpson expressed the belief emphatically that Mr. Nixon's motion was "quite unnecessary," in that the question involved had been threshed out time and time again. Before directing his remarks to the resolution proper, he took several lusty raps at W. W. Staples (Conservative, South Victoria) for his recent House criticism of William Newman's (Liberal, North Vic-