

COMPULSORY VOTING IS TO BE CONSIDERED WITH HENRY'S LEAVE

Sinclair's Bill Provides Fine, 7-Year Disfranchisement for Offenders

ATTENTION OF SENATE

Compulsory voting for Provincial electors is to be considered by the special committee appointed by the Legislature to take up the advisability of revising the method of compiling voters' lists. This was the disposition made yesterday by the House, with Premier Henry's consent, of the bill proposed by W. E. N. Sinclair, Liberal House Leader, which would provide for a fine and disfranchisement for seven years of those who did not vote.

In agreeing to the suggestion that this committee should take the question up, the Prime Minister made it quite clear that he was not approving of the system of compulsory voting, but merely consenting to the committee discussing the whole system of elections and voting. Hon. Leopold Macaulay, Minister of Highways; Russell Nesbitt (Bracondale) and H. S. Colliver (Prince Edward) were the Conservatives who approved of the aim, if not the phrasing, of Mr. Sinclair's bill.

Sinclair Speaks to Bill.

In speaking to the legislation, the Liberal House Leader said that it had been referred to as a compulsory voting measure, but that some other term should be used. "I notice that the Senate at Ottawa has been giving serious attention to it, and the conclusion I have come to is that it was discussed because I had it on the order paper here.

"It is a strange thing that, after all the struggle to secure the franchise, so many people take it so lightly. When people were fighting for the franchise, they claimed that it was their right. It is more than a right; it is a duty. I owe it to myself and to my neighbor to vote.

"Why is the vote not larger than it is? Is it because the right to vote is not appreciated? Or is it lack of interest in our own affairs?" asked Mr. Sinclair. "Is it because it is not thought of as a duty? We, in our day, have never known what it is to be without the franchise.

Lack of Interest.

"We live in an easy age, although it is not so easy in some respects. But we do not seriously regard our duties. And we have never had a stern question which compelled every one to go out and vote. There appears to be a lack of interest."

Mr. Sinclair then quoted figures to show the large percentage of electors who did not exercise their franchise. In the fifteen Toronto ridings there was an average of 23,202 voters in each, he said. There was a total of 348,048 voters in all the city ridings, and of these but 138,865, or 40 per cent., had voted in the last Provincial election. The successful candidates polled 97,736 votes, but 28 per cent. of the total number of voters.

In the four York seats there was an average of 27,568 voters, with a total vote of 109,275. But 49,793 votes were polled, 45 per cent. of the total, and the members received 31,225, or 30 per cent. of those who could vote. In the three Hamilton ridings, with an average of 21,750 voters, and a total of 65,250, there had been 32,433 votes cast, or 50 per cent. of the total. The members had received 22,829, or 35 per cent. of those who could vote.

In ten rural ridings, Brant, Bruce South, Durham, Glengarry, Grey South, Lambton East, Oxford South, Prince Edward, Simcoe Southwest and Victoria North, there were 133,381 voters, with an average of 13,338. The total vote polled was 93,703, or 70 per cent. of the maximum, with the successful candidates receiving 48,229, or 36 per cent. of the number of voters. These figures showed that the rural elector took his privilege more seriously, said Mr. Sinclair.

Mr. Sinclair admitted that probably a fine of \$20 and loss of vote for seven years was too drastic, but this could be straightened out in committee. He told of how the principle worked in Australia, and thought that Conservatives might oppose it because the Australian Government was defeated. "They might not want to force people to go out and vote against them." The bill, he said, provided for certain exemptions, such as illness, and also for half-holidays so that the voters could cast their ballots.

Mr. Nesbitt dwelt at some length on the workings of the system in Australia, and read from debates there, and newspaper comment upon it. "I agree that elections, both Provincial and Federal, are far too expensive. It is expensive not only to the electors, but to the candidates. The franchise has been doubled since women got the vote, and that has doubled the cost. They say that we would be interfering with the liberties of citizens. Governments are interfering with the liberties of citizens all the time in hundreds of ways.

"Today only about one-third of the electors on the voters' lists are interested in the elections. This one-third, by canvassing and dragging them to the polls, get about another one-third to vote. And the other third does not vote at all," said Mr. Nesbitt. In the last election, only 40 per cent. of the voters in the Beaches constituency voted; 36.9 in Riverdale; 32.7 in St. George's; 35.3 in Woodbine, and 42 per cent. in Bracondale. "That certainly is not a proper percentage."

Australian System.

In Australia exemptions were allowed where there was illness, accident, marriage, death or birth in the family, or where the distance was too great, he said. "I believe Mr. Sinclair made a good case, and I hope that the bill will receive second reading," he said.

"I may not be in favor of the bill as it is, but if a man or a woman is not interested enough to come out and vote I do not think either should have a vote," said H. S. Colliver (Conservative, Prince Edward). "We are all growing tired of getting people to run around and tell them how to vote. If they don't take enough interest to vote, then it is just as well if they are without the franchise."

"Speaking personally and not for the Government, I think there is a lot of merit to this bill," commented Hon. Leopold Macaulay. "The Senate may not be an ideal assembly to debate certain questions, but it is an ideal assembly to give hints and advice as to elections.

"Most of the Senators had been through elections. And most of them are, as it were, in a landlocked harbor, with their anchors fixed deep. They can give out a philosophy of life. If we read the debate they had, we will see that one of the most serious things as far as democracy is concerned is the expense of the elections. We have difficulty in getting trained leaders in democracy. It is an almost intolerable burden for a candidate to look after the voters' lists. I have had to open up committee rooms at my own expense and at election day we have to get the people out to vote.

"If we are going to get more of the right type of candidates, on both sides of this House, I think we have got to do something. The elections should be investigated, cheapened and simplified. In my own opinion, this bill should be referred to the committee which is dealing with the voters' lists. If some means of compulsory registration of voters were adopted, we might forego this until we saw how it turned out. If the Prime Minister could see his way clear they could deal with both," said Mr. Macaulay.

"I agree that something might come of further discussion in committee," said Premier Henry. "But I am not so hopeful as to what would come of this bill. I do know something of the expenses and labor in a large riding, and of the difficulties in getting out the vote. If there was some provision for encouraging electors to know what they were voting for when they went to the polls, it would be better. While not wishing to appear to favor anything of compulsory voting, I would be agreeable to it going to the special committee, and it could be dealt with this session."

COOKE GIVES FIGURES ON HYDRO QUESTIONS

Value of Buildings Owned by Government in City Is \$11,883,132

Debentures held by the Ontario Hydro-Electric Commission as payment upon the sale to municipalities of the local Hydro-Electric Power Commission service total \$1,806,000, of which \$306,657 has been paid, and \$1,499,342 is outstanding, Hon. J. R. Cooke, Chairman of the Hydro Commission, informed the Legislature yesterday in reply to a question of F. W. Elliott (Liberal, Bruce North).

The larger amounts are those of Oshawa of \$520,000, of which \$69,769 has been paid; Peterboro', \$335,000, of which \$18,000 is paid; Cobourg, \$295,000, with none paid; Belleville, \$176,000, with \$118,000 paid; and Trenton, \$165,000, with \$5,123 paid.

During the years 1926-31 inclusive, the revenue from the sale of power to the Canadian Niagara Power Company was \$5,363,190, and the export tax paid on this amounted to \$646,865, leaving a net revenue accrued to the Niagara System of the Hydro of \$4,716,325. During 1932 the revenue was \$741; the export tax, \$109, and the net revenue, \$631. No power has been sold to this company since March 31, 1932, Mr. Cooke stated in reply to an inquiry of Dr. G. A. McQuibban (Liberal, Wellington N.E.).

The total value of buildings owned by the Government in Toronto is \$11,883,132, Hon. J. D. Monteith told the House in answer to a question of R. A. Baxter (Liberal, Oxford South). These buildings are the Parliament Buildings, the East Block, Osgoode Hall, the Normal School, Government House; the Ontario Hospital, 999 Queen Street West; the Mercer Reformatory, McMaster University, and Nos. 1, 5, 7, 9, 11, 15, 39, 43 and 47 Queen's Park, 112 College Street, 621 Jarvis Street, and 128 Pembroke Street.

No tenders were called in the construction of the ferry boat to run between Manitoulin Island and Bruce Peninsula, Hon. G. H. Challies told C. A. Robertson (Liberal, Huron North).

E. G. Westbury, former Reeve of York Township, is not in the employ of the Government, Premier Henry told W. J. MacKay (Liberal, Bruce South).