

March 15

# Probe Into Trade Practices Planned Now at Queen's Park; State Curb Urged at Ottawa

## Labor Committee of Legislature Likely to Be Reconstituted — House Gives Serious Consideration to Principle of Fixing of Prices—May Be Constitutional

### NEW CONDITIONS, ADMITS MINISTER

An Ontario equivalent of the Stevens committee was seen as a possibility yesterday, with unofficial announcement that the Legislature's Labor Committee would be reconstituted to hear complaints that start with subcontracting abuses and range far beyond. Meanwhile the House gave serious consideration to a price-fixing bill, and referred it to the Municipal Committee, where its radical principle will receive thorough airing.

Russell Nesbitt, Toronto Conservative, recently told the House that the construction industry was in a bad way, partially, at least, through tender-slashing below cost in order "to get the job." He recommended at that time that a House committee be appointed to study this and other matters which affect not only the contractor but the worker.

#### May Ask for Committee.

Mr. Nesbitt now is ready to move for appointment of the committee, and, in his forthcoming speech, will extend the matter into such realms as the effect of relief work on the building trades and the skilled worker's plight under present conditions. It was learned yesterday that the Government is prepared to grant the request for reconstitution of the long-dormant Labor Committee, with scope as large as the present session's length will permit.

On the same lines, Hon William Finlayson yesterday told the Legislature that present conditions had increased opportunities for unfair competition. The old friendly relationship between employer and worker was gone, for a third party had interposed itself between them, forcing "chiselling" of prices and wages lower than the subsistence-point.

Mr. Finlayson was speaking on the bill introduced by William Morrison (Conservative, Hamilton East), which would grant municipalities power to fix charges for dry-cleaning. In introducing the measure, Mr. Morrison recognized the radically new principle entailed, but he thought conditions called for such action. Cut-throat competition in the cleaning trade had forced wages down to the sweat-shop class. Big companies were charging \$1.25 for work that their subsidiary—or "fighting"—units were doing for 49 cents, with a couple of ties thrown in as a bonus. As a lawyer, he foresaw the legal difficulties, but his attitude was: Pass it and let others contest it."

Mr. Finlayson agreed heartily with the principle of the bill while passing no opinion on its legality. When he first had been told about the measure, he was "shocked" at the jurisdiction it suggested the Legislature should exercise. But he realized that it was necessary to meet new conditions with new legislation, and that what was considered extreme a few years ago was not extreme now. Modern conditions demanded modern remedies.

#### Information From Delegation.

A delegation had informed him, said the Minister, of conditions in the cleaning trade, with proprietors letting out men because they no longer could afford to pay them wages. As for the constitutional side of the matter, the British North America Act limited trade and commerce to the Dominion, but gave the Provinces control over regulation of hours and shops. "This isn't sale, but service," he said. The Government was aware that conditions were at the point where more parliamentary control and regulation of industry was necessary. He hoped that in the Municipal Committee the measure would receive the discussion it deserved.