

March 26

Roebuck Talk On Air Backed By Government

Radio Broadcast on Hydro Contracts Is De- fended

COMMITTEE REFUSED

THE Hepburn Govern-
ment is backing
Attorney - General
Arthur Roebuck when he
steps to the microphone to-
night to take the Hydro con-
tracts to the tribunal of
public opinion.

Committee Refused.

The Government will not sanction Opposition demands for a legislative committee of inquiry—it declines to admit that any member of the Opposition could contribute anything to such an investigation.

As Hydro warfare flared up at Queen's Park yesterday this platform was laid down by Premier Hepburn and his Ministers. Conservatives forced the Hydro debate with an attack on the Attorney-General's proposed radio broadcasts, which swung into an appeal for Government action and a committee of inquiry.

Charges and inferences were interrupted by personal and party attacks which twice climaxed in questions of privilege—each time with a humorous let-down.

"I am quite conscious of a feeling," charged former Premier Henry, "that the engineers of the Commission are straining at the leash to be called before a committee where the whole truth can be told."

Truth Invited.

"I have no objection—speaking as a Hydro Commissioner—to any Hydro engineer telling the truth," Mr. Roebuck countered. "There was nothing hidden in Hydro now, but if the truth-telling was started it might not reflect well on former Administrations."

"I'll take a chance. I'll take a chance," said Mr. Henry.

"There comes a time," the Attorney-General began slowly, "in the career of public men when no further facts elucidated against them can do them any harm. There are some men with brass enough to remain in public life, no matter what has been proved against them."

The former Premier was on his feet in angry protest.

"Does the shoe fit?" asked Premier Hepburn.

"A Commission of Judges of this Province reported that my honorable friend's position was untenable. I see nothing to withdraw," Mr. Roebuck answered.

The former Premier demanded a Speaker's ruling on withdrawal. Minutes slipped by tensely while the Clerk of the House wrote down the words in question and members flipped rule books.

"The word 'brass' is out of order,"

ruled Mr. Speaker. "The rest is quite in order."

The House and even the Hon. George S. Henry laughed and grinned.

When Wilfrid Heighington told the Government that it was in "an obvious intellectual rheumatism" it was permitted to pass.

The entire fight was precipitated by the Conservatives, who successfully repeated a move to adjourn and discuss pressing business. As such this broadcast question, in company with Hon. W. H. Price's propaganda charges of last Friday cannot be raised again in this session.

The announced radio broadcasts, Mr. Henry submitted, were an affront to the Legislature. The truth about Hydro should come up on the floor of the House. The Government should inquire into the matter through a committee of the House, where witnesses could be summoned and examined.

Premier Hepburn declared himself rather amused at objections to radio speeches about "some of the improvident deals of a former Administration." The Premier spoke very rapidly and with deadly seriousness.

To Save Credit.

He marvelled at the temerity of an Opposition which charged that Ontario credit was being ruined, after leaving a staggering debt in its wake. "What we are trying to do is to save Ontario's credit."

"The Attorney-General is going on the air with the full approval and consent of the Government. We are going to have no committee."

Mr. Hepburn lapsed from seriousness with the charge that the Opposition could hardly give any aid. Their Leader, he said, was red in the face—comatose or verbose. "The man who forgot John Aird Jr.—the man who forgot Abitibi," he said.

"We want to deal with the court of highest appeal—the tribunal of public opinion. The Government is not going to shirk its responsibility. We'll let you know our policy and it will be a policy that will save Hydro."

In the debate the Conservatives repeated the inference that Attorney-General Arthur Roebuck did not speak for the Commission, and especially for the Chairman, T. Stewart Lyon.

Charge Denied.

"He is entirely wrong in his analysis," Mr. Roebuck answered Mr. Henry. "There is no difference between the Chairman and myself in our outlook as to that great enterprise." Both looked forward to the future—"because the gross mismanagement which administered in the past came to an end on June 19 and July 10." Mr. Roebuck said he was confident that the Chairman agreed that if old policies were followed and a new policy not followed, disaster would result.

The Attorney-General fought the radio charges back with the declaration that there was nothing in Parliamentary procedure, the British Constitution or common law which banned public discussion. As long as Opposition members spoke from the platform—and saving the rule of the House—he proposed to express his knowledge and thoughts to the electors.

"I haven't the slightest apology to make to the Leader of the Opposition for having turned to the great court of appeal in the matter of Hydro," he said. "It is not necessary that we decide quickly. It is only necessary that we decide wisely and justly."