

Price Attack Vile, Hepburn Charges, Closing Debate

Tory's Criticism of Administration Meets Blistering Rebuttal From Premier

PROBABLY the most merciless castigation of his entire political career was given former Attorney-General W. H. Price in the Legislature yesterday afternoon as Prime Minister Mitchell Hepburn devoted to the Parkdale Tory a large and bitter portion of his 95-minute address, which concluded the Budget debate.

Price Berated.

Colonel Price was accused of "vile, villainous and unscrupulous attacks" on Hon. Duncan Marshall; of a "vicious and unwarranted criticism" of Edmond Odette, Liquor Commission; of hypocritical insinuations against almost the entire Hepburn Cabinet, and, finally, of acting in the last Provincial election "more like a beer agent than a Minister of the Crown."

Particularly stinging was the Prime Minister's berating of Colonel Price for his past criticism of Mr. Odette, which Mr. Hepburn concluded by paying to the Liquor Commissioner one of the most laudatory tributes given a servant of the Government since the change in Administrations.

The Prime Minister took time also to lash at former Premier G. S. Henry for what he termed "joy-riding" at the expense of the T. and N.O. Railway, and he threw in caustic criticism of the work done—or not done—by Liquor Commissioners under the Tory regime.

And, in the course of his address, Mr. Hepburn took the occasion to announce the appointment of Arthur G. Slaght, K.C., as counsel for the T. & N.O. Railway, succeeding W. E. N. Tilley, at the same salary of \$4,800.

Provincial Debt.

The Prime Minister at the outset reiterated the charge that the Conservative Government, during the last four years of its regime, increased the Provincial debt by \$182,000,000. And he accused former Attorney-General Price of "vile, villainous and unscrupulous attacks" on Hon. Duncan Marshall during the Provincial election campaign. He quoted Colonel Price as expressing "contempt" for Hon. Peter Heenan, and accused Colonel Price of a campaign of villification that ill became an Attorney-General.

"He accused me," said Mr. Hepburn, "of being ready to sell out the St. Lawrence project to private interests—of being, in other words, a traitor to my country and a Judas. This, from the man who began the campaign with a pious announcement that he was going to avoid personalities and mud-slinging!"

Election Bribery Seen.

Furthermore, he charged, at the very moment when Colonel Price was telling an election meeting that not more than \$80,000 per day was being spent by the Henry Government, the then Attorney-General knew full well that \$139,000 was being spent in one day by the Department of Highways alone—"an example of election bribery," Mr. Hepburn called it.

Swinging his attack on the Tory Administration of the T. & N.O. Railway, Mr. Hepburn charged that former Manager Lee used the facilities and funds of the T. & N.O. Railway "for no other reason than entertaining Tories and promoting the interests of the Tory Party in Ontario."

"I further charge," said Mr. Hepburn, "that \$3,500 was voted for the sole purpose of entertaining these Tories. The Racine Report tells of one item of \$385 paid out of T. & N.O. funds for such an entertainment."

"Hon. Mr. Henry," he continued, "himself took a 'joy-ride' all the way to the Pacific Coast in the T. & N.O. private car Whitney."

Announces Appointment.

"It was not a joy-ride," broke in Mr. Henry. "I paid visits to the Provincial Governments along the route."

It was at this point that, in reply to a question from T. A. Kidd, Tory member for Kingston, the Prime Minister announced that the new solicitor of the T. & N.O. Railway was Arthur Slaght, K.C.

"At what salary?" asked Colonel Kidd.

"At the same salary as W. E. N. Tilley—\$4,800 per year. His firm will handle the railway's legal interests," replied the Prime Minister.

Mr. Hepburn went spiritedly to the defense of E. G. Odette, Chief Commissioner of the Liquor Control Board of Ontario, against what he termed "a most vicious and unwarranted attack" by Colonel Price.

The former Attorney-General, he charged, had said that Mr. Odette was "a Cabinet play-boy, a part-time employee at \$10,000 per year, who for weeks on end was never in his office at all, and whose plans and movements were often unknown to his staff for long periods."

Praise for Odette.

The Prime Minister then read a report from J. B. Unsworth, Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, stating that Mr. Odette had spent more hours per day at his desk administering the affairs of the board than any one of his predecessors.

"Mr. Odette," reported Mr. Unsworth, "rarely takes time off for luncheon, his practice being to remain in his office until all correspondence has been signed and his discussions with the board's officials concluded. No other Chief Commissioner has closed the day with a clearer desk, or with fewer matters in abeyance or pending, than the present Chief Commissioner. When spending the week-ends at home in Tilbury, Mr. Odette has been available by long-distance telephone at all times." The report added that on his trips to Europe and California the secretary had a full itinerary given him, and was frequently in touch with Mr. Odette. Only on those two occasions was Mr. Odette absent from his office for a period of ten days or more.

Operating Costs Compared.

The Prime Minister at this point read a report of the Liquor Control Board giving the following comparative figures for the years ending March 31, 1934, and March 31, 1935:

Operating expenses—1934, \$2,250,000; 1935, \$1,670,000. Net profits, 1934, \$5,332,000; 1935, \$7,809,000. Number on staff, 1934, 1,050; 1935, 797.

"And at this stage of my remarks," said Mr. Hepburn, "I want to extend to Mr. Odette the congratulations of the Government for his most efficient administration of one of the most important departments of the Government. This administration can count itself fortunate indeed to have, in such an exacting office, a man of the ability and calibre of Mr. Odette."

Mr. Hepburn then returned to his attack on Colonel Price's conduct during the Provincial election of 1934, recalling that he had, whenever asked at his meetings about beer, "cocked one eye quizzically, smiled slyly, and raised his glass of water, replying, 'Well boys, this is only water, but after July 1 you'll have your beer'."

"Why," expostulated Mr. Hepburn, "this former member of the Cabinet, far from upholding the dignity of an Attorney-General, acted like a medicine-man in a side-show. He went around the Province more like a beer agent than a Minister of the Crown."

Prior to the vote, he proceeded, the

Henry Government had sent throughout the Province a sort of application blank to restaurant owners who wanted beer licenses, and these were filled in by the thousand and returned to the Government. But, he said, after the election, and before the Liberals assumed control, all the forms were destroyed, to deprive the incoming Government of all benefit of the information. This he challenged the members of the former Cabinet to deny.