

"CHISELLING" SEEN AMONG OPTOMETRISTS

Organized Fleecing in Profession Charged by Hepburn

Organized fleecing of the public by many members of the optometrists' profession in Ontario was charged in the Legislature by Prime Minister Mitchell Hepburn, when he secured second reading for his bill to repeal the Optometrists Act.

"Take the patient for all he can stand," was the slogan of a large section of the profession, Mr. Hepburn declared, adding that United States "experts" were being imported to teach Canadian optometrists the art of "chiselling" and operating what amounted to a racket.

Would Repeal Act.

The bill would repeal the act under which the Optometrists' Board controls the standards, procedure and practices of the members of the profession, and so break up what the Prime Minister regards as a "closed corporation."

Other legislation, the House was assured, would be framed to take the place of these sections of the existing act which were of value, including that section which was aimed at eliminating the travelling "spectacle salesman," once a familiar figure on the Canadian rural scene.

"I have in the past asked the Opposition to assist me," began Mr. Hepburn, "in taking measures to curb any organization or profession that might be operating in restraint of trade." He then launched into a discussion of the profession of optometry.

Most of the members, he said, secured their final qualifications by a two weeks' course, and then set about "to fleece the public" and to operate as a "closed corporation." He quoted newspaper comment that the profession had taken on "many of the characteristics of a racket." All must take a membership in the controlling organization, he said, and must take an oath to subscribe to the rules.

"Some of them," he alleged, "are charging six and seven times the value of the spectacles."

He read from the Canadian Optometrist instructions on how to lead up to the price question, how to judge a patient's capacity to pay, and a discussion on the necessity of charging \$10 for examination alone. He mentioned one case where \$85 was charged. Members, he said, were sworn never to give free examinations. Recently a Texan, he said, was brought in to advise the members of the profession in Canada along these lines. A personal friend, said Mr. Hepburn, had been unable to read for a year because he couldn't get glasses for less than \$30—which he couldn't afford—when the actual cost of the glasses was known to be \$3.50. "They have eliminated competition entirely," he said. "One optometrist told me he could sell glasses at \$7.50 and make 100 per cent. profit, but he didn't dare or he'd lose his certificate."

Legislation Forecast.

"And," concluded the Premier, "this isn't the only profession we're going to deal with. Others will be under our scrutiny during the next year, because they are fleecing the public. They'd better take care or they'll get the same medicine."

Attorney-General Arthur Roebuck revealed that he had already told the Optometry Board that they would certainly not be reappointed when they had appeared before him.

One optometrist, he said, had feared his colleagues' rancor after he sold a friend a pair of glasses at one-third of the list price and still made 66

per cent. profit. A \$62-a-month clerk in the civil service needed glasses. She said she couldn't get them when an optometrist quoted a price of \$30.

There was no desire to abolish the association's property rights; there was no desire to stop their efforts to train the profession—"but I doubt if it is a profession," he said.

George Fulford, Leeds M.P.P., advanced the same thought. There were oculists, optometrists and opticians. "The Optometry Act has given the optometrists such a hold that the whole Province is being fleeced by these men. It has developed into a racket," he said.

"The optometrists and opticians are merchants pure and simple. They are salesmen, and not, to my mind, to be classed as professional men," Dr. A. D. Roberts said.

LOCAL WOMEN WORKING FOR 2 CENTS AN HOUR

Croll Sees Ontario Parallel to Negro Labor

A story of men and women, working in their homes to turn out bedspreads, to fashion baby booties, to crochet jackets and made lace at wages of two and three cents an hour, was told in the Legislature yesterday by Hon. David Croll.

The reports of almost record low wages had been made to him as Labor Minister. He passed on the record of the 2-cent-an-hour wage conditions to the M.P.P.'s when he moved second reading of his new bill to clean up the "home-sweatshop." In and around the City of Toronto and in Ontario, Mr. Croll said, wages were paid to workers inside of the walls of their homes which revealed the famed low wages paid to negro women in the Southern States.

The Minister intimated that the evil was increasing, and that his department had been, first, alarmed by a triple increase in the permits which they are now empowered to give out. And the irony of it, he said, was that most of these workers were on relief, while they were doing this work for what would have been otherwise starvation wages.

"When the NRA did away with Georgia child labor, they moved up to this country. There has crept in a practice which is entirely new, and should be checked now."

The Minister put the following instances of "home-sweatshop" exploitation before the House:

Two women worked for 5 cents an hour making bedspreads. The spreads cost \$1.33. They were sold for \$2.98 and \$3.95.

On Christie Street a man and his wife were making 30 cents a day for the work of the two of them in making bedspreads.

Another firm paid 45 cents for twelve pairs of babies' booties. It took about four days for a "home-sweatshop" worker to fill the order, at a wage of between 2 and 3 cents an hour.

A woman on Jones Street was crocheting baby jackets at \$1.65 for a dozen jackets. She worked from 9 in the morning to 11 at night. The jackets were finished in about ten and a half hours—each.

Another woman was getting 1 cent per yard for lace. Another was getting 80 cents for a dozen baby coats. It took her an hour and a half to make a coat.

The Minister's remedy is in the shape of legislation which will require permits for such work all over Ontario, and will give the Government the right to cancel them for cause and to move to guarantee decent wages. The House gave the bill a speedy second reading.

HIGHER PRICE PAID TO TORY

T. & N.O. Tie Purchases Reviewed

A. J. Kennedy, former Conservative member of the Ontario Legislature for Timiskaming, received five cents a tie more than any other contractor, and in 1928 was given an allowance of \$1,000 toward a \$1,200 sales tax bill, for which his company was responsible, by the Timiskaming & Northern Ontario Railway, the Legislature Public Accounts Committee learned yesterday.

Evidence at the committee's investigation into tie purchases by the railway showed that during 1927 Kennedy was granted an allowance of \$1,644, the amount of sales tax due on ties sold the railway. Altogether the railway paid him \$2,644 in sales tax.

This evidence was brought out in correspondence read into the record by Attorney-General Roebuck and by examination of G. B. Alford, purchasing agent.

Questioned on the 1927 sales tax allowance, Mr. Alford said the Commission "felt it had driven too hard a bargain with Mr. Kennedy and subsequently decided to pay the sales tax."

Correspondence for 1928 showed the Commission understood the sales tax was included in the prices submitted by the Kennedy & Gibson firm. The committee was informed the majority of business letters written by Kennedy were on Legislature stationery. Payment by the Commission was made to Kennedy and not the firm.

A statement showed that in 1928 the Commission contracted for 75,000 ties, but took delivery of 104,275 at a total cost of \$78,739. "After the railroad got stuck for \$1,000 in sales tax on the first order, they took jolly good care they would not get stuck again," said Mr. Roebuck.

Asked whether the Commission paid the sales tax for any of the other contractors, Alford replied they paid their own tax.

Kennedy, according to figures given the committee, received 85 cents each for ties of No. 1 quality, while other contractors and settlers received 80 cents, except one contractor who obtained 75 cents.

Questioned about this, Alford said he did not know why Kennedy received the extra amount and could not make a definite statement.

"Is there any evidence that the \$1,644.84 paid Kennedy as a gratuity for the sales tax was ever paid to the Dominion Government?" Mr. Roebuck asked.

"No," the witness replied.

"Then you have no documentary evidence that the money paid by the T. & N.O. ever reached the Federal Government, although it was paid to Mr. Kennedy?"

"No."

Colonel W. H. Price (Cons., Toronto Parkdale) said the Government might have had such information, but the Attorney-General contended there was no evidence to that effect, and suggested that the tax, in fact, was never paid.

Pair of Glasses

WILLIAM DUCKWORTH, good-natured Toronto M.P.P., snared himself in the Legislature yesterday and had to join in a good laugh with his fellow-M.P.P.'s.

"I got a pair of glasses in Toronto Junction," he said while the Optometry Act was being debated, "and they practically drove me crazy."

"I presume the honorable member has changed his glasses," Premier Hepburn said, while the House laughed.