

April 7

Attempts to Send Issue to Electors Blocked in House

Macaulay and Roebuck Join Forces in Futile Effort to Postpone Contracts Validation — Two Other Moves for Deletion of Clauses Also Fail When Bill Passes Committee

SCENES IN LEGISLATURE TEMPESTUOUS

Combined efforts of former Hydro Commissioner Roebuck and Opposition Leader Macaulay to have the Legislature endorse a submission to the Ontario electorate of a plebiscite, plumbing public opinion as to the principle of the new Quebec power contracts, went down to defeat in the House late last night amid scenes of clashing tempers and tempestuous tongues.

Mr. Roebuck charged that the Government, in campaigning on a "back-to-Niagara" policy and then embarking immediately after the election upon negotiations with the Quebec companies, had departed entirely from British practice and had taken a course of action that had no mandate from the people. The Houck bill, validating the new contracts, should only come into operation, he submitted, after the feeling of the electors had been taken by general plebiscite on the following question:

"Are you in favor of the purchase by the Hydro-Electric Power Commission of Ontario of an aggregate 430,000 additional horsepower at \$12.50 per horsepower from the Beauharnois Light, Heat and Power Company, the Maclaren - Quebec Power Company and the Gatineau Power Company?"

Two Amendments Beaten.

Earlier in the evening, when the bill was first called, Mr. Macaulay tried to block validation by moving two other amendments. First, he called for deletion of clauses in the contracts which, in his opinion, provided "for an increase in the price of power in the event of the Commission (Hydro) making further purchases of electric power generated in the Province of Quebec or from Quebec water in the Ottawa River at increased prices."

When that move failed, Mr. Macaulay with W. A. Baird (High Park), again as his seconder, demanded deletion of the clause in the Beauharnois contract, which he said "provides for a decrease in the load factor from 85 per cent to 75 per cent, thereby creating a loss to the power users of Ontario of approximately 12 per cent for thirty-nine years." This move was also defeated on a standing vote.

Macaulay Backs Roebuck.

Mr. Roebuck implemented his argument with an amendment, which Mr. Macaulay seconded with the cry of, "I'm not afraid to do this. I'm not very partial to referendums or plebiscites, but if the validation of those contracts can be held up until such time as the people who were double-crossed by the Premier and his followers last October can express their opinion, I'm for any means of accomplishing that end."

The hectic situation developed when the validating legislation was in committee stage. Major James Clark, Chairman of the whole House, ruled Mr. Roebuck out of order when he was expounding his case for a plebiscite and Mr. Macaulay promptly leaped into the breach.

Immediately the latter accused Hon. T. B. McQuesten, former Hydro Commissioner, of supporting the "back-to-Niagara" policy and reversing his stand after the ballots had been counted. The committee Chairman promptly called him to

order, whereupon he said, "Give me another chance," and launched a fresh attack on the Government's alleged lack of mandate to enter into new Quebec contracts.

Wants People Consulted.

"Last December," he said, "when these contracts were announced, I told the press that the Government had deliberately double-crossed the electorate and that they should go to the people to explain their reversal of policy. I insist now that they consult the people."

"What do you want, another East Lambton?" clicked Premier Hepburn.

"Oh, Oh," said Mr. Macaulay.

"Do you want another Hamilton?" persisted Mr. Hepburn. "Why, you didn't even put a candidate up there."

"I can tell you why we didn't," said Mr. Macaulay.

"The reason you didn't," flared John Newlands, the successful Liberal candidate in that Hamilton by-election, "was because you knew you'd be beaten."

"Oh, there are a lot of things about that election my honorable friend doesn't know," said Mr. Macaulay.

"Didn't you plead for revision of these contracts for three years?" asked Minister of Labor M. M. MacBride.

Vote Called for.

"Yes, I did," said Mr. Macaulay, "but you people campaigned in the election saying you'd never revise them. Now, I'm going to support the amendment of my honorable friend from Bellwoods (Mr. Roebuck), and I expect all my supporters to do likewise."

"Oh, go ahead and vote," clicked Mr. Hepburn. "Let's get it over with."

Mr. Roebuck claimed that having not consulted any one about his amendment, he consequently had no seconder. "I'll second it for you," said Mr. Macaulay.

On a standing vote, the amendment was overwhelmingly defeated. The validating bill was then given formal committee approval. It is anticipated that when third reading stage is reached today, the Opposition will demand a recorded vote of every member.

Asks Why Section Stands.

Mr. Macaulay subsequently demanded of the Government the reason it did not amend that section of the Power Commission Amendment Act, 1937, which made it impossible for a private citizen, even granted he got judgment in a damage action from Hydro, to collect.

"Why don't you go the whole hog and give every one the right that you have given to the Maclaren and other Quebec power companies?" he asked.

Attorney-General Conant could not see what the suggestion had to do with the validation legislation. Premier Hepburn emphasized that Mr. Macaulay must know that even if the agreements were ratified by the House, they were not settled until the bondholders had their say. The process of negotiations was still going on, and until the agreements were finally signed

he saw no reason for getting rid of the acts complained of.

Roebuck Springs Surprise.

Mr. Roebuck then sprang his mine on the simple clause which ruled: "This act shall come into force on the day upon which it receives Royal assent." A great deal had been said, he remarked, about whether Ontario should go back to Niagara or on to Beauharnois.

"The Prime Minister says there were no negotiations prior to the election and we as members of the House must accept his statement no matter what we might privately think. But the fact stands out that the Government in going to the people asked for a mandate to develop its own resources and that they got that mandate.

"The fact remains that according to British—" the speaker was here interrupted by Major Clark, Chairman of the House Committee, who held that his remarks were irrelevant to the clause. Mr. Roebuck then revealed he was going to move an amendment as to the time the bill could come into effect.

"And the reason I am moving the amendment is, as I say, because it is the practice in British countries, that a mandate which has been received from the people of the Province cannot be set aside immediately after the mandate has been received."

He made his motion demanding the plebiscite and added:

Obligation to Constituents.

"That is the only way, I suggest, that members of the Legislature can justify themselves to their constituents, we who told our constituents we were going back to Niagara."

Mr. Roebuck emphasized that members had an obligation to their constituents, and the only British way, the only democratic way, was to consult them again, because "we have no business to change our votes immediately after the mandate has been given by them."

House Committee Chairman Clark tangled several times with Mr. Roebuck over the relevancy of his argument to the particular clause of the bill under discussion, and finally ruled him out of order.

"Then," said Mr. Roebuck, "am I to understand that I'm not privileged to say anything more about this mandate?"

"You are not speaking to the point," said Chairman Clark.

"That is a most extraordinary ruling," said Mr. Roebuck.

"And I'll rule that statement out of order, too," retorted Mr. Clark.