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Drew Calls Estate Bill Vicious, Badly Drawn; House Session Stormy

Conservative Leader Charges Premier With Trying to 'Railroad' Succession Duty Act; Eight Amendments Help to Mollify Critics

FINAL READING IS EXPECTED TODAY

With tempers cooled by an hour of steady plugging through the contentious clauses of the Succession Duty Act, members of the Ontario Legislature made rapid progress in consideration of the measure yesterday and adjourned at 6 o'clock with the bill still in committee stage and prorogation promised some time today.

The final hour of the session carried the members through thirteen clauses of the bill, after nearly two hours had been spent in fruitless argument concerning its general application. Eight amendments affecting some of the most contentious sections, introduced by Attorney-General Conant, poured oil on troubled legislative waters and permitted swift progress in the last sixty minutes.

As adjournment hour was reached, Premier Hepburn suggested that, in view of the "labored discussion" which had tired members, he was prepared to adjourn until Friday if Conservative Leader George Drew could give assurance that consideration of remaining clauses would not take "more than a couple of hours." The bill would then be given third reading along with other measures some time Friday, he said.

Colonel Drew acquiesced in the suggestion. He said his remarks would deal only with specific objections to certain clauses, and agree that, once the bill had been reported by committee, he was prepared to vote third reading without further debate.

In addition to amendments sponsored by the Attorney-General, the House accepted an amendment offered by Leopold Macaulay, former Conservative Leader, extending the time period necessary to make gifts exempt from duty. The period of exemption for gifts made outside the immediate family was increased from twenty to thirty years. Exemption for gifts to members of the immediate family remained fixed at ten years, as originally established by the bill.

Labelled by Colonel Drew as "one of the most vicious and badly drawn acts that has ever been introduced in any British Parliament," the act was subjected to stormy criticism by the Conservative Leader, culminating in the charge that Premier Hepburn was trying to "railroad" the measure through the House.

Accused by the Attorney-General of dispensing "barnyard law," Colonel Drew deferred detailed criticism of the measure until it was brought up clause by clause, but he insisted that, before the bill was considered, Premier Hepburn should make good his promise to table a list of estates in which fraud had been proved. He charged that the Premier's word was no longer reliable and withdrew the charge only after members had appealed to the chairman for order.

Colonel Drew, in opening the debate, said he had still held hope that the act might be submitted to a responsible committee, emphasized it was an entirely new act, that there was already a Succession Duties Act in force, and that, therefore, there was no necessity for haste.

He warned that he was not going to "mince words" in his opposition to passage of the bill, claimed again it was extremely difficult of understanding, and added: "With all respect, I suggest that the Attorney-General himself demonstrated quite clearly last night that he doesn't understand the act."

He charged that the Government leaders had attempted to create the impression that any one who criticized the act was trying to prevent the collection of succession duties. "This cheap device," he said, "is not going to prevent any discussion of any act brought before this House."

"This is one of the most vicious and badly drawn acts that has ever been introduced in any British Parliament, and the explanations are not correct from beginning to end and I propose to show that this is so."

He branded the act an "outrageous act," and charged that it contravened basic principles upon which British freedom was founded in Magna Carta. The provisions for right of appeal were, he said, without precedent.

"Before any one may have the right to have his case adjudicated by the courts he must pay to the treasurer such part as the treasurer may require of duties, interest and penalties which is claimed to have become payable," he added.

Proposes to Amend Section.

Mr. Conant: "So that your blood pressure may not go too high, I wish to advise the House that, at the proper time, I propose to amend the section by striking out the word 'penalties'."

"Well," shot back Colonel Drew, "we are at least getting somewhere," and he again charged Mr. Conant lacked knowledge of the act.

Mr. Conant: "I am not going to sit here and take such remarks as that. I have more understanding of the act than any one in this House and as much understanding as any one could have through a month of close study of the act. Yet the honorable Leader of the Opposition stands up as a superman and throws brickbats at the men who framed the act. I must say, we are getting pretty large doses of barnyard law."

Colonel Drew reminded the House that Premier Hepburn had promised to table the names of estates in which fraud had been proved, and that the list had "not yet come forth."

"Those cases will be brought down as soon as they are available," the Premier replied. "I would remind my honorable friend that he is only Leader of the Opposition and I am running this House. I've given you lots of latitude, but I can crack down just as hard as you can."

"You undertook to bring down those names and I intend to hold you to it," replied Colonel Drew.

Premier Hepburn said that Treasury officials could not be expected to go into the voluminous files and produce the data "overnight."

"The Premier seems to find great difficulty in securing these facts," Colonel Drew charged. "We hear the same old story every day about this estate and that estate with nothing to substantiate it. I'd like to see the details of these mysterious estates and the House has a right to see them before this bill is discussed."

"You are trying to stage a filibuster on this measure," the Premier accused. "It is costing this House \$2,000 a day to consider this bill in special session. I'd like to see you go before your constituents and tell them you were responsible for this extra cost in time of war when expenses should be kept down. Let it be on your head."

The Conservative Leader hotly denied any attempt at a filibuster.

"I will not attempt to meet the type of debate the Premier resorts to under pressure," he said. "But the time has gone by for these glib promises and glib threats. You can't put any faith in the Premier's words, it appears."

There were loud cries of "Order," and Premier Hepburn demanded that Colonel Drew withdraw.

"I'll withdraw the remark and say that the Premier has given an undertaking which he has not carried out," said the Opposition Leader.

The House then turned into the long and oft-times argumentative review of the fifty main sections in the forty-one pages of the bill. Many members retired and left the field to a half-dozen lawyer representatives.