

# CONANT ARGUES WOMEN JURORS SPEED JUSTICE

Skeptics Laugh, Debate  
Stalls, as Opposition  
by Rural Members Met

## 'SERVICE TO NATION'

Opposition to women jurors threatened yesterday in the Ontario Legislature to engulf the Province's first mixed juries bill and foretold short shrift for the measure in committee stage—if it ever gets that far.

An hour's debate that crossed party lines and indicated particularly strong opposition from the rural ridings left the bill still without a second reading vote. The debate was adjourned by Tom P. Murray (Lib., Renfrew South), on the flat note, "I'm against it."

"I have too much sympathy for women," said the Barry's Bay lumberman. "Women have enough to do now. This bill is going to cause confusion in the homes and in the courtrooms."

The proposed legislation had its most persistent champions in Attorney-General Conant and Leslie M. Frost (Cons., Victoria). The bill was drafted on the recommendation of the Legislative Committee which last summer held an inquiry into the administration of justice. Mr. Conant was chairman of the committee and Mr. Frost was a member.

Debate was desultory until the Attorney-General, in answer to questions, estimated that the cost of providing accommodation for women jurors would vary between \$200 and \$300 in each county.

### Time "Wasted" Now.

He added: "I am strongly of the opinion that economies will more than offset the expenditures. For example, there is a considerable amount of time wasted in the present system and I think the presence of women on juries may speed up the administration of justice."

Skeptics' laughter rippled through the Chamber. Mr. Conant continued: "Undoubtedly when a jury retires under the present system, there is a considerable waste of time, and I feel that there will be less time wasted if women are present."

"It is only natural justice that women, who have taken an ever-increasing responsibility in this war, should take responsibility here," added Mr. Conant. He visioned a time, not far distant, when there would be a shortage of manpower. Women, he claimed, could effect signal service to the country by serving on juries.

Mr. Frost confessed that, at first, he was opposed to it. "I ask you," he pleaded, "before you vote on this bill, can you advance any reason beyond pure prejudice why women should not sit on juries? There is absolutely no reason why women should not take part in the administration of our laws."

### Would Improve Quality.

He, too, maintained that women jurors would improve the quality of jurors, a need recognized by the courts.

Colonel Fraser Hunter (Lib., Toronto-St. Patrick) backed the bill, but questioned a clause which said that a presiding judge might, on his discretion or upon application, make an order that the jury shall be composed of men only, or of women only, as the case might require.

"This clause will upset the full power of selection, and in effect may bar women from juries," he argued. "The selector may call women to serve on juries, but under this clause a judge, who is a woman hater, could bar them from serving. He might not like a woman's face—any reason at all—and the effect of the bill is nullified."

J. A. Habel (Lib., Cochrane North) granted women equal rights in the franchise and in the right to sit in the House, but in juries he declared a blunt "No"!

"If either my wife or daughter is called for jury service I hope Providence will keep them from sitting on a jury and hearing evidence," he said.