

March 14

Brewers to Meet Board This Morning

Ontario Liquor Board officials and representatives of brewery companies will meet in Toronto this morning to consider how best to take advantage of the Dominion Government's removal of the 10 per cent restriction on beer, it was learned last night.

The beer picture appeared to be somewhat confused last night. To a large extent the ability of the brewery interests to meet the sudden change will be the determining factor in whether Ontario citizens are going to get much more beer than they are getting today.

Premier George Drew was unable to cast much light on the situation. He was definite on one point: that Ontario had not failed to co-operate with the Dominion in the matter of restricting beer sales. He refuted the suggestion from Prime Minister Mackenzie King that Ontario had failed to do its part, and produced copies of correspondence to prove his contention that he had offered every assistance, and had asked as late as March 10 for a conference with Mr. King on the subject.

Question of Labor.

The problem of labor enters into the beer picture, and out of today's conference between the breweries and the Liquor Board is likely to emerge a clearer view of what the Dominion's action will mean in terms of more beer for the individual consumer. Any contemplated action on a single permit for beer, wine and liquor will await further developments.

Brewers indicated late yesterday that a beer shortage may exist for a few months. Time would be required, they said, to manufacture and mature an additional quantity of beer. It was denied that large stocks of beer were piled in warehouses and could be made available immediately.

Informed while the Legislature was in session that the Dominion Government had rescinded its wartime order as it affects beer, Premier Drew passed on the news to the members, and desks were thumped enthusiastically. Later the Premier conferred briefly with Attorney-General Leslie Blackwell. Before doing so, however, he read copies of the correspondence between the two Governments on the beer issue.

Says Facts Misrepresented.

Premier Drew charged Prime Minister King with misrepresenting the facts concerning Ontario's handling of the beer situation.

Several hours after informing the Legislature that the Dominion Government had lifted the beer restrictions, Mr. Drew issued a statement in which he said the Prime Minister did "some truly remarkable juggling with figures in his attempt to distort the effect of the notices put up by the Liquor Control Board of Ontario."

(These signs were placed in beverage rooms on order of the L.C.B. and informed the public that restrictions in the sale of beer were due to an order passed by the Dominion Government.)

"The notices simply conveyed the information that the alcoholic beverages available for sale at the sales outlet were restricted by Dominion order," said the Premier. "That statement was correct. Mr. King has not furthered the cause of Dominion-Provincial co-operation by misrepresenting the facts to the whole of Canada regarding the action of the Ontario Government."

"It is typical of Mr. King," continued Premier Drew, "that he failed to inform the people of Canada at the same time that I had written to him last Friday asking for an appointment so that the Attorney-General, the Commissioner of the Liquor Control Board and I could meet him in Ottawa in an

effort to find some solution of the unsatisfactory situation that had developed. I presume I am to accept today's announcement as his idea of an appropriate reply designed to encourage co-operation."

Letter to Mr. King.

Answering Ottawa's charge that Ontario was not co-operative in the matter of beer and liquor regulations, the Premier read to the House a copy of a letter which he sent to Prime Minister King on March 10. This letter was in reply to one from the Prime Minister of Feb. 24, in which the action of the Dominion in passing the wartime alcoholic order was defended.

In the last paragraph of his letter to Mr. King, Premier Drew said: "As your letter did not give me the information which I had hoped to obtain, I would ask for an early meeting in Ottawa to which I will bring the Attorney-General and the Chief Commissioner of the Liquor Control Board to discuss the possibility of finding some satisfactory solution for a situation which is becoming increasingly serious."

This was proof enough that his Government had not been unco-operative with Ottawa, as charged, the Premier asserted.

Not "Correct" Reason.

"From press reports which I have before me it appears that the beer restrictions have been removed because of Ontario's failure to co-operate," said the Premier. "That does not happen to be the correct reason."

"Mr. King takes the position that the wartime order called for a 10 per cent beer cut, and Ontario made it 25 per cent. I will have some vigorous comments to make on these glaring inaccuracies later on. It is abundantly clear that, far from refusing to co-operate, all we asked was a meeting to discuss it."

"It is just about as difficult to arrange a conference between the head of the Canadian Government and the head of this Government as it is for the head of the Canadian Government to meet with the heads of other Governments in the Empire."

In his letter to the Premier, Mr. King said his Government was influenced in reaching its conclusion to enact the alcoholics beverages order by the statement of Mr. Drew's predecessor in office, Gordon D. Conant. In a speech at Oshawa on Oct. 30, 1942, Mr. Conant was reported as saying that if, as a war measure, the Dominion find it necessary to curtail quantities of liquor or period of sale, all jurisdictions involved would have to accept it as part of the war program.

Dealing with this specific statement regarding Mr. Conant, Premier Drew wrote to the Prime Minister that it was unfortunate the Dominion Government had not also been influenced by Mr. Conant's next words, which were: "Such curtailment, however, even as a war measure, would certainly result in bootlegging with all the other troubles that arise therefrom involving the problem of law enforcement."

Continuing, Premier Drew observed: "If the Dominion Government found one part of Mr. Conant's statement so convincing it is unfortunate it was not equally impressed by a prediction which has proved all too accurate."