

March 1

Opposition Members To Command Majority On Labor Committee

A Legislature labor committee, on which the Opposition groups will have a majority over the Government members, was announced in the House yesterday by Premier George A. Drew. Clothed with wide powers, this committee will inquire into labor legislation in other Provinces as well as Dominion labor acts with a view to improving Ontario's legislation in this respect.

Naming of the committee stemmed from a motion placed on the Order Paper by J. B. Salsberg (Lab. Prog., St. Andrew), who had asked the Premier at an earlier sitting to call the motion for debate. The Premier on that occasion informed Mr. Salsberg and the House that a select committee on labor would be named. With the consent of the mover, the motion was amended and was carried without dissent.

The amended motion brought on a two-hour debate on labor problems in general, and Liberal House Leader Mitchell Hepburn made a brief contribution which brought Provincial Treasurer Leslie Frost to his feet. Mr. Hepburn recalled that the Progressive Conservatives, when in Opposition, refused to name any members to a select committee on labor, and Mr. Frost reviewed the labor record of the Hepburn Government.

Reviews Record

"Just to keep the record straight," said Mr. Frost. "It was the democratic member for Elgin who promised to bar the C.I.O. at the border. If he had had his way about 20 of the honorable members over there," indicating the C.C.F., "would be on Navy Island or somewhere else. The reactionary Tories, as the member for Elgin likes to call us, never presumed to deny to the workingmen of this Province the union of their choice. This the member for Elgin distinctly did. In 1938 the then Minister of Labor, Mr. McBride, promised advanced labor legislation. We never heard of it again.

"In 1938 the then Minister of Labor, David Croll, introduced a bill to apply the principle of collective bargaining. The Premier, then in Opposition, supported this bill and it was eventually killed. Mr. Croll never had the opportunity of bringing it up. The Government of which the member for Elgin was the head said that advanced labor legislation would be given careful consideration by the Government. In 1939, I believe it was, Mr. Croll, sitting in 'bad boys' row,' introduced labor legislation which was supported by the present Government. The Government of the day voiced support of the Croll bill and on the last day of the session the Government said the principle of the bill was not acceptable to the Government. Mr. Croll publicly expressed his disappointment."

Mr. Frost dealt with the collective bargaining bill sponsored by the then Minister of Labor, Peter Heenan. This bill created a split in the Liberal Government's ranks and the purpose of naming a committee on labor was to try to solve those difficulties.

Ditched Labor Court

"These progressive Liberals couldn't make up their minds on collective bargaining after nine years in office," remarked Mr. Frost. "On several occasions we in the Opposition had voiced our support of the principle of collective bargaining and had supported the Croll bill. We asked the Government to make up its mind, and when the Government announced it was going to name a committee we felt that this was entirely unnecessary. One of the things we violently opposed then was the infamous Labor Court. At the first opportunity we did away with it.

"Never during the lifetime of his Government was a collective bargaining bill introduced," declared Mr. Frost, referring to the Hepburn Administration. "The bill was introduced after the retirement of the member for Elgin. So he is clear. He is right out of the picture.

"There is a big difference between a Progressive Conservative and a reactionary Liberal from Elgin," concluded the Provincial Treasurer.

In speaking to the motion, Mr. Salsberg said there was no indication in the Speech from the Throne of the Government's intention to name a labor committee, and he viewed the motion as the Government's way out of avoiding certain defeat. Dealing with labor problems, he said that Ontario is facing a serious labor crisis.

Says Plants Affected

"There is a steady deterioration in labor relations and some of the largest plants in this Province are affected," said Mr. Salsberg, who urged that the committee be instructed to report this session so that its recommendations could be implemented.

Arthur Williams (C.C.F., Ontario) claimed that the difficulties besetting labor were due to the determination of a small but influential group of industrial magnates to prevent labor from becoming a democratic force. Mr. Williams was critical of delay in cases handled by the Labor Relations Board, mentioning one case pending since last October.

Mr. Hepburn maintained that the labor committee might bring in recommendations that would be of no value because the House might be adjourned or dissolved. He caused laughter by observing: "I wasn't sure I was in Opposition until the Premier's tirade of yesterday. If he intends to blow a fuse tomorrow he had better get his Minister of Health to sit beside him."

Delays Caused

Labor Minister Charles Daley said that the Labor Relations Board was set up to replace the Labor Court at the insistence of labor. One of the things it was hoped would be eliminated under the board was the judicial atmosphere of the Labor Court, Mr. Daley said. But now the trend was distinctly toward unions as well as companies bringing lawsuits before the board and in this way causing delays.

Mr. Daley said that after a year's operation it was possible that some beneficial changes could be made in the legislation setting up the Labor Relations Board. He believed that there was a growing realization on the part of management of their responsibilities toward the people who worked for them. There was no desire on their part to "beat down the worker," he said.

Attorney-General Leslie Blackwell and Opposition Leader E. B. Jolliffe made brief remarks on the labor motion. The former recalled that when representatives of the present Government went to Ottawa shortly after coming into office, to attend a conference on labor problems, every effort was made by Ontario to have the conference agree that there was no such thing as peace industry in wartime, and that a national labor code should be enacted for all industry.

"If in wartime with its stress on unity there was no chance of getting a national labor code, then the chance of getting it in peace appears to be hopeless," said Mr. Blackwell.