

MR. H. M. BLAIR SAYS HE WAS ASKED TO PLAY SICK

Ex-Secretary of the Public Works Department Says Premier Wanted Him to Take a Trip for His Health--Says Col. Guthrie Can Verify the Statement.

(Continued from page 1.)

Two Propositions.

He then returned to Premier Clarke with my replies, and came back to my home between 5 and 6 o'clock of the same afternoon. He then had two propositions to make, both of them from Premier Clarke. The first was that I should "play sick and remain away from the office," to which I replied "there was no Flemming about me."

"If you won't do that," Colonel Guthrie said, "the Premier wants to know if you won't go away for a while—say to Boston or somewhere—and you will get your salary cheques just the same."

My reply to that was that "I was no Bill Berry."

I was assured by Colonel Guthrie at that time that I was taking the proper course and he would stand by me.

During my conversation with him, while he was making these propositions to me from Premier Clarke, my wife and another lady (the wife of a prominent citizen of Fredericton) were in the next room within hearing, and can vouch for the accuracy of every word of this conversation. In addition to this, I understand from several people that they are prepared to make affidavits that the same facts were related to them by Colonel Guthrie regarding the propositions of Premier Clarke made through him for me to "play sick or go away."

Immediately after Colonel Guthrie had made these propositions to me on behalf of the premier, I rang up the Minister of Public Works, who was my chief, and related the circumstances to him. He was very angry that such proposals should have been made and again urged me to remain and see the thing through to the end.

This all occurred on Friday. On the Saturday following I went to the Public Works office and attended to my duties as usual. Premier Clarke was in his office in the same building. I naturally expected that after the messages he had sent by Colonel Guthrie that he would send for me, or communicate personally with me, but he did not do so, and I had no word whatever from him up to the hour of the office closing.

The 'Phone Message.

During the same Saturday afternoon at 5.20 p.m., I was called by telephone at my own home, and on answering the 'phone the party at the other end said it was "Clarke speaking." I asked "What Clarke," and he said "Premier Clarke." He asked me if I knew what he wanted to talk to me about, and I said "No." He then said that it related to those charges. I told him Colonel Guthrie had been to see me about some charges which had been laid against me, and I asked him (Premier Clarke) if he would please tell me what the charges contained, for Colonel Guthrie had been unable to state what they were and I was still in the dark as to the nature of them.

He said they referred to certain monies having been paid me for rake-off on gasoline purchased by the department, that I had also been charged with receiving certain moneys from the contractor who built the Normal School annex, and that I had been charged with holding stock in a company doing business with the department.

I told him the charges were serious,

if true, but that they were absolutely untrue. He then asked me what I proposed to do about it. I told him Col. Guthrie had been to me, acting as his messenger and had conveyed his request to me, among other things, that I should resign, which of course, under the circumstances, not knowing what the charges contained, I had refused.

I asked the Premier just what he meant by such procedure. I inquired from him if this was a British country or a German one. I told him I was a British subject, and demanded the rights which were mine under the British flag, and that I did not propose to stand for German methods. I asked him if he did not think it would have been the proper course to have sent for me and have shown me the charges and asked me to plead either "guilty" or "not guilty," and if that would not have been the course adopted by any person who was intent on giving fair play. He admitted that he had made a mistake in the way he had handled this matter, but at the same time wished to assure me emphatically that he was my friend. I told him I did not think much of such friendship.

Again—Two Propositions.

He then asked me if I would consider two propositions that he had to make—the first was that I "would play sick and remain at home," which I absolutely refused to do, and I stated to him that I was no Flemming. He then asked me if I "would go away for a while—say to Boston," and assured me that he would see that I got my salary regularly. I replied that I was no Bill Berry. I stated to him that I was absolutely innocent, and for me to pursue either course he advised would be proof conclusive in the public mind that I was guilty and that public opinion would be so much against me that I would be thought guilty by everyone.

He then asked me if I had any proposition to make to him, and I stated that I was innocent and I would fight the case to a finish, but all I asked for was a chance to meet my traducers. He said: "Harry, I know you are a fighter; we all know that, but I just thought either one of these two plans would be the best way out of it."

He said: "You know they would be very sore if you went back to the office," and I said, "Who do you mean by 'they'?" He said, "The people who laid these charges." I said: "Mr. Premier, it seems to me you are showing them more consideration than you are showing me," and he said, "Now, Harry, I am your friend and I tried to do everything for the best."

He again asked me just what I proposed to do, and if I had any propositions to make. I told him that if he would call a meeting of the Government at once, I would attend such a meeting and demand that the charges be investigated. He then agreed to get in touch with the Attorney General, as he stated he himself was leaving for Clifton Springs that afternoon and that he had only a few moments to catch his train, but that he would wire the Attorney General before leaving, or at the Junction, and instruct him to call a meeting of the Government in St. John on the Monday following. He asked me if I would arrange to notify the witnesses and take

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"them with me to St. John on Monday. I refused, stating that I did not feel that I should be called upon to arrange for witnesses under the circumstances, and he agreed with me. I suggested that Colonel Guthrie, who represented this constituency, and who resided here in Fredericton, might attend to this arrangement for him. He said that would be all right, that they would attend to that."

He told me that he was leaving for Clifton Springs on account of his health, and that he was greatly worried over this episode.

My wife was present in the room with me while I had the above telephone conversation with the Premier, and as soon as I got through 'phoning I repeated the Premier's conversation to her. I then rang up the Minister of Public Works at Newcastle and told him the Premier's conversation in detail, as set out above. The Minister was astounded at the Premier's proposition. He advised me to fight the matter to a finish and stated that he would be in St. John on Monday and would do everything in his power to see that I got fair play.

Mr. Baxter Comes In.

On Sunday afternoon I received a long distance call from the Attorney General at St. John. The Attorney General stated that the Premier had wired him that I wished to speak to him, and I told him that it was the Premier's promise that a meeting should be called in St. John on Monday to investigate certain charges against me. The Attorney General asked me if I would arrange to bring down the witnesses, and I told him "No," that I did not think I should be asked to do that, and I referred him to Colonel Guthrie; at the same time I assured the Attorney General that I would attend the meeting in St. John on Monday, and did attend such meeting.

Colonel Guthrie, M. L. A., went to St. John with me and attempted on one or two occasions after our arrival there to obtain a copy of the charges against me. He was unable to do so because the Attorney General informed him that they were in the hands of Acting Premier Murray, and I want to emphasize the fact that during all this time I had been deprived of the privilege of knowing anything beyond the brief facts given me over the telephone by Premier Clarke, concerning the charges against me.

There was a meeting of the government that night in the government rooms in St. John, and Acting Premier Murray presided. Besides him there were present Hon. Dr. Landry, Hon. Mr. Baxter and Hon. John Morrissey, as well as Colonel Guthrie and myself.

The Acting Premier, Hon. Mr. Murray, immediately informed me that certain charges had been laid against me and asked whether I was innocent or guilty. I told him that before replying to that question I would like to know what the charges were.

Hon. Mr. Murray then expressed surprise that I had not seen the charges, and equal surprise was expressed apparently by his colleagues, Dr. Landry and Hon. Mr. Baxter. Hon. Dr. Landry, who had the charges in his possession at the time, handed them to me, and for the first time I knew the particulars of the allegations made by Mr. Colby.

After reading the charges I answered the direct question of Hon. Mr. Murray, stating emphatically that I was "not guilty" of the gasoline charges or receiving money from the Normal School contractor, but that I had had a certain amount of stock of the Concrete Construction Company in my position for a short time, while I was considering a proposition of theirs to resign my position in the Public Works Department and accept the management of their company for the eastern provinces. I further stated to them at the time that if the charges had not been of such serious moment to me, I would have considered them as a joke, they were so false and ridiculous. I demanded, however, that an investigation be held at once and that it be held in public.

Hon. Mr. Murray then said that they would consider the matter of an investigation, but remarked further:

"Harry, there is another matter that we wish to ask you about: Did you make the statement that if you were put out of your position you would put out of business seven members of the Legislature, including two members of the Government?"

I replied, "No, sir, that is not the statement I made, but I did say that if I were not given a square deal and if any attempt was made to railroad me out of my position, that I had the goods to hit back with and that I was

some hitter."

When the Time Comes.

Mr. Baxter then asked me would I please tell them just what I had.

I replied, "No, not now; what I have are facts and if I have occasion to, I will tell them when the time seems opportune."

Mr. Murray then replied that the above was not the statement that had been made to him, and I told him that I had made the above statement to Luther B. Smith in the Royal Hotel in St. John that afternoon, and that I was perfectly willing that he should call Mr. Smith and ask him if the above was not the exact statement I had made. I might add that the next evening, on my way to Fredericton, I referred the above statement to Luther B. Smith, who accompanied me up on the Fredericton train, and he agreed that it was exactly as I had stated to him.

Hon. Mr. Murray then brought up another matter, stating that I had been charged with giving information from the Department of Public Works to the Opposition, and I replied that the Hon. Mr. Morrissey (who was present) had instructed me that the records in our department were public, that there was nothing to conceal, and that at any time, as he had frequently stated in the House, the accounts were open to the inspection of any hon. member or any citizen of New Brunswick.

Hon. Mr. Morrissey then interrupted me to say: "That is correct and those were my orders to Mr. Blair and if you wish information from the records of my department kept from the public, you will have to pass an 'order-in-council' as I will not be responsible for withholding information that the public are entitled to, as we are only stewards of the people."

Mr. Baxter then stated that he understood that that "damn club-footed Carter" had been getting information from the public works department and that if he had his say he would not allow him around any department.

I told Mr. Baxter and the other members of the government that Mr. Dugal had called at the department several times, in company with either Mr. Carter or Mr. Veniot, and had requested permission to see certain public documents which were on file in my office, that I had each time referred to the minister of public works for his permission to let these gentlemen see the documents, and in each case my instructions were as set out above, and on several occasions Mr. Dugal had sent Mr. Carter or Mr. Veniot with a written request that I permit them to see certain public documents relating to expenditure under the department of public works. On each occasion I referred the request to the minister of let them have one damn bit of instructions as set out above.

I then turned to the Hon. Mr. Morrissey and asked him if my statements were not correct, and he replied that they were and that I was

(Continued on page six)

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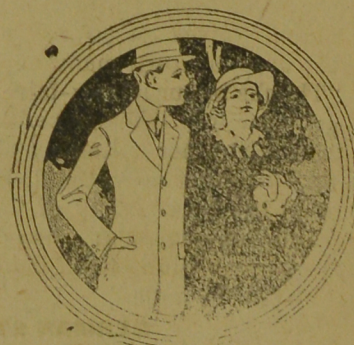
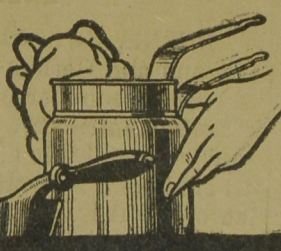
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