

HOUSE DECIDES AGAINST WOMAN SUFFRAGE BILL

Motion to Defer Consideration Until Next Session was Carried by a Vote of 24 to 15--Vigorous Speeches Delivered for and Against the Measure--Premier Foster and Opposition Leader Murray Vote in Favor of the Bill.

The much talked of woman suffrage bill came before the Legislature in committee last evening and after a spirited debate was shelved for a year by a vote of 24 to 15.

The galleries were well filled with ladies and the debate was followed with the closest interest.

The bill was taken up in committee late in the afternoon, with Mr. Bur-

chill in the chair. Dr. Crockett said he rose not to oppose Woman Suffrage but only to express the hope that the matter would receive such consideration that a measure of such importance deserved. He doubted if the propriety of bringing in this legislation had been well considered for he had heard of no very general demand for any such measure. It might be that the trend of public opinion was to extend the franchise to women, but the House needed to have some sort of assurance that there was a general desire for it at the present time. If the House should adopt the measure the logical result must be an immediate appeal to the people for members sitting there could not consistently continue to represent constituencies which would have become obsolete. The country was at present in the midst of a great war and it might be well to let a matter of this importance remain until the war was over. Sir Robert Borden had promised to take up the matter of Woman Suffrage in the wider field of Dominion politics. It might be well if the Legislature were to postpone action until the Dominion parliament had pronounced on the question. It might of course be asked why if the Dominion Government in the midst of such a crisis as at present existed could find time to take up this matter why could not this Legislature do so. His reply would be that the matter should have the fullest consideration beforehand. He was not unmindful of the great part women were playing in

the great empire struggle which was now going on and he felt that they deserved the handsomest recognition for all they had done. All that he asked for was time to consider the matter. There was no emergency and nothing would be lost by delaying the matter for the present time. He was prepared to admit in the fullest possible manner that to extend the franchise to women would undoubtedly tend to elevate the standard of public life but he still had his doubts as to whether the time was yet quite ripe to put the measure into operation.

Hon. Dr. Roberts.

Hon. Dr. Roberts said that this important measure affecting approximately one-half of the population, had on the present occasion been advanced two steps farther than at any time in as being congenial and as an indication the reception accorded to it thus far its previous history. He looked upon that it was recognized as a just and popular measure. He admitted that when first approached to take charge of the bill he looked upon the question in a somewhat disinterested manner, representative no doubt, of many of the other members. When he first took the matter up he was something of a "doubting Thomas" but the more and more he looked into its true significance he had become an ardent convert to and an active supporter of the cause. He was therefore anxious to see the measure become law as a tribute to the loyalty of the women of New Brunswick. He did not wish to repeat the arguments he had used on

the last occasion when he spoke upon the subject, but there was one matter to which he did not then refer and that was to the debt of gratitude which this province and the Dominion, in fact, the whole British Empire owes to women for the great part they have taken in the great world war, an indebtedness that time would never permit of repayment. Mothers had given their very life's blood in the person of their husbands and sons, sometimes giving their boy, others giving the whole family, all done in order that they might do their share in maintaining British freedom. A few members of the House had intimated to him that in case the bill did not go through it would be because the wives of some of them were not eager for such legislation, such reasoning was simply one of sentiment. Men were not accustomed to seeing women exercising the franchise and had held aloof. Should the measure become law in this province as it already had in the majority of the provinces of Canada those who were living 15 or 20 years ahead would wonder as to the peculiar condition of affairs extant when women did not have a vote. The same sort of conditions existed as to the education of women a few years ago, it being considered at one time a fatal blow to order and the home for women to have an education. What a strange proposition that seems in the present day. In closing he appealed to the House to support the measure and so place New Brunswick in line with her prosperous sister province.

Mr. Magee's Views.

Mr. Magee said that the matter had occupied the minds of legislatures the world over with what results the members well knew. In many countries woman suffrage had been in existence for years. Personally he favored the principle. It was one of the principles of the Liberal party and he believed that the state would be benefited if woman suffrage were universal but whatever his personal views might be he must consider first the views of those who sent him to the House to represent them. He was not aware of any agitation in Westmorland for the extension of the franchise and until he had further consulted his constituents he did not think he would be doing them justice to vote on a matter of so much importance without knowing just what their views were. He should have to ask for a referendum on the subject and he would suggest that it be taken at the next civic election at which women as well as men would be qualified to vote.

Mr. Mersereau agreed entirely with what had been said by the hon. members for York and Westmorland. Until there was a universal movement for woman suffrage he could not support the bill.

Mr. McGrath also agreed and said he had no requests from any constituents to support the bill. He, however, had been much impressed with the importance of the subject which was one which should be seriously studied.

Hon. Mr. Roberts said he could not help feeling surprised at the anxiety displayed by some members to please their constituents. He had sat there for four or five weeks but that was the first occasion on which he had heard the wishes of constituents taken into consideration.

Unanswerable Argument.

Hon. Mr. Robinson said he had received petitions from the lady school teachers in the City of Moncton, also from members of the Sunshine Bible Class asking him to support the measure, also a resolution from the Trades and Labor Council to the same effect. He noticed no very strong arguments against the measure and as far as he could see the arguments used for it were unanswerable. He could never understand why men wanted to dominate the whole situation. Women were their equals in intelligence and loyalty and failing any convincing arguments to the contrary he would support the bill.

The Opposition Leader.

Mr. Murray (Kings) said that when this measure came up in the House in 1903 he moved that it be given three months' hoist. That was nine years ago and he had the opportunity of thinking the matter over considerably since then. The plea had been put up that the matter should receive further consideration but the cause of woman suffrage had been before the country for years and was now a live issue. The same remarks that he made on a previous occasion appealed to him just as forcibly at present, but at the same time he felt that in view of what women had done during the last two or three years their request should not be lightly regarded and he had come to the conclusion that he would support the bill.

Changes His Views.

Mr. Tilley said he would be sorry to see the bill put over and he did not expect that suggestion from the Government side of the House, in fact, he expected to see this bill brought in as a Government measure. He had opposed the measure in 1913 because he did not think there was a general demand for it. Now he would support it for two reasons, first that conditions of the war have put women in a different sphere in regard to the duties they had undertaken, and the situation that was arising would need more of that attitude from the women; secondly because political life would undoubtedly be clarified by their active participation in politics. The public was sick to death of political scandals no matter which party they were committed by and the presence of women would help to clear them up.

The House resumed at 8 o'clock. Mr. Campbell said that he would yield to no man his regard for the fair sex and he felt that he enjoyed a fair share of their confidence as they enjoyed his. The people of his constituency when they elected him to the Legislature gave him no mandate to vote in favor of the bill. He did not think the time was opportune to grant the franchise to women. His hon. colleague (Tilley) had been opposed to woman franchise in 1913 and he noticed by the published debates of that year that he had used very strong arguments against it. It was impossible for him to tell just what position his hon. colleague might take on the question next year. He would congratulate him on the graceful manner in which he had performed the somersault, but his conversion was so sudden that he (Campbell) had some doubts in regard to its value. It had been said that

women were entitled to the franchise because of the self-sacrificing work they had done in connection with the war. They had certainly accomplished much but they did it to help their brothers and fathers and not for the sake of getting the vote. As to the bill itself he had examined it in committee and had been struck by its unworkability. It not only proposed to give women the franchise but sought to make them eligible as members of the Legislature. Although in some respects it would be delightful to have a lady sitting beside him he could say on behalf of his hon. colleague (Potts) that they had got along very nicely even though he showed a disposition to wobble on the bill. The petition had only asked for the franchise but the bill in asking that they be made eligible for membership in the House had gone much farther. Its passage would mean the unloading of responsibility upon the women which they should not be asked to carry. He had a letter in his possession from a citizen of St. John who had pointed out that the first woman to cast her ballot in St. John under the municipal franchise act had personated another lady.

Mr. Potts said he thought the time was opportune for placing the Woman's Franchise bill upon the records of the House. He saw no reason why women should be kept in the background today as they surely had as much right to progress as the manhood of the country.

Hon. Mr. Roberts stated that he had received petitions in favor of the bill from different towns and cities in the province and would lay them on the table of the House.

Opposed to Bill.

Mr. Robinaud said he wanted to place himself on record as being opposed to the bill. He did not think the time was opportune for granting the franchise to women. He thought the passage of such a measure would have the tendency to lower women from the high and responsible position they now occupied to the turmoil of political life. He hoped that the bill would get the six months' hoist in order to give hon. members an opportunity to study the question more carefully.

Hon. Mr. Veniot Against It.

Hon. Mr. Veniot said he recognized the gratitude due to women especially since the beginning of the war and he felt that no man had had greater opportunities to recognize it than himself. Having been a witness to the great sacrifice made by women during the past three years he thought they should not be brought down to the level of politics. The hon. member for St. John (Tilley) had expressed surprise that the bill had opposition on the right of the Speaker and that it had not been brought down as a government measure. He wished the hon. member to understand that members on his (Veniot's) side of the House enjoyed just as much independence as those who sat on the left of the Speaker. He (Veniot) wished it understood that even had the bill been brought down as a government measure it would not have had his support. The hon. member (Tilley) had been a member of the House for some years but had found no fault with the late government for not making woman suffrage a government measure. Had he possessed any influence with that government he might have secured the passage of such a measure as the opposition in the late House consisted of only two members. The hon. member (Tilley) had voted and spoken against woman suffrage when it was before the House on a previous occasion. He had then made the claim that he spoke as a representative of 75 or 80 per cent. of the women who did not want the franchise. The hon. member for St. John who was fathering the bill had at first been opposed to it but material which had been placed in his hands had caused him to change his mind. Some of the arguments which he (Veniot) had heard on the day the bill was presented had convinced him that he should oppose it.

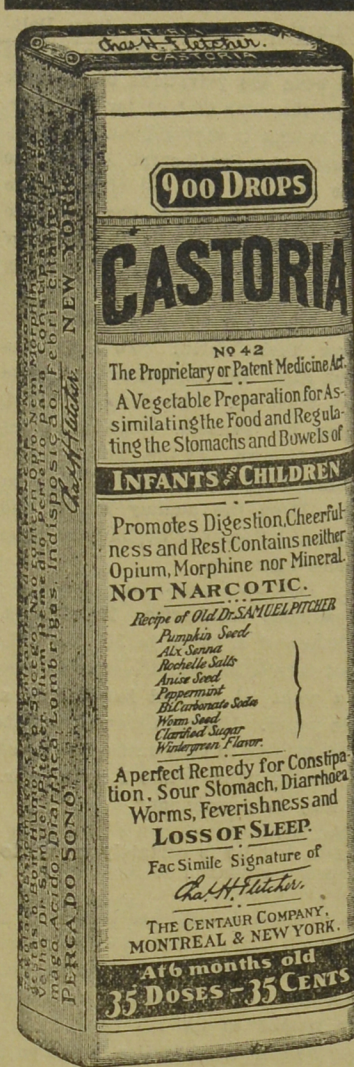
Mr. Tilley said that if the hon. member had read the evening papers he would know that woman suffrage had passed the British parliament.

Mr. Sweeney — "Only the principle was approved."

Hon. Mr. Veniot wanted to know if the vote in the British Parliament had caused the hon. member from St. John to change his mind.

Mr. Tilley—No, I changed my mind a year ago.

(Continued on page 7.)



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