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DEBATE IN PARLIAMENT OVER THE CUSTOMS INVESTIGATION; VOTE TO BE TAKEN TONIGHT

report of the Customs probe opened in the House of Commons today. There were again such scenes as were witnessed when the first test of strength between Liberals and Conservatives came on the dramatic opening day of session. Paul Mercier, Liberal of St. Henri, Montreal, who was chairman of the Customs Committee, first moved adoption of the Customs report which does not make any specific reference to the responsibility of Hon. G. H. Boivin, present minister of customs.

Hon. H. H. Stevens, Conservative, Vancouver Centre, whose charges led to the appointment of the Customs Committee then moved an amendment which constituted a motion of censure not only on Mr. Boivin but on the government also.

Hon. G. H. Boivin spoke in his own defense. He took in turn the charges made against him and against his responsibility. He read a letter from the Deputy Minister of Justice to show that he had acted within his authority in deferring the commitment of Moses Aziz to jail and gave his reasons for so doing.

Dugald Donaghy, of North Vancouver, a Liberal member of the committee spoke briefly before adjourning the debate.

Tomorrow afternoon, the fight will be resumed with the critical division in all probability, tomorrow night.

In opening the debate, Paul Mercier Liberal, St. Henri, chairman of the committee, moved that the third and final report of the committee investigating the department of customs be concurred in.

Basis For Improvement.

In making his motion, Mr. Mercier said that the committee was convinced that the House would find in the report the material necessary upon which to base a re-organization and improvement of the preventive service. A well-organized preventive service was a great assistance to a nation in the collection of revenue and for the adequate safeguarding of trade and commerce.

The Department of Customs and Excise was, he said, one of the most difficult to administer. Evidence taken before the committee had demonstrated the personality of the minister was continually exposed to various influences. Members of Parliament from all parties came to him to obtain favors on behalf of their electors, begging for minimum fines or the suspension of proceedings already referred to the courts of the country. Before passing final judgment members should recall that the minister of a department was a public man—a man who belonged to the public—and as such he was continually subject to censure.

Influenced by Compassion.

It should be remembered, continued Mr. Mercier, that a member of the House might become, one day, a member of the Cabinet. Could he be always expected to make no error when perhaps he was influenced by a sense of compassion or a desire to help those with whom he had to work in the course of his public business if such a desire "takes control for a moment of his heart and mind," he might perhaps make a mistake.

Would it not be better, asked Mr. Mercier, to take this opportunity of educating the public to the sterner code, would it be better to teach the lesson that a voter cannot always depend on the benevolence of his representative in Parliament or the humanity of a minister?

Hon. Mr. Stevens Speaks.

Hon. H. H. Stevens (Conservative, Vancouver Centre) complimented Mr. Mercier on his speech and on his work as chairman of the Customs Committee. Mr. Mercier's record of having presided over 115 sittings of the committee was probably unequalled.

Mr. Stevens thought that he detected in Mr. Mercier's speech a consciousness "that there has been serious dereliction of duty on the part of public men." He had uttered, "out of the goodness of his heart" a plea for those who had been guilty of dereliction. There were times, said Mr. Stevens, when Parliament had a duty to perform and it was perhaps wiser not to consult the heart but to consult a sense of duty.

Charges Justified.

Mr. Stevens believed that the result of the customs probe had justified the charges which he made in the House at the beginning of the session and which, he thought, were now proved to have been based on facts. Mr. Stevens paid tribute in passing to the work of R. P. Sparks and those associated with him in the businessmen's probe into smuggling which had been carried on for two years before

the Parliamentary investigation began.

With the majority of the report Mr. Stevens was in entire accord. He regretted that it did not contain, however, a finding with regard to the conduct of the Minister of Customs. Failure to comment on that subject might mean, he said, that the full force of the lesson which was to be taught to the whole customs organization might be lost. Before the end of his speech he said he intended to move an amendment which would remedy this failure.

Department Going Back.

The customs department had been degenerating in efficiency for some time and during recent years at an accelerated rate, said Mr. Stevens. Hon. Jacques Bureau, former minister, had been derelict in his duties as a minister.

"He perverted his opportunities of service to the state to the distribution of indulgences to his favorites," said Mr. Stevens, referring to Mr. Bureau. "The vast revenues the department collected, amounting to over \$300,000,000 annually, which he ought to have jealously guarded were left unprotected, the easy prey of mendacious individuals. High officials with a long career of faithful service were debauched by him; an almost unpassable picture in comparative shame."

Known to Premier.

"His conduct was well known to the Prime Minister and his assistants yet he was allowed to resign and was rewarded with a seat in the Senate, while his puppets are driven out of the service," he continued. Mr. Stevens proceeded to quote correspondence passing between R. P. Sparks, president of the Commercial Intelligence Department, and the Prime Minister in which Mr. Sparks drew the attention of Premier King to the conditions in the customs department. On Feb. 4, 1925, Mr. Sparks had written to the Prime Minister submitting that conditions in the department required departmental changes. This, said Mr. Stevens, was more than a year before the opening of the recent investigation into the customs department. About three weeks after Mr. Sparks had written a further letter to the Prime Minister dealing with the acquittal of J. E. A. Bisailon. Mr. Sparks insisted that the Prime Minister had been warned in both letters and conference of the true situation. On March 20, 1925, Mr. Sparks had written to the Prime Minister declaring that there was sufficient evidence to warrant the dismissal of Bisailon.

Reply of Cabinet.

To this letter a reply had been received signed by E. J. Lemaire, clerk of the Privy Council, stating that it would receive due consideration. The laxity of Hon. Jacques Bureau "and his countenance of evil-doers was well known to the Prime Minister long ago," declared Mr. Stevens.

Officers of the department, under the influence of the minister had made important decisions affecting the public revenue which were repugnant to the facts, said Mr. Stevens. "Losses and discrepancies as disclosed by the investigation could have been effectively concluded if the statutes had been properly enforced by conscientious officers—uninfluenced by ministerial interference," continued Mr. Stevens. "In other words, it was not lack of legislation but weak administration that caused the breakdown."

"Haven of Refuge."

Mr. Stevens said that the evidence showed that motor thefts and smuggling are intimately associated. "Case after case was submitted which showed that professional automobile thieves found in the customs department a haven of refuge wherein to cover up their nefarious traffic," he declared.

On Extensive Scale.

The evidence disclosed before committee demonstrated that wholesale commercial smuggling was being practiced on an extensive scale and that customs and excise duties and sales taxes were being systematically evaded. The audits were very incomplete, disclosing losses subject to possible recovery of over \$1,750,000, actions at law to recover which ought to be taken forthwith. "These losses, disclosed by the auditors, are undoubtedly but a fragment of what have occurred, and for the recovery of which actions must be taken," said Mr. Stevens.

Mr. Stevens referred to the clearance of liquor presumably for some foreign port, such as Nassau. This was one of the most prolific sources for the evasion of the law. Mr. Stevens thought that the administration and officials were either too simple to be

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in the position or were deliberately condoning the traffic.

Searching Examination.

"To effectively investigate the possible losses from this cause," said Mr. Stevens, "will require a most searching examination of the books and records of those concerned, as well as some clever police work to check up the documents tendered as genuine but which are frequently false."

"Another method disclosed in the evidence," said Mr. Stevens, "was that followed by the notorious Cooper, Hushion, George gang of bootleggers, by shipment on the Bernard M. and Frank H. In these cases, cargoes of liquor would be billed from a foreign port via the St. Lawrence and Great Lakes to Port Arthur, and thence by rail and sea to Japan. These shipments, however, never reached Port Arthur, but were actually distributed somewhere on the lakes east of Windsor."

Doubtful of Minister.

One of the things to be considered by the House was whether the present minister could be trusted to prosecute those who had been exposed in the probe. For instance, "will the Minister dare to prosecute Hushion?" asked Mr. Stevens. The former M. P. had bought the barge Tremblay's alcohol for this gang, which had sold it without paying excise, he said.

Following his reference to multi-millionaires who were "unscrupulous bootleggers" Mr. Stevens named the Dominion Distillers, "this man Cooper," the George Companies and Mr. Hushion as having broken the laws of Canada and "a friendly neighboring nation" through their sales.

Woodsworth Intervenes.

J. S. Woodsworth (Labor, Winnipeg North Centre), interrupted to ask if the probe had revealed serious smuggling operations at any other point than Rock Island. Mr. Stevens said that only a part of the Dominion had been thoroughly investigated. Personally, he believed conditions at the border cities were "not much better."

Three major prosecutions should be carried out, continued Mr. Stevens, the Gaunt case, the Dominion Distillers and the Group at Rock Island. The Gaunt case have been evidently settled by the acting minister, Hon. P. J. A. Cardin, for \$3,400, when the proper penalties should run into \$53,000.

Reviews Tremblay Case.

Mr. Stevens reviewed the facts in connection with barge Tremblay case. He said that the alcohol some sixteen thousand gallons was placed in the King's bond at Montreal and remained there until December 1925. During the autumn of that year Chief Preventive Officer Wilson wrote to a number of firms for bids for this alcohol, which were unsatisfactory. During December 1925, the Minister of Customs opened "private negotiations with W. J. Hushion, Ex-M. P." and eventually the alcohol was sold to the Dominion Distillers for 36 cents a gallon. "The customs law declares that all seized goods should be sold at not less than duty paid value, which in this instance would equal \$10.50 a gallon instead of 36 cents, Mr. Stevens said. The question before the House, Mr.

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