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Review of Parliamentary Session At Ottawa

(By Our Own Correspondent.)
OTTAWA, June 11 (Special by mail)

As stated in a former letter, the House of Commons in its session of four months and a half was remarkable for its lack of constructive legislation rather than for anything else. It had as little to show for the time spent as any previous session of Parliament. Of the 41 public bills which received Royal assent, outside of the estimates and other money and Budget bills, every one was in the form of amendments to the existing legislation. The estimates, however, and money bills for loans to harbor commissioners at Quebec, Halifax and Quebec and for the beautification of Ottawa and its purlieus were not new in the sense of being unusual and only constructive in the material sense, but they were certainly lavish. Essentially, the second session of the sixteenth Parliament was a hand-out session. Over \$375,000,000 was authorized in the main and supplementary estimates, and statutory appropriations to the extent of \$46,000,000 were passed, as follows: \$39,000,000 on account of the Canadian National Railways; loan to the Quebec Harbor Commissioners; \$8,500,000 to the Saint John Harbor Commissioners; \$5,000,000 to the Halifax Harbor Commissioners; \$500,000 to the Federal District Commissioners; Ottawa, \$3,000,000. Essentially, it was a spending session. Even economically-minded Mr. Robt, apologizing for what his Scotch caminess could not in his heart approve of, said that in a new, expanding country like Canada, a government which did not spend generously must fall down, and, of course, the government if spending is to keep its feet steady does not intend to fall down. That, as members of the Opposition pointed out, is the fiscal policy of the Government, spending where spending will do most good to the Liberal cause.

In respect of standing up, at no time during the session was the government in danger, its majorities ranging from 11 to 58. MacKenzie King was born under a lucky star—so did Napoleon think of himself—and since he first saw daylight his luck has never deserted him. With the House divided into groups, on any division involving the fate of the Government, the Progressives, the Laborites and the two so-called independents were, and it may safely be predicted, always will be, in resolutions moved by the Progressives or the Laborites, so that the members of these groups are perfectly safe with their constituents

in rampaging on any topic that comes within their political menu, and, of course, these groups cannot see eye to eye with the Conservatives in regard to their fiscal policy. This is particularly true of Mr. Bourassa, who works himself into ecstatic frenzies on his obsessions about Canadian independence and against Great Britain. Their attacks on the government, when they do attack, reminds one of the big, fat, strong English country squire (for whom in this case the government may be substituted for the purposes of the simile) who used to be beaten by his wife. When expostulated with by friends on allowing it, he invariably replied: "If pleases she, and it don't hurt I." The Liberal Progressives, whom Mr. Forke by agreement represents in the Cabinet, are, of course, a joke. If it were postulated by the Government that the moon was made of green cheese instead of the albumen of hard wheat they would vote cheese.

If the House of Commons were not productive in noteworthy legislation, the Senate was fertile in divorce bills. No less than 243 measures of "relief" were passed. So great was the burden imposed on the Senate divorce committee in hearing evidence that that body has gone on strike and demands relief for itself. The Senate has given notice to the Commons that hereafter it will not hear divorce cases except from Quebec. The record was set this year, the cases being practically all from Ontario, to the courts of which province the Senate wishes applications for relief to be referred. Now that the world has settled down to "normalcy," and the war can no longer be held responsible for temperamentalism, the question is being discussed "Why?"

It was interesting to note how the new rules worked out. It was thought that limiting speeches to forty minutes would shorten debates. In practice it has done nothing of the kind. On the other hand, it has greatly increased the number of speakers. The speeches on the Address and on the Budget, greatly outnumbered those of last year and the actual number of pages of Hansard used up were doubled. But there is the other fact that when a speaker is in the middle of his theme there comes the irritation of being checked up and having to sit down. It is true that the new rules were almost unanimously adopted last year and members cannot very well kick—and the Guardian correspondent then predicted that it wouldn't work—and it has not worked out well in practice. It is all very well to point to the Mother of Parliaments and say that the most important speeches there are delivered in forty minutes or less, but there members are trained by necessity to curtailment. Condensation is an art of oratory and not achieved by rule, and obtains nowhere else except in the British Parliament. In our Parliament there are men like Tommy Church, Toronto; Bourassa, of L'Angeles; all of Comox-Alberni (B.C.); Woodsworth, (Labor leader); and a number of the Progressives

who love the spotlight of debate. They submit, but they get their revenge in committee, in talking out private bills, and in moving votes of want of confidence. The ingenuity of members in getting even is displayed as the result of rules restricting the exercising natural rights, and the right of free, unrestricted speech is as old as Parliament itself. Then there is the rule of one hour devoted to private bills which makes it possible for loquacious members, through pique or principle, to talk them out and defeat them regardless of merit. Through the abuse of this rule four important bills, against the evident wishes of a large majority of the House fell by the wayside. It was a significant instance of the tyranny of a small minority, and it was so marked that Mr. Bennett took the ground that it was a derogation of the dignity of Parliament and that the rules which made it possible should be amended, and in that the Prime Minister concurred.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the session was to watch the development of the Hon. Mr. Bennett as leader of the Opposition. The selection of any leader is always an experiment and not always successful. After all, as it must be admitted, his experience in Parliament had not been extensive, and while his ability as a lawyer and debater, and his experience in finance have long been recognized; leadership of a great party involves other and very different qualifications. I shall not say he started off with some timidity, because timidity is not known in his lexicon, but he was obviously feeling his way at first. Before the session was half way through he was sure of his feet and as he progressed he became more and more aggressive and effective. He is amazingly sure of his facts, and although he may have shaded the lines sometimes he is never technically in the wrong and usually in substantially right. The Government dreaded the Hon. Arthur Meighen's barbed shafts, which hurt, but made the members of that side of the House resentful, but the fear Mr. Bennett inspires is of another kind, and on a number of occasions force of reason brought about concessions to his views. The Prime Minister is wise enough not to lock horns with him on questions of fact, of law, or constitutional usage, but the Hon. Messrs. Dunning, Veniot, Forke, and even Ralston rushed in where, figuratively expressed, angels fear to tread, and got their wings scorched.

Mr. Bennett, recognizing that financial reform and retrenchment are among our outstanding problems, has concentrated on finance—his hobby—and throughout the session it was the dominant note of his speeches. He believes in three things, as absolutely necessary, following to some extent the example of President Coolidge—the reduction of the national debt on the lines of consolidation and the creation of a sinking fund for its redemption on an annual statutory basis, the exercise of the strictest economy consistent with the requirements of development, and the expenditure of all public monies for

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ed his position as leader in a remarkable degree and justified his selection at the Winnipeg Convention. He is perhaps not yet as accessible as he might be as a popular leader, and a little difficult of approach. One of his supporters said to me, "I always feel like interviewing an archbishop when I go to see him," but notwithstanding his rather serious taking of himself, he has a very strong sense of humor, which was demonstrated at a dinner given him by members of the House of Commons, and the Senate just before the closing of the session. His speech on that occasion was accompanied more or less by a "scream" of laughter, and where there is sense of humor there is one great factor of leadership. His notable deliverances were on the Address and the Budget. In respect of the latter I append a précis of the high lights. (Continued on page 12)

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