

MR. SIFTON CANNOT EVADE RESPONSIBILITY.

The provincial government is hard put to it to defend its failure to prosecute the Alberta Herold.

"When the war broke out" the Bulletin's leading article yesterday declared "the minister of militia appointed Capt. C. F. Hamilton of Ottawa, as chief newspaper censor for Canada, with a staff of assistants. Instructions were prepared by Capt. Hamilton and sent out to newspapers, setting forth the lines of conduct the papers were required to follow. The department thus assumed, and quite properly, authority to lay down regulations as to what kind of matter relating to the existing circumstances the newspapers were entitled to publish, and did promulgate such regulations. If any papers have been publishing matter not conformable to these rules it is for the department which made the rules to take steps to enforce compliance with them or to prevent a continuance of their violation."

We have before us a copy of the censor's instructions referred to, and also the letter which accompanied them. There is no mention therein of the department's having assumed any "authority to lay down regulations." The letter noted that the newspaper publishers were anxious to co-operate with the minister of militia and defence "to forward the military and naval interests of the country" and in order to effect this object the memorandum was being forwarded by the censor's office giving "the precise information as to what sort of news it was undesirable to publish."

Nowhere in the memorandum is there any reference to the possibility of the appearance of such articles as have found a place in the columns of the Alberta Herold. The department never thought of making regulations to govern such cases. It knew that the criminal law of the country provided for the punishment of those guilty of sedition and it assumed that the provincial governments, having been charged under the B.N.A. Act with the duty of enforcing that law, would proceed to do so.

But the premier of this province has disclaimed all responsibility on the part of his government for such prosecution. In doing so he is playing a political game that in view of the crisis in national and imperial affairs with which we are face to face must be to the lasting disgrace of Alberta.

In the course of Thursday afternoon's debate in the legislature Mr. Sifton stated that "the actions taken throughout the British Empire in regard to treason have all been taken by the war office and it is not left to local authorities to take action in matters of this kind."

How close to the truth this statement of the premier's is may be seen from an article which appears in a recent issue of the London Telegraph. Referring to the great activity of German agents in the old land, it says:

"The country is studded with magistrates, and there are scores of chief constables. Every case in which there is first-hand evidence—circumstantial or otherwise—such as would convict a known criminal in ordinary circumstances ought to be brought to the attention either of a magistrate or the superior police authorities in the locality concerned. If either fails to act, then the facts should be laid before the home office.

"Every precaution sanctioned by humanity and necessary for national safety ought to be taken. We are engaged in a life-and-death struggle, and we cannot afford to leave open a loophole by which we can be injured."

Does the London Telegraph or does Mr. Sifton properly represent what is being done in Great Britain? The extract shows conclusively that the local authorities are not waiting for any instructions from army headquarters to take action. But if justice is not done by them acting according to the ordinary procedure, then the home office, not the war office, intervenes.

The home office is that department of the British government which discharges the duties that, under our federal system in Canada, devolve upon the attorney-generals of the various provinces. In defining the duties of the home secretary the Encyclopaedia Britannica says:

"He is responsible for the maintenance of the King's peace and attends to the administration of criminal justice."

Will Mr. Sifton, in the face of this, still

maintain, as he did on the floor of the house, that his attorney-general has no duty to perform in dealing with such a case as that of the Alberta Herold?