

ACTION FORCED ON CLUB LICENSES

Drastic Decision of Roblin Government Said to Be Result of Recent Disclosures.

Spur of Urgency Behind Move—Pressure Has Been Strengthening For Months.

With one fell sweep that came with startling suddenness, the provincial government on Saturday night closed no less than seven of the notorious all-night clubs of Winnipeg.

That is to say their licenses to sell liquor have been rescinded, which is tantamount to putting them out of business, unless the gambling games can be made to support them. These are the drinking places of low resort which have become familiar to the public in recent months as "Clubs of that class," a term applied to them by Percy Hagel, when on the witness stand.

The proprietors were only given a few hours' notice to close up their bars, and it has developed that the government was shocked into this precipitate action by certain disclosures in connection with the McCoin case. It was the Krafchenko case that brought these clubs into the spotlight, and the government, through fear of further sensations, took prompt action to forestall new revelations to its disparagement.

It has been stated that the man accused of this murder, and another arrested with him on a charge of being an accessory after the fact, were habitués of one of the midnight clubs, and that they met there late in the evening of the day the murder was committed. It appears that the government was contemplating a cancellation of the club licenses, in any event, and that this information supplied by the attorney-general's department forced its hand.

Strong Motive for Drastic Action.

There can be no doubt that there was some strong impelling motive to bring about this sudden and drastic action. It is usually recognized that the government organ in Winnipeg is well posted on the moves of the provincial cabinet. On Saturday morning it published an editorial suggesting that municipal control of this and other temperance problems be arranged for at the next session of the legislature. In the afternoon the government organ told on its front page of the surprising move of the liquor license commission, and stated that the commission had taken this action at a meeting held on Friday afternoon. There is good reason to believe that this action was taken, not on Friday, but on Saturday, under the spur of urgency.

An all-around organization of the liquor license department and its management was being shaped up when the McCoin murder incidents occurred to hurry matters along. "Mike" Johnson, the chief license inspector and his assistant are slated to be dismissed, and the government proposes to place in charge of the department a man agreeable to the temperance interests of the province. It is the general belief that Fleming McGill, at present business agent of the bartenders union, is to be the deputy chief license inspector.

Indication of Public Opinion.

There are several causes that have moved the government to seriously consider reform measures, perhaps the greatest of these being the clear indication of public sentiment as revealed by the recent election. In addition to this, however, there has been strong pressure brought to bear from private sources. About one month ago Premier Roblin was approached by a large deputation of well-known Conservatives. This deputation was organized by the licensed victuallers, otherwise known as hotelmen, and it was urged upon the government that the club licenses be cancelled. The hotelmen have keenly resented the permission given these clubs to sell liquor all night long and all day Sunday, when they themselves have been obliged to close at regular hours. In recent months since the bar trade has fallen off somewhat as a result of the war their antagonism has increased until it was decided to take the action mentioned. A further delegation to press this point was to have waited on the government early this week.

It was impressed upon the government that knowing the usefulness of the clubs as a force in election times their operations had been tolerated, but since they were now useless to the government it was unfair that they be given further support.

Strong opposition to the night clubs came also from the bar-tenders union. They sent a deputation to wait upon the license commission and protested against the indiscriminate licenses issued to bar tenders, who are employed in the night clubs. As a result of their action it is said that any future licenses will be issued under stricter regulations.

Compensation Likely.

Since the sale of liquor was the sole reason for the existence of all the proprietary clubs mentioned the taking away of their licenses will mean a heavy financial loss. It is said that the government is going to deal kindly with its proteges by providing them with hotel licenses, or by compensating them in some other way. At the last

long these club proprietors lent their personal efforts and their club organizations to the Roblin machine to be used in securing votes.

The clubs which lost their licenses on Saturday include the Moose on Pacific avenue; the Garry, on Henry avenue; the Churchill, on Garry street; the Oberon, on Notre-Dame avenue; the Orchestral Musicians, on Fort street; and the Printers club, on Cumberland avenue. The license of the Cosmopolitan club was cancelled some time ago.

These scandalous resorts have been attacked and described so often in the Free Press as to need little further mention. They have been denounced by Mayor Deacon and most of the city clergymen. They are the clubs that "Mr. Pepys" visited last June and described so picturesquely in the Free Press.

Resorts of Gamblers

Attention was first directed to these clubs last January when a royal commission was appointed to investigate the escape of Krafchenko. It was revealed at this hearing and by subsequent investigation that the clubs were a resort for gamblers and men of criminal type. It was observed that drunken men were frequently kicked out into the street when their money was exhausted. They were places where interdicted men could always get a drink, and they were veritable traps for the young manhood of the city.

In these clubs there was supposed to be a nominal membership fee of \$1, but it was scarcely ever collected. The usual passport was the reputation of being a good spender. Electric bells were placed at all doors to ward the poker and crap players of the arrival of license inspectors or the police, and there were trick gaming devices to be folded up and stowed away if occasion should arise. Liquor was dispensed at practically all hours, and there was always a rush to the clubs at 11 o'clock at night when the hotel bars closed. The name "clubs" was a misnomer, for they were operated by a proprietor in the same manner as any hotel, and this was a matter of common knowledge in Winnipeg.

Refused to Take Action.

Several attempts were made, notably at the last session of the provincial parliament, to have these club licenses cancelled, but on each occasion the government refused to take action. In defence of these clubs Premier Roblin referred to them as "Associations of gentlemen." He stated on one occasion "Ministers of the gospel, who the last three weeks have gone through the Moose club are willing to testify that its appointments are of the same class as those of the Adano club."