

MOUNTED POLICE AGAIN SUBJECT OF HOUSE DEBATE

Criticism By Opposition of Change Made in Policy in the West.

The Commons on Saturday went into civil supplementary estimates. On a vote of \$260,000 for equipment and maintenance of the Royal North West Mounted Police, the Prime Minister made a statement which showed that at the outbreak of war, 56 Imperial reservists belonging to the force had been permitted to go to the front; that in 1915-16, 105 members had been permitted to purchase their release and enlist; while many others whose terms expired had also joined the expeditionary force. So great were the enlistments said the Premier that it was found necessary for the Government to make an appeal to the men to maintain the strength of the force. The official strength of the force exclusive of officers should be 1200 men, but its present strength was but 742 men and the commissioner was now engaged in an effort to bring the force up to strength.

Says Men are Idle.

Mr. W. E. Knowles of Moose Jaw said that the 500 men who constitute the police force are practically idle men, and that this was undesirable at a time when men are scarce. This condition, he explained, was due to the cancellation of the former arrangements with the Government of Alberta and Saskatchewan, whereby the mounted police cease to do police work, and now confine their energies to patrol work. The men, he said, would be happier, if they were allowed to help in the harvest fields.

Sir Robert Borden said that Mr. Knowles did not have a proper appreciation of the situation which had existed and which had made the change desirable. He intimated that representations had been made to him of a sufficiently grave character to warrant the most careful preparations being made for the preservation of law and order. It was not thought possible when the change was made that the United States would come into the war during April of this year. The Prime Minister was disposed to agree with Mr. Knowles that conditions have changed. He promised to send the observations made by the member for Moose Jaw to Commissioner Perry and to ask him for a report.

Still Big Need for Force.

Mr. R. B. Bennett, of Calgary, was not disposed to think that many of the police are idle. When trouble was feared, he said, patrols were organized with special regard to the border situation, and the location of the foreign born elements in the provinces. That there was still a need for the force, he said, was quite apparent. In more than half a dozen cases recently barns and crops have been destroyed, presumably by the "enemy within our gates." The force, he went on to say, has charge of a territory 1,000 miles in length, and in Alberta its jurisdiction extends to a point over 300 miles north of Edmonton.

Mr. Bennett went on to say that some persons were disposed to say that the new provincial forces had been organized for political purposes. The chief purpose of their creation, however, was to relieve the Mounted Police of ordinary police duty, more particularly in connection with the enforcement of the new temperance legislation. He said he had always hoped that the provinces would ultimately absorb the force, and maintain on the prairie the scarlet uniform which had so much impressed the newcomers into the country.

Mr. Knowles disclaimed any intention of disapproving of what had been done, but he thought the time had now arrived when some of the men could be relieved for other work.

Says Change a Poor One.

Hon. Frank Oliver said there were two sides to the question, one senti-

mental and the other practical. Probably the sentimental side was the most important. The police force had been identified with law and order in the western country since 1874. They were an institution on which the people could rely, and the people of the West have felt hurt over the setting aside of this force. He thought the time had come when a portion of the force could be asked to do more useful work. The provincial governments, he said, did not want the new arrangement. The proposal of the Dominion Government came as a shock to them, and compelled them to enlist the services of other able-bodied men to carry on the ordinary police work. The change was a poor one from both a business and practical standpoint. The liquor laws in the West had never been so well enforced as in the old days of unorganized territories, when the drastic federal liquor laws were enforced by the police without in any way doing damage to their prestige.

Sir Robert Borden, in reply, said that if the Government had not taken action to prevent disorder, and anything had occurred, no member of the House would have condemned the Government more freely than the member for Edmonton. He had, he said, submitted the plan to the Leader of the Opposition, who for more than 15 years had been in charge of the Northwest Mounted Police. Sir Wilfrid Laurier had concurred entirely, and Mr. Oliver was condemning not only himself, but his own leader. The Government, he said, had received formal notice from at least one province of its desire to discontinue the arrangement then existing, although later on this Government had reconsidered the matter.