

The Grain Growers' Guide

Winnipeg, Wednesday, August 2nd, 1911

PARLIAMENT DISSOLVED ; ELECTIONS SEPT. 21

The die is cast. Canada today has no Parliament. When the governor-general, on the advice of the government, prorogued and dissolved Parliament on Saturday he thereby reduced every member of Parliament to the status of a private citizen. The people have now full power to say, by their ballots on September 21, who will be their representatives in the next Parliament, which will assemble some time in October. The present situation will convince the most skeptical that our system of government is not yet perfect. The election is called at the most inconvenient time of the year, when the bulk of the electors are working night and day to harvest the crops, upon which depends the prosperity of the entire nation. This very fact precludes the possibility of the agricultural population exercising to the full their privileges upon such an occasion. Manifestly this is but scant justice. It necessitates that the people of Canada shall decide in favor of one of the two old political parties. Present day thinkers are convinced that our present party system needs readjustment, to put it mildly, to present day needs and requirements. The elector who does not see eye to eye with either of the two parties is given no consideration, and is in the perplexed position of being compelled to support a party that has not his confidence or of not exercising his franchise. Constitutionally an election can be called at any time, but it was not expected, in the ordinary course of events, till November, 1912. By that time the Redistribution Bill would have been passed, and the Prairie Provinces would have at least fifty per cent. larger representation. Holding an election at the present time disfranchises one-third of the people of these provinces. The injustice of this is beyond question. The blame rests somewhere. Each of the old parties pleads innocence. The Western elector is well informed and will no doubt exercise his judgment upon this point. Again, the Canada Grain Bill has not been passed, and present conditions in the grain trade will continue for another year. This is another injustice to the Western farmers. The farmers' organizations in the three provinces will take no official part in the present election campaign. This has been decided upon by their executive officers. The wisdom of their action is abundantly clear. An attempt to send to Parliament a strong contingent of independent thinkers pledged to the cause of the people could only be successful if conducted upon a large scale and supported by an organization more widespread than the present one. No stream can rise higher than its source. The source of Parliament is the people. If the people are not of one mind as to the needs of the country Parliament cannot be either. An attempt to elect in each Western constituency members pledged to the Farmers' Platform would have been such a severe test upon the farmers' organization, in fact it would have been such a test as the leaders do not think would be warranted at the present time. Far too many of our people are still held in thrall by the party fetish. These ties are growing unmistakably weaker and the continuation of the educational campaign will eventually sever them completely. The certain value of the farmers' organization is of far more importance to the welfare of the West than the possibility of electing a few representatives pledged to the Farmers' Platform, and the certainty of alienating from the organization a large number of strong party men. The organization has

forced upon Parliament the consideration of a number of matters of paramount importance which would otherwise have been ignored. This is a matter for congratulation. Both the organization and Parliament will still remain. Parliament will be no stronger while the farmers' organization will continually increase in strength and influence, and will command increasing respect and consideration from the powers at Ottawa.

It will be of decided value to consider what odds the farmers' organization would face in an attempt to capture the West for democracy at the present time. Both of the old parties are in reality strongly organized and powerful machines. Their one object is to gain control of the treasury benches at Ottawa with the distribution of patronage and the prestige attached thereto. They will have at their command this time larger campaign funds than ever before in the history of Canada. These funds are supplied by Special Privilege and are provided generously for both parties. The party machines have ramifications reaching into every constituency, and will largely control the nomination of candidates. Every candidate nominated by the party machine will be supported by the campaign funds at the disposal of the machine, and necessarily will be a man who will obey the dictates of the machine leaders. Further, there is the closest offensive and defensive alliance between the federal and provincial party machines, and they will work in harmony and for greater efficiency at the present time. This alliance is not a healthy one—for the people. But we all know that the politicians sometimes have ideas of their duties which do not absolutely conform to the true principles of democracy. This indicates the potency of the combination which the farmers' organization would be compelled to face in order to elect men pledged to the Farmers' Platform. The farmers' organization could not cope successfully with such odds in the few weeks at their disposal. However, the situation is not hopeless by any means. Both parties are pledged to enact into law a part of the demands of the organized farmers, so that no matter which way the election goes the farmers stand to gain something. Again, there is an opportunity to see that some of the party conventions nominate men who will stand for the entire Farmers' Platform. These party conventions are being called daily, and will be meeting in the course of the next two weeks to select their candidates. It is the greatest opportunity for action that has ever come before the independent thinking men. They can and should attend the convention of the party most to their liking and make every possible attempt to secure the nomination of a candidate who will support their entire platform. There are a large number of men who have formerly been Liberals or Conservatives, but who disagree with their party in that they firmly believe in the justice of the entire demands of the farmers. Now, if these men turn out in force at their conventions they will have a powerful influence in the nomination of a candidate. If they can secure the nomination of a candidate favorable to the farmers' demands the party machines will be compelled to support that candidate or face a losing fight against the opposing machine candidate. Heretofore the independent thinking electors have made no determined effort to control the machine nomination. They can do so now without in any way endangering the farmers' organization, and with a strong likelihood of defeating the machines at the outset, because even the machine is hopeless without the support

of the convention. There is a probability that one or two independent candidates may be nominated at conventions that have already been called. If this occurs it will give an opportunity for the independent electors in those constituencies to test their strength without endangering the organization as a whole and it will also give an indication of the strength of the independent feeling throughout the country.

Finally, the most important lesson to be learned from the whole situation is that in order to improve conditions generally the beginning must be more fundamental. We must get at the bottom of the trouble. The people of the Prairie Provinces must make the legislatures of these provinces responsive to the will of the people before they can win strength in the wider federal field. This means that we must follow the example of Oregon and have Direct Legislation placed upon the statute books of the three provinces. When that is done the people will be enabled to vote upon principles and not upon men. Party machines will be eliminated because their usefulness will be gone. If the people of the West devote their chief attention to this great and fundamental reform for the next year or two they will then have made real and substantial progress and will have established a foundation upon which can be upreared a true democracy. When Direct Legislation is in effect in the Prairie Provinces the people can then initiate and vote upon their own laws without arousing the bitterness and animosity which is caused by our present elections. Direct Legislation has been officially endorsed by the farmers' organizations of the three provinces, and an energetic campaign of education in favor of this reform will win overwhelming support for it in a very short time. Whichever of the provinces has Direct Legislation upon its statute books first will be considered as the leading democratic province in the Dominion of Canada.

SPELLS DOOM OF PROTECTION

Senator Dixon, of Montana, was one of the opponents of the Canadian reciprocity agreement in the United States. Speaking on the bill in the Senate, he said:

"I have always counted myself a pretty good protectionist. I voted for the Payne bill without any apology. . . . Do not be mistaken gentlemen. Whenever you deliberately, under whatever pressure, destroy the measure of protection that the farmers of this country have enjoyed, that minute the death-knell of protective tariff is rung. . . . When reciprocity passes I am ready to start revising the tariff, and it will not be confined to the wool schedule and the farmers' free list. I am ready to take the whole thing from A to Z; and so far as I am concerned, I am ready to give it a revision that will not be a homeopathic one."

When a protectionist, who supported the Payne-Aldrich high tariff, gets into such a frame of mind it is a very hopeful sign. There is much evidence that the tariff will receive rough handling in the United States during the next few years. Those people in Canada who are urging for the elimination of our protective tariff will be encouraged by the revolt in the republic. The high tariff of the United States has always been the bulwark of protection in Canada. The majority of those in Canada who favor reciprocity regard it as the first step towards wiping out the protective tariff and substituting a more equitable method of raising the revenues.