

Parliament

THE expectation that the Dominion Parliament would close its session last week was not realized, but all the indications are that the remaining business will be disposed of during the present week. The first session of a new Parliament is usually a short one. A Government fresh from an appeal to the country occupies a strong position. An Opposition, whose policy has been rejected by the electorate, does well to bow to the will of the people, and to offer no strenuous hostility to Government measures. These things are usually recognized, and consequently business in the first session moves smoothly and rapidly. It is in later sessions, when the issues of the past election cease to be prominent, that questions arise which make new issues for the next contest. In the present session a large amount of important business has been transacted, with but little of part controversy. There will be a good record of useful work for a very short session.

The next session of Parliament should begin much earlier than the present one. If the amount of debate which often occurs had taken place this year there would be no prorogation this week. The session would run on into midsummer, or longer, as in some past years. The tendency of the session to extend into the summer months was one of the causes which led many business men to decline all proposals contemplating their service in Parliament. This was a serious disadvantage, for it kept out of the House of Commons some of the men best qualified for useful service.

To meet that condition a change in the fiscal year was made some years ago. Six or seven months had been found necessary, after the close of the year, to collect, arrange and prepare for presentation to Parliament the reports of the public business of a vast territory. When the fiscal year ended, June 30, Parliament could not conveniently meet until January or February, and meeting so late, the session was liable to run far into the summer. The fiscal year was, therefore, changed so that it now ends March 31st. When this change was made it contemplated the meeting of Parliament in November. So far as the preparation of the reports is concerned, the Government should find a session beginning in November as easy as one beginning in January formerly was. The purpose of the change in the fiscal year seems to have been overlooked. The Government have three months more than under the former condition to prepare the work, but we have fallen back into the old fashion of having Parliament meet late. An effort should be made this year to have the session begin at the earlier date which the change in the fiscal year made possible.

The Farmers at Ottawa

WHEN several thousand intelligent farmers—one journal places the number at six thousand—assemble at Ottawa at this season to present their views to the Government on the question of conscription, one must believe that they are very much in earnest and that their views demand respectful consideration. The men who gathered at Ottawa on Tuesday last were chiefly from the Province of Ontario, but included a large representation of the farmers of Quebec Province and a few from more distant parts. They devoted to their mission much time that was particu-

larly valuable at this season, and they paid their own expenses. They were entitled to a respectful hearing and this they received from the Premier and his colleagues of the Cabinet committee appointed to meet them. It can hardly be said that the mission of this large body of farmers to the capital was a good one. They knew in advance that the Government, whether wisely or not, had determined on the policy of calling the young men to the colors at once and that this determination would not be abandoned. They had every reason to know that any Minister of the Cabinet to whom they addressed themselves would have to tell them this, repeating a declaration already made in unmistakable terms. The visit of such a great body of men under such circumstances was calculated to suggest that the Government and Parliament could be stampeded by a movement so large as to be menacing in its character. Governments and Parliaments do not like such movements. Members are almost naturally inclined to resist them. Probably no delegation going under such circumstances could have obtained a satisfactory decision from the Cabinet. But it is safe to say that if a small committee, that could sit down in the Premier's office and talk the matter frankly and informally, could not obtain concessions, the great demonstration, almost threatening in its character, could not do so.

On the question of the Government's consistency the delegation could make a point, and they did so repeatedly. They could show that after the enactment of the Military Service Act, as the election time approached, an Order-in-Council was passed which, freely interpreted by Government candidates, was understood to give assurance that farmers would be exempted from military service. Against this they had the claim of the Government, that a critical condition had arisen on the Western battle front, which urgently called for more men, and that consequently the men must be found. This attitude of the Government had been fully stated in recent debates in the House. The farmers should have realized that, whether this was a satisfactory explanation or not, it was the only explanation that could be given to them, whether they came to Ottawa or remained at home.

There is no doubt that the measures lately adopted to secure additional men for the army are very drastic in their character. In many cases they will in their operation be productive of much hardship. As far as is possible these things should be considered by the authorities and relief granted where the most distressing cases are met. When all this is done there will remain many instances in which one's warmest sympathies are aroused, and where nothing can be done to provide relief. In war time, especially in the situation now existing, exemption from sorrow and distress is not to be expected.

The British Government

WE hear repeatedly of the political crisis that is said to be imminent in England, but it never really comes. The recent letter of General Maurice, charging the Premier with misrepresentation concerning military affairs, was magnified for a few days. When the question was discussed in Parliament, Mr. Lloyd George was able to make a statement which satisfied the public. The crisis passed, leaving General Maurice on the retired list. General Maurice thinks that owing to the refusal of the

House to appoint a committee of inquiry, his side of the story was not heard. Possibly, some day the matter may be revived, but for the present the public, judging between General Maurice's letter and Mr. Lloyd George's speech, appears to be satisfied that the General's attack was unwarranted. So the threatened crisis disappeared as quickly as it arose.

The Irish situation is now the one that is most likely to give trouble. That Mr. Lloyd George was too impulsive when he promised to bring forward immediately measures for Irish Conscription and Irish Home Rule, is now evident. He had not counted carefully enough the rocks in the way. The Home Rule Bill is not yet ready, nor is there much prospect that the members of the Cabinet will be able to agree on a measure. The recent conflicting reports of the Government's intention respecting conscription are now disposed of by the issue of the proclamation of Lord French, the new Lord Lieutenant. This proclamation denounces a German conspiracy which has been discovered in Ireland, and proceeds:

"That it is the duty of all loyal subjects of His Majesty to assist in every way His Majesty's Government in Ireland to suppress this treasonable conspiracy and to defeat the treacherous attempt of Germany to defame the name of Irishmen for their own ends.

"That we hereby call upon all loyal subjects of His Majesty in Ireland to aid in crushing such conspiracy, and so far as in them lies, to assist in securing an effective prosecution of the war and the welfare and safety of the Empire.

"That as a means to this end, we shall cause still further steps to be taken to facilitate and encourage voluntary enlistment in Ireland in His Majesty's forces in the hope that, without resort to compulsion, the contribution of Ireland to these forces may be brought up to the proper strength and made to correspond to the contributions of other parts of the Empire."

It is evident that, for the present, at all events, the conscription movement is to be abandoned and further efforts are to be made to obtain men by the voluntary system. Probably the Government's course in this matter will be sharply commented on when Parliament resumes its sittings. But the difficulties in the way of enforcing conscription in Ireland are so great that the Government will be able to justify their action, though their conflicting statements of Irish policy may leave them open to criticism.

One of the most reassuring features of the British political situation is the unwavering loyalty of Mr. Asquith to every movement that seems necessary for the prosecution of the war. It is probable that he recognizes as fully as anybody the undesirability of a change of Government at this time, and that, while he will offer fair criticism of measures coming before him, he will not be a party to any movement aiming at the defeat of the Government.

There is an appearance of marking time on the Western front. But it is pretty certain that Fritz is busy making preparations for another big push. Fortunately, as the British War Office statement points out, the time is allowing very vigorous efforts of the Allies to strengthen their line.

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