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News from Ottawa

Debate on Speech from the Throne is chiefly on
Reciprocity and the Navy

By The Guide Special Correspondent

Ottawa, November 24.—Parliament filled in its first full week of work with a regular talkfest. The subject under discussion was the address in reply to the speech from the throne and an amendment thereto offered by Sir Wilfrid Laurier. The speaking was of the best heard in Parliament for some time, the speech-making being of a high order of merit. Several of the new members of the House acquitted themselves in a creditable manner and the general impression created was that this is going to be a good debating Parliament. It was remarked by an old observer that both Premier Borden and Sir Wilfrid Laurier have improved as a result of changing places. Sir Wilfrid, after many years of defensive speaking, finds himself strong in attack. Mr. Borden, who in opposition sometimes had to force himself, has gained more confidence and hits back with more cheerful vigor than he did when in opposition.

The amendment moved by the opposition leader practically challenges the constitutionality of the government because of the inclusion in it of men who have been opposed to one another on a great question of policy—the naval issue. The omission of any reference to the navy in the speech from the throne gave him an opportunity of which he did not fail to take advantage with the result that the session has started off at an unprecedented pace. Once this debate is disposed of it is expected that the members will settle down to business till the Christmas holidays.

In moving the address Mr. Bennett, of Calgary, made a speech which was marked by good form and some originality. An outburst of oratory, such as the member for Calgary is noted for, was expected. But Mr. Bennett repressed himself and succeeded pretty well in catching the tone of the house. His most important suggestion, perhaps, was that steps should be taken to control the trusts and corporations. Of course he pronounced the defeat of reciprocity to be a blessing and advocated the organic and commercial union within the empire in the usual general terms.

Laurier on Western Feeling

Although all the subjects mentioned in the speech were referred to during the course of the debate the discussion was confined mainly to two themes—the defeat of reciprocity (and incidentally the tariff) and the navy. The pronouncement of the last mentioned theme was due entirely to the introduction of the amendment by Sir Wilfrid Laurier prompted by the fact that there was no reference to the naval policy of the government. But while the striking part of the ex-premier's effort was the navy and the inclusion of the Nationalist representatives in the cabinet he did not neglect to discuss the defeat of reciprocity and the probable effect of that defeat from his own point of view. Sir Wilfrid told the House frankly that he believed the country had made a mistake; that the people had been swayed by passion and prejudice and not by reason, and that the result would be an economic loss for the Dominion as well as a blow at the movement to bring about an increase

in the friendship between Great Britain and the United States.

Sir Wilfrid also expressed the firm conviction that the defeat of reciprocity would create some hard feeling in the West towards the eastern provinces which had voted so strongly against the proposal. "If you read the newspapers of the West," he said, "you cannot but be impressed with the existence of this sense of wrong and injury. But there is more than that; you find indications in those papers of an impression growing in the minds of the people there that in the attitude taken by this government, Western interests were sacrificed to Eastern interests. There is in this a danger far greater, far more to be apprehended than the vain, illusory idea of annexation. There is nothing more detrimental to our national life than that there should be cultivated between the East and the West this feeling. It would not be reasonable to ask the government at this time, to be prepared to offer a new policy. But at no distant date the government should be prepared to deal with the situation and give the Western people some compensation for the benefit which they expected from the trade agreement, of which benefit they are deprived."

The Naval Question

Apart from the criticism of the prime minister for the inclusion of the three Nationalist ministers in the cabinet and his reference in both caustic and humorous vein to what he described as a coalition government, Sir Wilfrid's attitude on the navy question can be best described by quoting his own summary which was moved as an amendment to the address and which was in the following terms: "We beg to represent to your Royal Highness that by resolution of this house adopted March 21, 1909, it was affirmed that

"This House fully recognizes the duty of the people of Canada as they increase in numbers and wealth to assume in larger measure the responsibilities of national defence, and further

This house will cordially approve of any necessary expenditure destined to promote the speedy organization of a Canadian naval service.

"That in pursuance of that resolution the late administration proceeded to adopt a well defined policy of naval organization.

"That with regard to that policy as well as the whole question of naval defense, there is in the present cabinet a flagrant conflict of opinion, and that some of its members have repeatedly, both before and during the election denounced naval defence in any form whatever.

"We respectfully submit to your Royal Highness that it is a fundamental principle of constitutional government that the advisors of the crown shall be heartily in accord on all important questions of public policy, and that the inclusion by the prime minister in the present cabinet of members holding diametrically opposite views on a question of highest importance to the Dominion of Canada and to the empire is contrary to the well understood principles of responsible government, and should not receive the approval of the House."

Premier Borden's Reply

Premier Borden in his reply did not depart from the views maintained by him during his visit to the West and in the campaign. "I think that within the range of this empire," he said, "having regard to the great variety of its products, there is infinitely better scope for the bringing about of reciprocal trade arrangements than were to be found in the scheme which was presented to Parliament."

Dealing with the economic aspect of the reciprocity agreement and the charge made by Sir Wilfrid Laurier during the course of his speech that this phase of the question was neglected by the Conservatives during the campaign, Mr. Borden said: "I challenge that statement. The fact that it is absolutely unfounded can be demonstrated to the satisfaction of anyone who desires to go over again the discussion which took place in the late campaign. But I will point out to the Rt. Hon. gentleman one thing, that on one

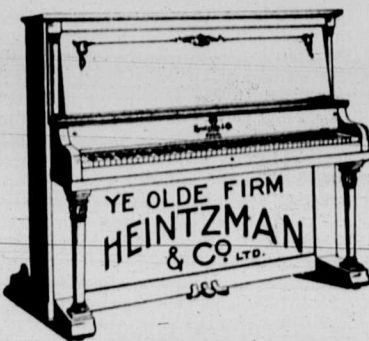
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