

June 12, 1918

# Impressions of the Session

WITH the labors of the first parliamentary session, under the new and unusual conditions brought about by the triumph of Unionism at the last general election, concluded, a few retrospective glances at the broader aspects of the session will, perhaps, be of interest to readers of *The Grain Growers' Guide*. The steady pressure of business before the house and the rapidity with which it was disposed of made it necessary to devote all the contents of sessional letters to the immediate doings of the house, to the neglect of some of the most interesting features of the first of Union parliament.

To the people of the Canadian West not the least interesting aspect of the session was what might with propriety be described as the predominating influence of the western provinces. From no other part of the Dominion was so large a proportion of members elected to support the administration, and from no other section were they so evenly divided between the two political parties. Next to the western provinces Ontario elected the biggest proportion of government supporters, but Conservatism contributed a greater number of members than Liberalism, and, curiously enough, sent to Parliament a group of members who at times were disposed to give the government more trouble than the official opposition, whose business under constitutional forms of government it is to criticize, a necessary function most fair-minded people will be free to admit, even in wartime. This group was known as the "ginger" group, and included amongst its members such men as Sir Sam Hughes, Col. J. A. Currie, H. B. Murphy, North Perth, Dr. Edwards, of Frontenac, John Best, of Dufferin, and several others. They got no support from Conservatives east of the Ottawa river, and very little from Liberal Unionists; a little support at times from one or two western Conservatives, but none from western Liberal Unionists. When the latter expressed themselves independently, it was usually on tariff matters, their views being just the antithesis of those held by the "ginger" group, all of whom are protectionists of a most pronounced type.

## The "Ginger" Group and the Westerners

The existence of the "ginger" group only tended to emphasize the strong strategic position held by western members throughout the session. Had there been any disposition on the part of the low tariff and radical members from the west to depart from their fixed purpose of supporting the war measures of the government and its legislative programme generally some serious consequences might have resulted. Owing to the number of absentees the government was never able in the house to command its actual majority in the country, which stands at over 60, and a comparatively small number of shifted votes would have reduced the majority on several occasions to the danger line, knowing that they could not secure any support from the men beyond the great lakes, the members of the "ginger" group were not so inclined to press the fighting to the point of voting against the government and, as a result of the staunchness of the men from the west, the government majority remained practically intact throughout the session. As indicated in a previous letter the hardest trial for the radicals of the house came on the night when they had to choose between turning the government out of office and accepting Sir Robert Borden's proposal in regard to titles which was not to their liking.

## The Wise Men of the West

Having indicated in a general way how the safety of the government was due to the solidity of the Conservative and Liberal Unionists from the prairie provinces and British Columbia I shall pass on to a consideration of the personal influence of the new men from the west on the government and parliament. In Biblical days the wise men came from the east, but after several

## The "Ginger" Group—The Western Ministers—The New Members—By The Guide's Special Correspondent.

months of Union government, and the marked betterment it has shown over the party administration that preceded it, there is a strong disposition at the Capital to think that much of the wise counsel and steady influence that has prevailed has come from the land of the setting sun. It would be obviously unfair to such ministers as Hon. F. B. Carvell, Major-General Mewburn, Hon. N. W. Rowell and the other new blood from the east to put forward the claim that the marked difference between the administrative ability and general sagacity of the new government as compared with its predecessor is due entirely to the wise counsels of the ministers from the west. Nevertheless they are getting credit for a large share of it, and those who have most closely watched the wheels go round at the Capital are strongly inclined to the view that the credit has not been misplaced.

The new ministers, as everybody knows, are Hon. A. L. Sifton, minister of customs; Hon. J. A. Calder, minister of immigration and colonization, and Hon. T. A. Crerar, minister of agriculture. As the head of the department responsible for increased food production and the conservation of food supplies, through the instrumentality of the Canada Food Board, Mr. Crerar has been called upon to speak more frequently in parliament than either of the other two new ministers from the west. He

rose in parliament, "that I rise with a little diffidence to address the house for the first time. It is somewhat of an ordeal for a new member; it is particularly an ordeal for a man who has had no political experience, and who has launched his bark on the stormy sea of politics under rather exceptional and unique circumstances." Mr. Crerar could not have introduced himself to parliament in a better way. He rose to reply to some rather severe criticisms of the Canada Food Board and its operations, an obviously difficult task. J. A. Robb, chief Liberal whip, who followed, spoke of "the very great pleasure and interest with which we have all listened this afternoon to the maiden speech of the minister of agriculture."

## The Minister From Saskatchewan

Of all the new members of the cabinet none have been so silent since the organization of the Union government as Mr. Calder. The man from Saskatchewan has had nothing whatever to say in parliament as to affairs in general. He has been on his feet a few times in connection with the consideration of the estimates of his department and in order to reply to questions, but he has made no set speech. Mr. Calder's silence has been a matter of considerable comment and speculation. It is understood that his opinion commands the attention of his colleagues and is always sought be-

fore next year, when the house will remain in session longer, and when plans the minister has been maturing in regard to after-the-war immigration will be considered, he will be heard from. Also in regard to negotiations for the purchase of the G.T.P. and G.T.R. which are in charge of Mr. Calder and Mr. Meighen. No doubt exists amongst members of parliament that when the occasion arises for Mr. Calder to make a big effort he will be quite able to deliver the goods.

Mr. Sifton has been almost, if not quite, as silent as Mr. Calder. He has spoken briefly on legal matters in concise, clear-cut fashion, quite the opposite of the style of Hon. C. J. Doherty, minister of justice, whose obviously sincere efforts mystify the house and the press gallery. As minister of customs, Mr. Sifton did not have much explaining to do during the session, tariff matters being largely in abeyance. When he has spoken on other topics his lucidity of expression and explanation has been a matter of comment. This was noticeable a few days before prorogation when, in connection with the resumed debate on titles, he made a plea for a unanimous representation from the Canadian parliament to the Imperial authorities in regard to the matter. It is generally understood that in regard to matters where correct legal opinion is essential, Sir Robert Borden has learned to lean on the Liberal Unionist minister from Alberta. In the days of the Borden administration Mr. Meighen was the prime minister's chief adviser on legal matters, but his mantle has in some degree, at any rate, fallen upon the shoulders of Mr. Sifton. Mr. Meighen's time, it might be remarked, is now largely taken up with the details connected with the administration of the Interior Department, while his spare hours have been devoted to a consideration of the railway problem.

## The Group of New Members

So much for the new ministers. Next to them western influence at Ottawa has been augmented mostly by a group of new members of courage and ability whose numbers include recognized leaders of the grain growers of the prairie provinces. The best known of these, of course, are R. C. Henders, of Manitoba, and Mr. Maharg, of Saskatchewan. Of the two, Mr. Maharg was heard the most frequently in the house, but Mr. Henders, as indicated in a previous letter, had a better opportunity for concrete performance because of his selection as chairman of the common committee on agriculture. As a result of his insistence that the committee should do some really practical work, several illuminative reports were made to the house dealing with the need of labor throughout Canada in connection with the production of this year's crop. At this point mention should be made of F. L. Davis, Liberal Unionist from Neepawa, the chairman of a sub-committee which spent much time to good advantage framing a report on the loss essential industries of the Dominion. The information gathered by the committee on agriculture will doubtless be of use in connection with governmental action following the registration of the manpower of the nation on June 22.

Mr. Maharg's activities, insofar as shown in the records, were confined to a few excellent speeches in the house and an occasional contribution to discussions in committees. It was Mr. Maharg who surprised some members of the house by effectually exploding the theory that a hard and fast agreement was made before the election that the tariff must not be touched during the progress of the war. Mr. Maharg's remarks "in that regard," as Sir Robert Borden would put it, have already been quoted, as well as his warning to the government that it could not expect its followers to be docile at future sessions unless it tries hard to live up to the expectations of the people who returned it to power.

Several other members from beyond

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Mr. Maharg Exploded the Theory that there was a Hard and Fast Agreement that the Tariff Must Not be Touched During the Progress of the War.

has had to address the house both by way of explanation and defence. His explanations have been clear and to the point, while his defence when the administration has been attacked has been fair and reasonable and such as to disarm his critics. As a matter of fact, none of the ministers are held in higher regard by the opposition than the minister of agriculture. His frank confession in his maiden speech in the house that he was new to the parliamentary life and practice, but anxious to learn and do his best, won for him the immediate confidence of the house and everything that occurred during the course of the session tended to strengthen that confidence. "I will state quite frankly," said Mr. Crerar, when he first

fore any important decision as to government action is decided upon. Mr. Calder, during the session, and for some time before was the chairman of a cabinet sub-committee in charge of legislation. The sub-committee undoubtedly did good work because government bills were brought down in good time and were so well framed that the complaints as to bad drafting by legal lights on the opposition benches were not so numerous as usual. Mr. Calder's silence was doubtless due to a personal disinclination to talk for the mere sake of talking. He was probably satisfied with the views put forward by others in support of government legislation, or in reply to criticisms, and did not see the need of prolonging discussions. Doubt-