Parliamentary Session May Not Be Critical

Union Government Still Firm, Though Premier's Return is Awaited With Interest—Increased Price of Silver Makes Smaller Content Necessary—Revival of Annuity Branch

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EARLY predictions of the political prophets that the present session of parliament would consist largely of a series of crises winding up in general disintegration of Union government and an appeal to the country, are already proving false. The session is not two weeks old yet, but it is already apparent that the administration will have no trouble in holding its majority and carrying on. A large government caucus, which was attended by the various elements which comprise Union, unanimously decided to continue support of the government and favored in addition in principle, the proposal to form a permanent party. A proposed platform, which had been drafted by the cabinet, was presented to the caucus, and although there was no resolution on the subject, it apparently met with general support. It was intimated that Sir Robert Borden would be back in his seat before the end of the session and it was agreed to leave over the question of any further action on the formation of a permanent organization until his return.

The Franchise Act

With the government now reasonably certain of its majority, the outlook is that the session, contrary to early predictions, will be neither lengthy nor controversial.

The franchise bill was the measure over which it was promised that the battle of the session would be waged. This expectation was based on the anticipation that the bill would continue many of the features of the War Times Election Act and would provide for federal lists. The bill has been introduced, and so far as one can judge, no bill could be fairer. Some of the details will be criticized, but the broad principles of the measure cannot be made a political battlefield. The bill extends the franchise to all men and women over twenty-one and British subjects and accepts wherever feasible the provincial lists.

Tariff Not Crucial Issue

Outside of the Franchise Act the only other fighting ground for the session will be the tariff. The government has already intimated that there will be few changes this session and that any general revision will be held over. Both the Liberals and the farmers will doubtless challenge the position of the government, but the tariff is unlikely to provide a parliamentary crisis.

There was a possibility of a fine old battle over the naval question as a result of the report of Lord Jellicoe. However, the decision of the government caucus to leave the naval question alone for this session, removes from the scene another controversial question.

Altogether, it promises to be a comparatively dull and uninteresting session, with an occasional flare-up such as the Murphy-Rowell vendetta to add spice to life.

Silver Content Reduced

Sir Henry Drayton has introduced two measures of considerable interest to the financial and business world. One bill provides for a change in Canadian silver coinage. As the Act now stands our coinage has a fineness of 925 points, that is out of the thousand points, 925 are silver and 75 alloy. When Canada first started her coinage operations there was profit to the Mint, but under the great increase in the price of silver, the profit has not only disappeared but there is even a loss. The bill provides for a new standard of 800 fine silver and 200 of alloy.

Sir Henry pointed out that in so far as the content of the silver coin was concerned, it was an entirely arbitrary matter. It is a question which turns not upon the value of the coin as such, but rather whether it will make a good coin. The standard of Great Britain and the United States is 900 points and of the Scandinavian countries which the government now proposed to adopt of 800. Sir Henry said that there was legislation before the British House to reduce the fineness of the British silver coin to 500.

Use of Nickel Urged

Hon. W. S. Fielding, ex-minister of finance, heartily approved of the proposal. He renewed the old suggestion that Canada adopt a nickel coinage. Sir Henry said that he had already considered the suggestion. He had brought up with a company, which proposed to refine in Canada, the question of a supply of proper nickel blanks of Canadian nickel for the purpose of a new coinage. The question was not far enough advanced to say exactly when they would be in a position to submit a proposal to the House. Sir Henry also announced that he expected the dies for the new small copper coinage very shortly, when refinement would start at the Mint.

Interest on Annuities Increased

An effort is being made by Sir Henry Drayton to give a fresh start to the annuity branch. A bill has been introduced with a view of encouraging the sale of government annuities. The bill provides for the increase of the total amount payable yearly by way of annuity from $1,000 to $5,000. There has been a change also in the matter of age. Under the present law no one can obtain payments under an annuity until he has become fifty-five. The insurance companies impose no such restrictions and the law removes this barrier. There is another change which provides for an increase in the rate of interest from three to four per cent. payable on moneys repaid when the annuitant dies before the annuity becomes payable. Apparently the annuity branch proposes to start a campaign throughout the country. The only protester was Dr. Michael Clark, who vigorously objected to such paternalism and the entrance of the government into active competition with the insurance companies.

COMMERCE BOARD BEFORE SUPREME COURT

The validity of certain clauses of the Combines and Fair Prices Act is being tested before the Supreme Court, and upon the decision depends much of the power thus far claimed by the Board of Commerce operating under this Act. The questions submitted to the court are:—

1. Is section 17 of the Combines and Fair Prices Act *intra vires* in forbidding the accumulation or withdrawing from trade of the necessaries of life?
2. Had parliament power to establish the Board of Commerce?
3. Had it power to impose penalties for offences against the Act, and require provincial courts to enforce them?
4. Has the Board of Commerce power to decide as to unfair profits in purely provincial transactions?
5. Had it such power in respect to interprovincial transactions?
6. Could it prohibit export of necessaries of life?

The third International Fur Fair in Lucerne (Switzerland) will be held from the 23rd to the 27th of March, 1920, in the Market Building on the Bahnhofplatz, Lucerne. Owing to the general circumstances the Lucerne fur auction sales will not be held before next autumn.