

## PLAIN TALK TO LABOUR MEN.

### BRITISH MINISTER APPEALS TO SENSE OF FAIR PLAY.

Mr. J. R. Clynes, M.P., the British Minister of Food, who is himself a Labour man, attended the fifth Labour Conference early in September and spoke on aspects of food matters in Great Britain. A fair reading of his remarks by Labour men and others in Canada whose patriotism is beyond reproach, but who see only one side of the question of food supply, will give matter for reflection.

The Canada Food Board adopts the same frank attitude as the British Food Ministry and adheres as firmly to its decisions when made with the full understanding that those whom the entire facts are not available may see minor points for criticism. Mr. Clynes expresses for all the Allied Food Controllers the main article of their creed when he says: "It was not his job to rearrange the whole social order but it was his job to see that the people should not go short of an indispensable article of food."

Mr. Clynes said that he welcomed conferences as affording opportunities for serviceable criticism and securing information of value to the staff in their various spheres of activity. Until quite recently the organization of the Ministry of Food was, he believed, a perfect one for its purpose, and it had worked very well; but latterly they had to deal, not with the food problem merely affecting the United Kingdom, but affecting the Allied nations. That problem was not one of distribution merely—it was one of supply and of purchase. It had become necessary therefore to effect greater co-operation of action, of effort and of review amongst and between the representatives of the Allied nations who had charge of food matters. It was necessary to have unification of effort, and that factor had been sought and secured in order to confer considerable and immediate benefits with respect to food on the population of the Allied nations.

There was proceeding on the Western Front an effective military offensive of the Allied powers, and Mr. Clynes' belief was that they could back up that triumphant military offensive by an effective food offensive, which could take the shape of giving the Allied Governments the exclusive power to secure the food supplies of the world outside the Central Empires and Russia. Those measures must have their effect upon the German mind, and at worst they were much more human than the barbarous measures used by the enemy in the prosecution of the war.

The Ministry had recently had to sanction an increase in the price of milk, which had brought down upon him many critics. He had fixed the price of 2s. 3d. a gallon to the farmers with reluctance, and only after very mature consideration.

It was not his job to rearrange the whole social order, but it was his job to see that people should not go short of what was an indispensable article of food if it was to be obtained.

Mr. Clynes added that what the Ministry of Food had to do was to put such a price on food production that it would attract it and not repel it. There must always be a fair and reasonable price for the services rendered by any useful person whose services were at all necessary for the production and distribution of articles of food. There were people who would commandeer the farmer and ask the State to take hold of his cattle; who would in every sense apply to food producers exactly the same measure of compulsion which they said should never under any circumstances be applied to labour itself. If, went on Mr. Clynes, it was right that labour should be free, and that its terms of service must be terms of consent and that those things should be arranged between the buyer and seller of labour, then he said that the terms of service in the case of the food producers must in the same way rest upon the same principle of consent.

People would only deceive themselves by putting their view in the terms "Conscript life, and therefore you can conscript food." That was merely playing with facts. While they could turn a civilian into khaki, they could not turn a workman or farm labourer into the dairy shed unless they arranged with him as to the price for the work he was going to do; and in every branch of agricultural service they came back to the fact of the necessity of not trying to seek any advantage by mere physical force. They could not dragoon the farmer to produce milk for them, getting up at all hours for the purpose—they could not do that without coming to terms with the carriers of the pail.