

What Canadian Farmers Want

Reported by the Farmer's Advocate Representative

THE farmers of Canada mean business—mean it as they never did before. Eight hundred delegates from a string of seven provinces, with Nova Scotia in the east and Alberta in the far west, and a few individuals from British Columbia, met in Ottawa on December 14, and on the morning of the 15th marched four abreast to the House of Commons to interview parliament and demand a sweeping reduction in the Canadian customs tariff. Reciprocity with the United States in agricultural produce, implements and certain natural products and increased preference to Great Britain, with complete abolition in ten years' time of all tariffs against the mother country, were the cardinal planks of the tariff platform. Other measures were pressed as well by the Western delegation, cheerfully backed up by their fellow delegates from the East, but the one supreme issue on which all were actively concerned, and which overshadowed every other question, was the tariff. No party politics figured in the case. Men of all shades of political opinion were of one mind on this matter. With but a single dissenting voice, representing a fruit section, every man who spoke in the Thursday mass meeting preceding the parliamentary interview declared heartily and strongly for the platform submitted. Perhaps never before in Canada has such wonderful unanimity of opinion been exhibited in a tariff discussion, and when it is considered that every man present spoke for scores, hundreds or thousands of voters at home, it will be understood that the sentiment for tariff reform, which has been gathering momentum in Canada, especially since Sir Wilfrid Laurier's Western tour, has become a force to be reckoned with. Henceforth, the voice of the farmer will be heard in the land and heeded in legislative halls. A sleeping giant has awakened and noted his strength. The epoch-making event in Ottawa last week was the first thing of its kind and scale in Canada, but it will not be the last.

The new force is not a destructive one. Its temper, though keen, is not bitter; it engenders no class discord or narrow self-seeking; it seeks, rather, to resist privilege; it stands for fair play, justice to farmers, relief to consumers, goodwill and co-operation towards manufacturers and sincere regard for the general good.

The Canadian Council of Agriculture, whose existence made possible the delegation last week on such a vast and well concerted plan, was organized in Saskatchewan last February, and is composed of representatives of four affiliating bodies, viz.: the United Farmers of Alberta, the Grain Growers' Associations of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and the Dominion Grange in Ontario. Thus there is, as E. C. Drury, secretary of the Council of Agriculture, and retiring master of the Grange, remarked in Toronto at the Grange convention, a single farmers' organization in Canada autonomous as far as the various provinces are concerned, but able to move in unison in matters of national moment.

REPRESENTATIVE DELEGATION

But the delegation of farmers last week was more representative even than these above-named organizations. Delegates were present from the Nova Scotia Fruit Growers' Association, from cheese boards and farmers' clubs in Ontario, and from various other bodies, local and provincial. Besides these came many individuals from both East and West, some paying their own way and some helping defray other delegate's expenses. Bear in mind that these men sought no special privileges, but merely relief for themselves and others from the burden of a protective tariff designed properly enough in the first place to encourage infant industries, but now requiring severe pruning to regulate evils of combination, extortion and economic waste. To be sure, the delegation was more radical than the general agricultural opinion of the country.

Grant, also, that some statements made require qualification. Still the fact remains that these men are thinkers and unquestionably represent the trend of thought among most classes of farmers in Canada today. The representations were clear-cut, logical and straight from the shoulder. The members of the delegation were stalwart, clean, well dressed, prosperous looking and a credit to the business in which they are engaged. As one Ottawa paper remarked they compared well with the members of parliament, whose benches they occupied.

THE PRELIMINARY MEETING

Assembled in Ottawa on Thursday morning, the first business of the delegates was to unite on a common platform. It proved unexpectedly easy. At nine o'clock the memorials drafted by the executive of the Western associations were submitted to the executive of the Eastern bodies at a joint meeting and adopted with a few mutually agreeable changes. Subsequently the resolutions were submitted to a general meeting of the delegates held in the Grand Opera House Thursday forenoon and afternoon, and presided over by D. W. McCuaig, president of the Canadian Council of Agriculture. Some purely Western propositions were disposed of first, after which the meeting got down to the great tariff question. The platform adopted by the executive was ably presented by Secretary E. C. Drury.

NO ANTAGONISM TO MANUFACTURERS

Canadian farmers, said Mr. Drury, have nothing but goodwill toward our manufacturers. We want to see the towns thrive and industries flourish, but we want the manufacturers "to stand on their own feet and not on ours," as one member of the Grange expressed it. We have no objection to reasonable protection, if used to do what it was intended to do, i.e., to assist promising new industries in the fight against strong organized competition from without. But its advocates never expected it would run on indefinitely. We desire to approach this great question from no class standpoint, but from the standpoint of the whole country's welfare. We are asking to shirk no burden but simply for a little more justice. The protective system is robbing our farmers. Many of the manufacturers in this country have an abominable system of watering stock, some of it being watered to the extent of ninety per cent.—as much water as there is in turnips. Then some of them are antiquated in methods. At least, one is being run with methods and equipment discarded in the old country fifty years ago. If our farmers in the West went out to reap their harvests with a cradle and failed they would scarcely have reason to ask the government for favors.

Mr. Drury then cited the familiar example of the cotton industry, in which there was a strike two or three years ago, investigated by the Hon. Mackenzie King. The report of the investigation brought out some interesting facts. The company claimed that lack of sufficient protection prevented them from paying the wages they would like to pay, and made a cut of ten per cent. accordingly. In the investigation it was revealed that while the nominal dividend of the company was five per cent. per annum, it was making equivalent to fifty per cent. on the actual capital invested, as ninety per cent. of the stock was water. The wages paid by the Cotton Combine ran from 98 cents to \$1.63 per day. 42.3 per cent. of the help employed were females, 26.6 were minors and the hours of labor during periods of normal activity were from 6.15 a.m. to 12 and 12.45 to 6, except on Saturdays, when they worked only in the forenoon. "If we were going to do one thing," said Mr. Drury, "that would make the lives of our workmen harder I would hesitate indeed. The farmers of Canada are not antagonistic to the laborer; they stand on common ground." This case of the cotton industry is but one example. He believed if a commission of enquiry were ap-

pointed it would sweep the whole case for protection completely away. It has been calculated that a Canadian tariff costs the average Ontario farmer \$200 a year. The amount of money collected under the tariff in customs is not more than a third of what is levied by our manufacturers by reason of the tariff.

Referring to the recent move of the Massey-Harris Company, Mr. Drury remarked he didn't see why they could not go on manufacturing implements in Canada, adding, incisively, that if they were patriotic they would. He repudiated strongly the allegation that in arguing for reciprocity Canadian farmers were not loyal to the empire. On the contrary, they can excel the flag-flapping class in loyalty a long way. "Nor are we going to hang a rider on to the preferential tariff clause of the platform by asking the starving masses in Britain to tax their bread and meat for the benefit of Canadian farmers. But our motives in asking for an increased preference of Britain are not entirely generous. We want relief from the protected classes that are robbing us. We want the manufacturers of England in here to control our cotton prices. The cost of living in Canada is higher than it should be. Men who come to us from Britain think at first that the wages we pay are high, but when they find out the cost of living here they conclude that they would have been nearly as well off in Britain."

OTHER DELEGATES SPEAK

E. A. Partridge, of Sinaluta, Sask., pointed out that under free trade conditions manufacturing could be carried on more economically than at present. He endorsed the suggestion in the tariff platform, that direct taxation should be resorted to if necessary to raise money under free trade, pointing out that this would effect an opinion in favor of economy in administration. Robert Sellar, of Huntingdon, Que., waxed eloquent in favor of bettering trade relations with the United States, referring to the string of blue-coated men between the two countries to prevent profitable exchange. We could never get rich except by exchanging commodities, and if we may not do this we might as well put up a sign "Bankruptcy." We have lived a hundred years in peace with the United States. Why not another hundred? We had no need of soldiers and no need of a scrap-iron navy. Give us an honest government and there would be no need of a special tax to make up the deficiency in revenue, resulting from the measure of reciprocity proposed. With a pointed play on the old quotation, "The beggars have come to town!" he remarked instead that the "Masters have come to town!"

S. C. Parker, secretary Nova Scotia Fruit Growers' Association, reported that Nova Scotia was with the West on the great grand issue of freer trade, first with the mother country, and then with the United States.

"You are going," he said, "to see a boom in Nova Scotia in the next ten years that you little dream of!"

Hay, potatoes and turnips are some of the principal crops of New Brunswick for which it was desirable to acquire United States market, said S. B. Hatheway, of Fredericton, N. B. New Brunswick is willing to make any reasonable sacrifice in order to secure access to the American cities. In potatoes this province has been forced to seek markets in the West Indies, but the American market would be much better.

A few years ago when the tariff on twine was cut in two, said Col. Fraser, of Burford, Ont., we were told that the binder twine industry was ruined, but the government went farther still and cut off all the duty. After that the Plymouth Cordage Company came into Canada and established a plant at Welland. The Massey-Harris Company were not going to leave the country, even if free trade were adopted.

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