

Parliament Still Faces Large Program

Leadership and Platform of Unionist Party Not Definitely Settled Yet—New Pensions Scale Means Large Increase in Expenditure—Government May Finance Shipbuilding Industry

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BY the time this appears in print the government will likely have held its caucus to settle the fate of the Unionist party as well as the leadership. If it has already been held the worst will be known; if it is not yet summoned it cannot be much longer delayed as the end of the session is in sight. When I last wrote I predicted that Sir Robert Borden would retire. That seemed absolutely certain at the time, but a lot of water, speaking politically, has run under the bridge during the past week. While there has been no general caucus yet on the subject, there have been many secret conclaves and much canvassing of the whole situation.

The net result seems to be that Sir Robert Borden, despite his own personal wishes and the advice of his physicians will likely continue at the head of the Unionist party. The trouble is that the cabinet cannot agree on a successor. There is no doubt that there are negotiations on foot for a "reapproachment" with the French protectionists, Liberal and Conservative. They are frightened of the free trade platforms of the two Oppositions. But they will not accept Hon. Arthur Meighen as leader. They say it would be hopeless to attempt to make headway in Quebec under his leadership at present, at least, owing to the long, persistent and continued attacks upon him in the French-Canadian press. To the habitant he has so long been painted as a man with horns, that it is impossible to face the electors with him as a leader. This is hard and unfair on Meighen, but politics is a cold-blooded game. Sir Thomas White was a possibility and acceptable, and if he would have been willing to take the premiership, he could apparently have it. But Sir Thomas is emphatic in his statements that he is out of politics. Under the circumstances, Sir Robert is being urged to remain at the head, and will probably agree. He has been actually recovering his strength since his return to Ottawa, although he will have to conserve his energies. However, on several occasions he has delighted his followers with his verve and vigor in debate.

Criticism of Extravagance

In reminiscent mood Sir Robert recalled this week that he was first returned to parliament twenty-four years ago on June 23, 1896. It was the year of the great flood as far as the Conservative party was concerned, Sir Robert being one of the few new Conservative members to be elected in that contest. Sir Robert, speaking at the time on the question of the pensions, recalled that in the election of 1896, one of the chief arguments against the then government was its extravagance. It was attacked on every platform for its lavish expenditures. Yet these expenditures were only \$43,000,000, or only a few million dollars more than the pensions bill alone of the Dominion this year. It was a striking contrast and one that gave a house used to the spending of millions and attacked for not spending millions more for gratuities, pause for considerable thought.

Much Late Legislation

There has been a rush of important eleventh-hour legislation which may hold up the plans for prorogation. Aside from the pensions proposals, the most important is the ship-building legislation and the decision to continue the Wheat Board for another year. The policy to encourage shipbuilding is at least unique. The government found it was unable to assist the industry by bonus; it was anxious to keep the industry alive. It has devised an original system

of credit financing. The government's proposal, briefly summarized, is that the minister of finance may be authorized by the governor-in-council to endorse promissory notes drawn by the purchaser in favor of the shipbuilder for 50 per cent. of the purchase price in cases where the remaining half has been provided for, this to apply to vessels of more than three thousand tons and the vessels to be mortgaged to the government for the full amount of the notes endorsed and to be registered in Canada without right of transfer until the mortgage has been cleared off. It is intimated in Ottawa that if this legislation goes through there are orders enough ahead from foreign countries, principally France, to keep Canadian yards busy for two years.

Huge Claim Against Germany

Canada's claim against Germany for reparation for losses sustained by the country and by individual citizens during the war has been forwarded to England for presentation at a conference of representatives of all parts of the British Empire, soon to be held in London, and, subsequently, at an inter-Allied conference at Spa. The bill rendered by the Dominion is for a total of 1,871,000,000. The total is made up of the following items: Cost of war and demobilization, 1,715,000,000; separation allowances, \$85,000,000; Halifax losses, \$30,000,000; army of occupation, \$8,000,000; illegal warfare, \$31,500,000. The separation allowances alluded to are those paid to families and dependents of persons who served in the military and naval forces during the war. By Halifax losses is evidently meant the damages occasioned in that city by the explosion of the munition ship "Mont Blanc" in 1917. The sum claimed under the head of army of occupation is the cost of maintaining Canadian troops on the Rhine frontier for a period after the signing of the armistice on November 11th, 1918. The last item is a claim for compensation for damages sustained by Canadians as a result of the resort by Germany to illegal methods of warfare. Included in this item, for instance, would likely be a sum to cover losses of Canadian merchant and fishing vessels sunk by German U-boats during the period of unrestricted submarine warfare.

Senate Approves Hudson Bay Route

After three years of investigation, a special committee of the senate has just reported that the railway route to the Hudson Bay is feasible, that valuable fish and marine animals abound in the bay and strait, and that consideration should be given the matter of making Fort Churchill instead of Port Nelson the terminus of the road. The committee, which held fifteen meetings, extending over a long period, and heard twenty-one witnesses, makes the following findings:—(1) That the Hudson Bay route is feasible and will be probably in time profitable. (2) That under present conditions the season of navigation would last at least four months, and may by improvements in aids to navigation be considerably increased. (3) That in the opinion of the committee sufficient care was not taken in the selection of Port Nelson as the terminus of the railway, and that the government should not make further important expenditures on this port without first making a new and thorough examination into the relative merits of Fort Churchill and Port Nelson as the terminus. (4) That the waters on the strait and rivers tributary to the bay teem with fish and valuable marine animals, and the committee believes the bay is equally well stocked. (5) That mines already discovered in the Hudson Bay district are of sufficient nature and richness to indicate the existence of great potential mineral wealth.