

THE CANADIAN LIBERAL MONTHLY

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CONSCRIPTION AND REFERENDUM.

WITH the Conscription Bill and the referendum motion of the leader of the Opposition, as well as the six months' hoist of the measure proposed by Mr. Barrett, all voted on and disposed of, the present issue of the Liberal Monthly considers that a very fair and accurate measure of the different aspects of this remarkable piece of legislation is within its province. With this in view we present herewith five speeches delivered by Liberal members on the Military Service Act of 1917, as fairly indicative of the different appeals of the measure. The first of these is the speech of the Right Hon. Sir Wilfrid Laurier, representative of the referendum view. The remaining four are made up of two in favour of the government measure, by Messrs. F. F. Pardee, chief Liberal Whip and Hon. G. P. Graham, respectively; and two in favour of the referendum by Hon. Chas. Murphy and Mr. A. B. McCoig, M.P. for Kent. Mr. McCoig voted for the measure after the defeat of the referendum proposal.

The people of the Dominion have by this time a very clear conception of the wide powers and scope of the conscription measure. They likewise have awakened to the significance of legislation of this kind in the circumstances. The rights and liberties of Canadians are threatened through the medium of the Empire, that is, a defeat of British democracy in the present struggle would have far reaching effects in this country. All parties recognize and admit this. Every section of the Liberal party favours the maintenance of Canadian military representation at the front in as large numbers as this country can furnish. The one point of difference of opinion lies in the best method to secure these additional troops. Some members of the Liberal party believe that conscription alone will secure the required reinforcements. These Liberals are entitled to their convictions, which must be, and are, respected by all true democrats. Others hold that a referendum would be more in accord with Liberal principles, considering the undoubted fact that the present parliament is a moribund body and absolutely without mandate from the people to deal with a matter of such vital importance, constituting, as it does, a departure from precedent of the most radical kind. Particularly strong is the position of advocates of an appeal to the people when the conduct of the administration in the matter of recruiting is considered. Every evidence points to glaring blunders and worse on the part of the government in this department. It is asserted by Liberals of the referendum school that voluntarism in Canada was systematically harrassed and finally killed by the adverse influences operating within the cabinet, a view which the controversy between the Prime Minister and the former Minister of Militia has greatly strengthened. Conscription Liberals, on the other hand, while admitting the maladministration of the militia department and the government, point to the necessity for more men at the front as sufficient reason for hoping and trusting

that the government will enact the measure fairly and impartially, despite their record in the case of voluntary recruiting. With these Liberals it is a case of faith induced by the alleged necessities of the situation. To them, haste is imperative and conscription points the shortest way. But will conscription secure the required men easier or quicker than a referendum would accomplish the same object?

We must not overlook the vital matter of national unity. It will not prove a real victory if we defeat the Hun and plant the seed of discord, sectional strife and jealousy among our own people. Such a victory would be a costly one indeed. Yet we cannot forget that in this matter the government has not kept faith with the people or their representatives. Repeatedly has the government assured the country that there was no intention of introducing compulsory military service, repeatedly has it informed representatives of the workers that no such step would be taken without giving the people ample reasons for such departure from our accustomed policy, and ascertaining public sentiment thereon. Up to within a few weeks of the introduction of the bill the premier repeated his promise in this regard. Nevertheless the measure was framed as a strictly party proposal and introduced as an administration bill. Constitutionally, therefore, the opponents of conscription without a referendum, appear to have a very strong case and one which embodies the true principles of Liberalism. To ascertain the voice of the people in legislation affecting the very circle of family life, in matters touching hearths and homes and loved ones is surely not an unreasonable policy. To conciliate, not to antagonize; to explain and reason and appeal, rather than to compel, is surely not a disloyal policy.

CANADA'S FINANCIAL POSITION.

THE financial situation in the Dominion is beginning to cause grave concern among those who make an intelligent study of national finances. The facts appear to be that we have borrowed such large sums of money during the past six years, and, of course, particularly since the war broke out that to-day we are facing what may easily develop into a crisis. The recent attempt of our Minister of Finance to borrow an additional \$75,000,000 in the United States was unsuccessful. It appears that owing to arrangements made at the time of the large Allied loan a few weeks ago no loans by any of the belligerent countries may now be offered on the American market. In addition the needs of the United States, which is now in the war on a gigantic scale, will require the conservation of its financial resources.

It is understood that the Canadian banks have intimated that while they might be in position to help out the government, such aid can be proffered only at the expense of the commercial community. The administration has been forced to accept this offer and the result cannot but have a serious effect in the country, when there ensues a curtailment of credit. The situation in brief is that the banks cannot finance the nation and the industrial and commercial interests at the same time. Naturally the national interest will have the call. The need for national economy is therefore very urgent.