

Our Ottawa Letter

Parliament meets three weeks hence—Extension of life of Parliament, New sources of revenue, and war profiteering, will be Lively Topics of Discussion
(By The Guide Special Correspondent)

Ottawa, Dec. 18.—Parliament having been called together for the despatch of public business, the capital is beginning to simmer with quiet speculation as to what is likely to happen when the House meets on January 12. The issuance of the royal proclamation fixing the date for the deliberations of the two Houses at least removes the last possibility of a general election within the next few months. It has never been so difficult, however, to attempt a definite forecast of what is likely to happen when the legislators get down to business. Will they agree to petition the Imperial government for an extension of the life of the present parliament until after the war is over, or will they disagree as to what would be a reasonable extension and precipitate a general election some time between now and the haying season of 1916? These are undoubtedly the questions that will continue to agitate the public mind more or less until the situation is clarified.

An Agreement Likely

Extreme partisans on both sides of the House are inclined to think that it will be impossible for an agreement to be reached, and that in addition to the war turmoil we will have a battle of the ballots some time next spring or early summer. Conservatives and Liberals of this way of thinking both expect to be able to place the blame for a war-time election on the other fellows, and they claim that whichever side succeeds in doing this will win at the polls. This is an admission that they believe the majority of people to be opposed to an election until the war, at least, is as good as won.

Fortunately for the country, however, the moderates on both sides of the House are inclined to the view that before the session is over both sides will unite in a petition to the Imperial authorities asking for the extension of the life of the House for a year. As both Sir Robert Borden and Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the two leaders, can be included in the group of moderates, it is a fairly safe prediction that a compromise arrangement will be reached.

The Leaders' Views

In this connection it is pretty well known just what has passed between the two leaders. Sir Robert Borden some time ago, it is stated, wrote Sir Wilfrid Laurier suggesting that when the House meets, the life of parliament should be extended for a year from the declaration of peace. To this Sir Wilfrid demurred, pointing out that such an extension would be indefinite, and might mean that there would be no appeal to the people for two or three years after the fighting had really concluded. Sir Robert then suggested an extension of one year from October next. To the principle of this proposal the Opposition leader is said not to have made any objections. He took the view, however, that it was a matter in regard to which parliament should be consulted. He also, it is understood, intimated that the Opposition would desire to know what domestic legislation the government proposes to introduce before definitely committing itself in regard to the matter of an extension. In view of this attitude on the part of the leader of the Opposition, it is not likely that anything will develop until the House meets and the government has definitely made known its legislative program. As the life of parliament does not expire until late next autumn, it would appear that there can be no serious objection to the matter waiting over until towards the end of the session. The British parliament, having decided to extend its own life by a year, it is all the more likely that similar action will be taken at Ottawa.

Tax the Profiteers?

While government legislation apart from war measures is not likely to be heavy and private bills will not be numerous, the approaching session is quite likely to develop features of absorbing interest. The people will be anxious to

know what measures the minister of finance proposes to take to raise more revenue with which to meet the rapidly increasing war expenditure. In this connection it is safe to predict that "profiteering" and "war profits" are words which will appear with considerable frequency in the records of the House. Expression will doubtless be given in some concrete form to the ever-growing conviction that the makers of excessive war profits should surrender some of their gains to the Dominion treasury. The correspondent of The Grain Growers' Guide has already heard of the probability of a western member moving a formal resolution declaring it to be the duty of the minister of finance to "commandeer" all war profits in excess of ten per cent. Such action would undoubtedly be popular with the mass of Canadians, but it is equally certain that it would cause an awful clatter amongst many of the closest political friends of Hon. W. T. White, minister of finance.

Those sixteen Toronto patriots who, with Mr. White, rose in revolt against their party because it dared to introduce reciprocity would doubtless be amongst the first to hold up their hands in horror at such a proceeding, while there would be a wail of anguish from other profiteers from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Should the western member adhere to his present intention, there will at least be an interesting discussion, and the attitude of the minister of finance in regard to the matter will, to put it very mildly, be "good copy" for members of the parliamentary press gallery.

Poor Chance for Free Wheat

Free wheat is another question which will occupy a foremost place in the debates. So far as it has been possible for one to learn here, up to the present time the members of the government have not given any serious consideration to the question of the removal of the wheat duties. Their eastern supporters declare that when the next general election takes place the government will occupy exactly the same position in regard to reciprocity, free wheat and the tariff generally that they maintained when they won the battle at the polls on September 21, 1911. Hon. Robert Rogers has been criticized in the government press of the East for declaring at Winnipeg that he has an open mind on

the subject. It would appear to be practically certain at the present time that the eastern view is likely to prevail, and that no step will be taken to place wheat on the free list.

The fear of an adverse expression of opinion on the free wheat issue in the vacant constituencies of Brandon and Lisgar will probably result in the eight Dominion constituencies now vacant remaining so until a general election is held. Not much difficulty would be experienced in arranging for acclamations in the six eastern seats now without representation, each party being allowed to retain its own seats; but it is different in regard to the two Manitoba constituencies which were vacated for political reasons. With eight seats vacant and a number of members absent on military service, the House will be considerably smaller. The failure to fill the eight seats will, however, mean the saving of twenty thousand dollars, which is a matter not to be sneezed at in these days of high expenditures and big deficits.

Can This Be True?

The gratifying announcement is made that whatever else may happen this session, the government has decided that there will be no railway subsidies and no bond guarantees. Apparently the politicians are beginning to realize that

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