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JUN 26 1918
INT. AGR. INST.

The Journal of Commerce

VOL. XLV. No. 26

MONTREAL, TUESDAY, JUNE, 25, 1918

Price., 10 CENTS

The Journal of Commerce

Devoted to
CANADIAN INDUSTRY, COMMERCE AND
FINANCE.

Published every Tuesday Morning by
The Journal of Commerce Publishing Company,
Limited.

Head Office: 35-45 St. Alexander Street, Montreal.
Telephone: Main 2662.

Toronto Office: 263 Adelaide St. West, Toronto.
Telephone: Adelaide 917.

HON. W. S. FIELDING,
President and Editor-in-Chief.

Subscription price, \$3.00 a year.

Advertising rates on application.

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Special Articles

Titles in Canada.

By J. W. MACMILLAN.

Conditions in the West.

By E. CORA HIND.

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A Free Parliament and a Shackled One

IN THE Parliament of Canada and in the Legislatures of the several Provinces of Canada we are supposed to follow substantially the rules and customs of the Parliament of Great Britain. We claim that we draw our inspiration and our practice from the "Mother of Parliaments," as we fondly characterize the great bodies which legislate for the British Empire. If difference is to be expected at all between British and Canadian practice it would be that, in the democratic atmosphere of the North American Continent, we would have less rigidity of rule and greater freedom of speech and action than in the ancient Parliament of Great Britain. A little while ago our claim along these lines would have been well founded. If a recent incident in our House of Commons is to be approved Canada can no longer claim to be guided by the practice of the free British Parliament.

The action of Sir Robert Borden in making a want of confidence issue out of the question concerning titles in Canada—thus stifling the free voice of the House and calling on Government supporters to humiliate themselves by voting against their publicly declared convictions—is receiving widespread notice from the press. By many journals it is condemned strongly; from few does it receive more than an apologetic approval.

The question of titles, while one of widespread interest, was not one of transcendent importance. Any opinion that the House of Commons might have expressed on it, whether favorable or unfavorable to the granting of Imperial distinctions to Canadians, might have been accepted with equanimity. But the effort, unfortunately successful for the moment, to prevent the free expression of opinion and, by entirely illegitimate pressure, to force men to vote against their known convictions—that is a very important matter, vitally affecting the independence of members of Parliament and the interests of the people whose free agents they are presumed to be. A mobilization of public opinion to prevent a repetition of such Kaiserism is necessary for the protection of the rights of the people and of the freedom of Parliament.

Let us recall the facts of the case. The Union Government was formed for the avowed purpose of securing united action in measures deemed necessary for the prosecution of the war. As respects such measures unity was essential. Outside that field, unity was not necessary, nor was it to be expected. On questions not relating to the war there was known to be wide difference of opinion among the members of the Cabinet. It was to be expected that the Premier and his colleagues would refrain, as far as they could, from introducing

such questions. If others introduced them, surely it was reasonable that each member of the Cabinet, and each member of the House, must be free to speak and act according to the dictates of his conscience, with a full understanding that so long as the Government were sustained in their war policy, difference of opinion on minor matters counted for little and could not affect the position of the administration. That this was the basis, and the only possible basis, on which the Union Government could stand would, we are sure, have been declared by every member of the Cabinet before the unhappy step was taken on the question of titles.

There came before the House of Commons a motion and an amendment on a matter having no earthly relation to the prosecution of the war. That the motions arose from no unfriendliness to the Government was evident from the fact that both emanated from staunch Government supporters. The original motion stood on the order paper for several weeks unchallenged by the Government. Then a debate arose, and an amendment was moved. The whole question was still treated as an open one. The debate was adjourned at the request of the Government, but with no intimation that they regarded the matter as a vital one, affecting them. Weeks later, on the resumption of the debate, after many members had made known their views in support of one or other of the motions, the Premier, at the very eleventh hour of the consideration of the question, declared that he must regard the motions as raising an issue of want of confidence, and that the Government would resign if either of the motions was adopted! With no time for consultation or reflection, a majority of the House—not a willing majority, but a dazed, indignant majority, including many new members who could not at the moment understand the position—responded to the Premier's call. A victory for the Government? The friends of Union Government may well pray to be saved from further victories of that kind. The unwisdom of the Premier was allowed to prevail for the moment. But does anybody suppose that this ends the matter?

Having thus seen a striking example of a Parliament in which independence has, for the time at least, been throttled, let us turn to the old "Mother of Parliament," and see how things are done where real freedom prevails, where Parliamentary institutions are understood to ensure and not to strangle freedom of speech.

Almost on the very day on which freedom of debate was stifled by the Canadian Premier, a question came up in the British House of Commons which serves to show what is the right way of dealing with such matters. It was a question on which there might have been some excuse for the Government requiring unity, for it was a matter of considerable im-