



## Senator Hon. Gideon D. Robertson

(Copied from "Representative Canadians".)

ROBERTSON, HON. GIDEON DECKER, P.C., Federal Minister of Labour, was the first actual representative of organized labour to be called to either the Dominion Cabinet or the Senate of Canada. He was born at Welland, Ont., on August 26, 1874, the son of Gavin E. Robertson and Laretto Goring, both native Canadians. His paternal grandfather was a native of Scotland, who became a member of the bar and later went to Jamaica, where he took an active part in the agitation for the abolition of slavery, which became a fully accomplished fact in 1838. In this movement Robertson was in correspondence with Clarkson, Macaulay (father of Lord Macaulay), Wilberforce and others active in freeing the British Empire from this reproach. Later, he came to Canada, where Gavin Robertson, father of the subject of this sketch, was born, and where he became a farmer and school teacher on the Niagara peninsula. Gideon Decker Robertson was educated at the public and high schools of Welland and as a youth took up telegraphy in connection with railroad work. A strong believer in trades unionism, he soon became active in the Order of Railroad Telegraphers, an international body, of which he was some years ago elected Vice-President, an office he still holds. His duties brought him in contact with the chiefs of organized labour on this continent, and he won a high reputation for clear thinking and executive ability. In 1917, when Sir Robert Borden decided to abolish party lines and form a Union Government, he offered Mr. Robertson a position in the Senate and a seat in his Cabinet. The offer was

accepted, and in the autumn of that year he was sworn in as a member of the Privy Council and a Minister without Portfolio. In May, 1918, he was appointed Chairman of the sub-Committee of the Council on



Labour Problems, and also Chairman of the National Registration Board in connection with the war. On November 7, 1918, he was sworn in as Minister of Labour in succession to Hon. T. W. Crothers, who had announced his intention of retiring some months previously. The appointment was made just at the psychological moment, for the armistice, which had been signed just one week previously, created a host of labour problems more serious than

Canada had ever previously been called upon to face; and only a statesman enjoying practical knowledge and the confidence of organized labour could have dealt with the situation. In the spring and summer of 1919 he was called upon to combat a conspiracy affecting all Canada to introduce a modified form of Russian Bolshevism, fathered by the Industrial Workers of the World, known as the "One Big Union." The aim was to unite all existing labour organizations in one body, and by sympathetic strikes and a policy of terrorism destroy capitalism, and reduce all other classes to subjection. This movement came to a head with a general strike called in Winnipeg early in May, on the pretext of a dispute between the metal workers and their employers. Winnipeg was chosen as a strategic point, because of its peculiar geographical position as the chief divisional point of the three transcontinental railways. The aim was to cut Canada in two in the matter of communications, and then by broadening the strike Eastward and Westward secure complete control of Canadian transportation and industry, after which the movement was to be carried into every section of the United States. Senator Robertson himself went to the scene of operations, and by his fearless, though moderate handling of the situation, and his influence with the saner labour elements, rendered the conspiracy abortive so far as the rest of Canada was concerned, and fruitless in Winnipeg. He thus secured a triumph for legitimate trade unionism, of which he is the chief sponsor in Canada. He is a Freemason and a Presbyterian.