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Special Articles

Conscription

SIR ROBERT BORDEN is to be commended for his reply to the labor representatives at Ottawa who, in discussing the subject of the National Service cards, asked him for an assurance that conscription would not follow. The Premier very properly replied that while conscription was not proposed and not desired, if the war situation later seemed to render it necessary it would have to be adopted. This is the only attitude that Canada can properly assume. Conscription—compulsory military service—is not a thing to be desired here or elsewhere in the British Empire. It is against the whole spirit of British liberty and British democracy. Advocates of the system there were long ago in England, and they had their sympathizers in Canada. Fortunately their views did not prevail either in England or here. Conscription, if it had been attempted in England in the early days of the war, would surely have brought grave disorder upon the country at that stage very properly.

War Conference of the Empire . . . a series of special and continuous meetings of the War Cabinet in order to consider urgent questions affecting prosecution of the war, the possible conditions on which, in agreement with our Allies, we could assent to its termination, and the problems which will then immediately arise—is no doubt intended to be a compliment to the Overseas Dominions, a recognition of the important part they are taking in the war, and of their right to share, as far as may be possible, in the direction of the Empire's affairs. The people of the Dominions will understand and appreciate this. There is a dramatic side, too, to the movement which will have its effect in Great Britain and perhaps in the enemy countries. So far so good. But if the question be viewed from a very practical standpoint—and these are times in which the practical side of things becomes more than usually important—there may be room to doubt whether such a Conference can at this time really render any valuable service. One is reminded of the story of the colored gentleman who, being asked if he could change a ten

dollar bill, replied, "No, sir, I have no change to give you, but I thank you all the same for the compliment." We should all be grateful for the compliment paid to the Dominions by the Imperial Government, even if we are conscious that there is nothing that this Dominion can do for the prosecution of the war that it is not already doing, or willing to do as readily without a Conference as with one. All the resources of the Dominion, in blood and treasure and services, have been pledged to the uttermost, as fully and unreservedly as they could be at any formal meeting in London.

The announcement of the calling of the Conference for the purpose stated seems strangely out of harmony with the situation which has just brought about a change of Government in England. The chief complaint heard from those who desired a change was that which is expressed in the homely saying about too many cooks spoiling the broth. The public was told that too many men were taking a hand in the directing of the war measures; that the Cabinet was too large; that the War Committee was too large; that the organization was unwieldy; that there were consequent indecision, delay, confusion; that what was needed was concentration of power in the hands of a very small War Council; that the ordinary members of the Cabinet must stand aside from the war business; that Parliament must be content to largely waive its privileges of inquiry; that even the Prime Minister (then Mr. Asquith) must not meddle with war measures, but allow the small body to carry on the war, thinking out everything, deciding everything, and doing everything promptly and vigorously. This War Committee, so large and unwieldy, was composed of seven members. It was proposed to Mr. Asquith (as we learn from the London Times, one of the chief advocates of the change) by Mr. Lloyd George "that the

Conditions in the West.

By E. Cora Hind.

Western Wheat Crop of 1916 not Equal in Quality to 1915 Wheat.

By R. Harcourt.

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and under it . . . in an attempt to . . . freedom when could not have . . . any organization for compulsory service. It was right that this volunteer system should be used to its fullest extent before the question of compulsion was admitted to consideration. But there came a time when the need for additional men could no longer be promptly met by the volunteer system, and then, with the support of nearly all public men who had previously resisted the conscription policy, a measure of compulsion was adopted.

So it may possibly be in Canada. Representative public men of all parties have hitherto gone on record against conscription. All have expressed a hope and a faith that under the volunteer system Canada could from time to time obtain all the men needed for her war service. That hope and to some extent that faith remains to-day. Nobody wants compulsory service. But if the war is to last a long time, and if Canada finds that the number of slackers is so large that the ranks of the battalions for active service cannot be filled in the old way, conscription may then be possible, and many who would not have assented to it before, and would not assent to it to-day, will then be ready to give it their cordial support.

Britain and her Allies must win this war. Canada must do her part to the fullest extent. Whatever is necessary—even if it be conscription—towards attaining that end must be faced boldly whenever the need arises.

The Imperial Conference

THE call for an immediate Imperial Conference in London—"not a session of the ordinary Imperial Conference, but a special