



SEVENTY minutes were all that were required by the Hon. Mr. Sifton, on Friday of last week, to make the greatest speech that has been heard in the House of Commons this session. Mr. Graham's speech on the Government railways, and Mr. Fielding's speech on the Budget, were worthy efforts, but Mr. Sifton freed from departmental responsibilities and statistics was able to touch several subjects with a freedom and a conciseness which are unusual.

#### A SPEAKER AND A SPEECH

He declared for a thoroughly organised consular service which would stimulate foreign trade; for civil service reform which would take patronage out of the hands of politicians and members of Parliament; for the throwing open of unallotted railway lands to homesteaders; for the building of a Hudson Bay railway out of the funds realised from the sale of Western lands; for private ownership of all great undertakings so long as these are well-managed; and for the All-Red Route. In dealing with each of these topics he was practical and not theoretical. His facts were well-chosen and almost convincing. He gave his reasons in each case clearly and forcibly. The whole effort was statesmanlike in an unusual degree.

When one reads that speech, he understands why Mr. Sifton does not care to again become the holder of a portfolio. He has found that there is more air outside. To get a proper perspective of Canada's great problems, one should not be hampered by party shibboleths and party necessities. A member of a Dominion Cabinet or a leader of the Opposition may know the truth and may be anxious to follow it, but he is condemned to consider the effect of his utterances and actions on the party's fortunes. Mr. Sifton slipped off the lasso a few years ago and he prefers freedom to bondage. He is as anxious as ever to serve Canada, but prefers to do it as a publicist rather than as a politician.

The speech also shows, what most of us have realised, that Mr. Sifton's forte is constructive work, not criticism. In his mental attitude, he recalls Hon. George Brown and Sir John Macdonald when they were working on Confederation. He has not the rhetoric of the Hon. Joseph Howe but he has much the same type of vision and is more practical. He would build up a nation as business men would found a great bank or create a transcontinental railway system.

THE fact that Australia is free from the near competition of any large industrial country gives it a freer hand in industrial experiments than Canada. Its experiments in connection with compulsory arbitration of wage disputes is in part an outcome of this condition.

#### AUSTRALIA AND PROTECTION

In the matter of tariff legislation similar conditions prevail. For while Canada's proximity to the United States causes the tariff legislation of the latter country to be a factor which we must consider when we are drafting tariff legislation, Australia on the other hand has not the same external compelling influence.

Australia, although the separate colonies before the new Commonwealth was formed were not a unit on the question, has definitely adopted the protectionist policy. A recent Australian parliamentary paper states that a protective tariff is justified in order "to promote regular employment, to furnish security for the investment of capital in new and in existing industries, to render stable the conditions of labour and to prevent the standard of living from being depressed to the level of foreign standards." It will be noted that questions of labour and the standard of living are made central in this plea for protection.

In recently revising its tariff in the direction of higher protection an interesting attempt has been made to attain these ends. Provision is made for the establishment of a Board of Trade composed of three members appointed for a fixed period and independent of party considerations. This Board is to have wide powers in tariff matters. To a certain extent it suggests the propositions made in Canada and in the United States in favour of a permanent tariff commission —

although its powers are not so wide as those which would be involved in these suggestions. The Board is to see that the duties imposed give the proper amount of protection. It is to divide the country into industrial districts and publish scales of "fair and reasonable wages" for such districts. No legal compulsion is to be made use of with a view to having these adopted; the appeal is to be to the self-interest of the employers. On certain goods already protected excise duties will be imposed. If the employer accepts the published scale of "fair and reasonable wages" the excise taxes will be remitted. Otherwise he must pay these taxes.

With a view to protecting the consumer the Board has powers somewhat like the anti-combine provisions of the Canadian legislation. The Board is to prevent any undue inflation of prices due to protection. Its powers, however, are investigatory alone. It is to investigate the prices charged by the protected producers; if it finds the prices unreasonable it is to report to the Government. It is in the discretion of the Government whether it will take action or not.

Under protective schemes in general we find different points of appeal. In some cases it is the diversification of industry; in others it is the standard of living as affected by the level of wages. It is natural that in Australia, where such prominence has been given to compulsory arbitration, stress should be laid on the wage side of the problem. The complexity of the system and the far-reaching extent of the governmental intervention in industry attract attention to the implications of protection in this, the most thoroughly balanced scheme of protection yet developed. It is significant that the employers are to be allowed, in form at least, a certain amount of liberty in the fixing of wages.

A REVIEWER of the books and articles on the Colonial Conference of 1907 ventures a rather suggestive statement.\* He avers that had Mr. Bourassa met political defeat in Quebec before the Conference instead of after it, Sir Wilfrid Laurier might have been more enthusiastic in the cause of Imperialism. The reviewer says that "obviously he [Sir Wilfrid] went to the Conference resolved to oppose any new developments in political relations" and suggests as a reason for this attitude that "Sir Wilfrid had always in his mind a vision of Mr. Bourassa finding in the Conference new material for an anti-imperialist campaign in the province of Quebec."

The reviewer in question has probably laid too much at Mr. Bourassa's door. It is questionable if Sir Wilfrid, with so large a following in Parliament and in the country, had any reason for fearing this arch anti-imperialist. Politically, Mr. Bourassa never counted for a great deal. He is well educated, well informed and a passionate speaker, but he has never been able to create an organised following. Only a party leader, which Mr. Bourassa never was and probably never can be, could create fear in the mind of Canada's foremost statesman. The man who had placidly accepted the resignations of Mr. Tarte, Mr. Blair and Mr. Sifton would not be likely to overestimate the political power of Mr. Bourassa.

There is every reason to believe that Sir Wilfrid's attitude at the Conference was the natural result of his long-held convictions. During his later years, Sir Wilfrid has become firmly set in his leading opinions. It is well known, for example, that he is thoroughly and unequivocally opposed to government ownership in all its newer forms. He has maintained this opinion and attitude in the face of stronger arguments and more potent influences than any Mr. Bourassa could state or exercise in his anti-imperialist campaign. Moreover, Sir Wilfrid is not a coward. To a certain extent he has followed public opinion instead of leading it, but that is a characteristic of nearly all great leaders. They yield on unimportant questions and

\* Review of Historical Publications Relating to Canada. Edited by Wrong and Langton. Toronto: Morang & Co.