

Manifesto of the Right Honourable Sir Wilfrid Laurier

(Issued Nov. 5th, 1917.)

TO THE CANADIAN PEOPLE.

The writs for a general election have been issued.

A consultation of the people at short and regular periods is the right of a free people. The constitution provides accordingly for a general election every five years. It is undeniable that there has existed a strong desire in the community to avoid an election during the war, and both parties last year agreed to the extension for one year of the Parliament elected in 1911.

An impression prevails that had I accepted the invitation of the Prime Minister to join his government, a new extension would have been possible. This impression is absolutely erroneous, the fact being that the invitation extended to me was coupled with the stipulation that the coalition government would pass a conscription measure, and then appeal to the country, thus making an election unavoidable.

The government as recently reconstructed, the Union Government so-called, is now appealing to the country for support. Six members of the Liberal party, some of them close personal friends, have consented to become members of the administration, and the programme which they intend to follow has already been placed before the public, but in this programme no trace is to be found that the Liberal members of the administration have succeeded in influencing their colleagues to the adoption of measures which they deemed essential not only to win the war, but for the welfare of the country at all times.

The Government's Manifesto.

Most of the articles in the Government's manifesto are simply stale commonplaces extracted from the Conservative programme of 1911, forgotten after the election, resurrected for a new election. Such is the promise of economy of public expenditure, and such the promise of Civil Service Reform—two reforms which the Opposition would have been happy to support in the last Parliament, if the Government had afforded them the opportunity.

Immigration.

One particular item is deserving of attention. "A strong and progressive policy of immigration" is promised. This will be, perhaps, the most important question after the war. The burdens which are now being accumulated and which will have to be assumed and borne by the Canadian people can be faced if the enormous resources of the country are developed. But development demands a rapid increase in the population. Hence the necessity of a strong and progressive immigration policy. It is manifest that the promised strong and progressive policy has been seriously impaired by the breach of faith with naturalized Canadian citizens involved in the withdrawal of the political franchise from large numbers of these citizens. This must prove a serious blow to immigration, especially when the conduct of the Canadian government is contrasted with the attitude of the United States, where no such indignity has been placed upon naturalized citizens.

Canadian Northern Railway.

An article of the programme of the Government speaks of the development of transportation facilities, but in vague though rather ambitious terms. No mention is made of the acquisition of the Canadian Northern Railway; yet this subject was not exhausted by the legislation of last session, and it will be one of the most important duties of the next Parliament again to review it.

One feature of the act of last session is that the Government becomes the owner of the stock of the Company, of the nominal value of sixty million dollars. There never was a dollar paid in that stock. The experts employed by the Government to appraise the value of the whole enterprise, men of acknowledged ability and experience, themselves have reported that the stock of the Company has no value whatever.

Yet the Government have taken authority to appoint a board of arbitrators to give a value to that property, which their experts have declared absolutely without value.

The Opposition asked that the report of the arbitrators, whatever it might be, should be