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APR 24 1918
INT. AGR. INST.

The Journal of Commerce

VOL. XLV. No. 17

MONTREAL, TUESDAY, APRIL 23, 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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More Conscription

ONLY the most urgent need could excuse the measures that have just been adopted by the Government at Ottawa for the amendment and enforcement of the Military Service Act. The failure of the Act in its previous shape is frankly admitted. A large part of the work was placed in the hands of tribunals created throughout the country, the members of which, in many cases, were lacking in qualifications for the discharge of duties of a semi-judicial character. In one district men were ordered into the ranks under conditions which in the next district were deemed proper grounds for exemption. In the appeals with which the local judges had to deal, which in many places so engaged the judges' times that the ordinary Court business had to be suspended, there were conflicts of decisions. The Central Appeal Judge at Ottawa, who had to abandon his regular court duty, found the number of appeals so great as to be beyond his power of prompt hearing. Valuable time was being occupied, much money expended, and but few men, comparatively speaking, added to the Canadian army.

Into the midst of this situation came the news that the war seemed to have entered upon its most critical period, that the greatest battles in the world's history were being fought in France and Flanders, that Canadian casualties were becoming very numerous, that the main army of Canada was on the scene of the great conflict and certain to become engaged, and that the need of men to reinforce the ranks of the Allies was the paramount question of the hour.

The Government, feeling that the reinforcements could not be obtained by the slow process of the Military Service Act in its existing form decided to make such amendment as would practically cancel all the exemptions that had been granted and allow the immediate calling out of all unmarried men and all childless widowers of the ages of 20, 21 and 22 years of age who are not physically disabled.

The measure was adopted by both the Senate and House of Commons after a brief debate—in the Senate without division, and in the House by a large majority—and is now law.

To the method employed in the passing of this legislation there may be perhaps well grounded objections. The usual form of introducing a bill to pass its several readings was not adopted. Instead the new measure was prepared in the form of a draft Order-in-Council to be made effective at once on the approval of the form by Parliament. The reason for this, of course, was the desire to take quick action, and probably there was a fear that procedure in the more regular form would meet with obstruction. The course of the debate on the resolutions seems to show that this fear was not warranted. The debate was, for the importance of the question, a very short one. The Opposition mem-

bers were content to have a general statement of their objections made by their leader, and then to record their votes without further delay. There is no reason to doubt that a bill in the regular form would have received similar treatment, for the Opposition members appear disposed to accept the verdict of the country, which is the sensible thing to do. It would have been better, for the sake of precedent, to have pursued the usual course rather than the exceptional one. However, this is more a sentimental than practical objection. The main fact is that before passing their Order-in-Council, the Government submitted it to Parliament, and afforded full opportunity for its discussion.

The new measure is a severe one, for which popularity cannot be claimed. It will produce much hardship and distress. Only under extraordinary conditions could such a law be justified. The misfortune is that the extraordinary condition exists. The men must be had to reinforce the armies at the front in the present crisis, if Canada is to do her part in the fight for liberty.

The Secret Session

THE holding of a secret session of the Canadian Parliament on Wednesday last—the House of Commons meeting in formal session and the Senators being admitted to the galleries, while all others were excluded—was a unique event, well calculated to remind the people of Canada of the critical situation arising from the war. Theoretically, until very recently, Parliament was supposed at all times to meet in secret. Though the galleries were crowded with visitors, nobody was supposed to "see" them. If it pleased any member to remark that he saw "strangers in the House," the Speaker immediately ordered the galleries to be cleared. In our Legislatures before Confederation this power of exclusion on the demand of a single member was occasionally used. This, however, was in days before democracy attained the influence it has today. In the British Parliament, from which we draw inspiration and guidance, Mr. Disraeli in 1876 moved the adoption of a new rule under which Parliament retained its own authority and that of its presiding officer, to exclude strangers, but no longer allowed the public to be shut out by the whim of a member. In 1876 the new British rule was adopted by both the Senate and House of Commons of Canada in the following form:

"If, at any sitting of the Senate (or House) any member shall take notice that strangers are present, the Speaker or the Chairman (as the case may be) shall forthwith put the question 'That strangers be ordered to withdraw,' without permitting any debate or amendment: Provided that the Speaker or the Chairman may, whenever he thinks proper, order the with-