

THE BORDEN GOVERNMENT

Characteristics—Influences—and Tendencies

THE BORDEN MINISTRY was formed on the tenth of October 1911. It is therefore on the threshold of its third year of office. A sufficient time has elapsed to enable an estimate to be formed of the Government's capacity, its characteristics and its tendencies, and the influences that are controlling its policy and administration. These influences, which afford a key to all the rest, are identical with the forces that combined to bring the Government into existence.

Despairing of ever gaining power by virtue of a constructive policy, the once formidable Conservative party in Canada determined, in the chance which Reciprocity offered in the campaign of 1911, to throw its best traditions to the winds, and by hook or crook, by alliances natural or unnatural, by pledges consistent or contradictory, by conduct patriotic or unpatriotic, to cripple the power of Sir Wilfrid Laurier and reduce his following in the Commons. In this circumstance, Conservative leaders find an excuse, though not a justification, for much of their compromising conduct during the campaign; it is also their apology for self evident limitations in the personnel of the Administration itself.

The Nationalist-Conservative Alliance.

The alliance with the Nationalists was one factor which helped to bring about the Conservative victory. In point of time it was the earliest, for the alliance was first entered into secretly during the Drummond Arthabasca by-election in November, 1910.

In the Province of Quebec, prejudices had been aroused by a small group of Nationalists against the Laurier Government for proceeding to carry out the unanimous resolution of the House of Commons of March, 1909. This resolution provided for the speedy organization of a Canadian Naval Service as Canada's most effective means of co-operating with the mother country in the defence of the seas. This resolution remains unrepealed. The Conservative party decided to make the by-election in Drummond-Arthabasca a test of the strength of these prejudices by refraining from placing a candidate in the field and allowing the battle to be fought between the Nationalists and the Liberals on the Naval issue it being understood that Conservative support would secretly be given to the Nationalist candidate. This unholy alliance succeeded, and what was tried as an experiment in 1910 became from that time forward a part of the recognized plan of campaign.

Notwithstanding that the Tory party has always claimed a monopoly of loyalty, its leaders did not hesitate to finance in large part the Nationalist campaign. Besides defraying some of the election expenses of Nationalist candidates, they assisted in paying for the circulation of *Le Devoir*, the Nationalist organ. The articles in this paper were designed to inflame the passions of French Canadians against any assistance by Canada to Britain in the maintenance of British power at sea. In many constituencies in Quebec, the Conservatives placed no candidates,

but supported the Nationalist candidate against the Liberals. In French Canadian constituencies in Ontario, Mr. Henri Bourassa, the Nationalist leader, was invited by the Conservative leaders to address the electors on behalf of their candidate. Mr. Borden's own utterances with reference to Naval policy, both in his manifestoes and his speeches, were carefully conceived so as not to antagonize Nationalist sentiment, and to further the Nationalists-Conservative Alliance. He even went so far as to permit straight Conservative candidates, in constituencies where there was some Nationalist following, to make pledges to the Nationalist party, and himself endorsed their action by supporting their candidature in person.

By unpatriotic action of this kind, the Nationalists, with Conservative aid, succeeded in carrying twenty-two seats in Quebec; the Conservatives, with Nationalist aid, carried four, and Mr. Borden was thus given the combined following of twenty-six from that province. But the price of this support necessitated the entire French-Canadian representation in the Cabinet being Nationalist. Messrs. Monk, Nantel and Pelletier, three outstanding Nationalists, were accordingly taken in as members of a Tory Cabinet, and later, when Mr. Monk resigned, Mr. Coderre, another Nationalist, became Mr. Monk's successor.

This Nationalist influence in the Cabinet has been far-reaching. True, it has been a negative, not a positive influence, but it has been responsible more than all other influences combined for the inaction, the duplicity, the twists and the turns, which have characterized Mr. Borden's leadership on the important question of Naval defence.

Organized wealth and the Interests.

When the Laurier Government brought down its proposal of Reciprocity, notwithstanding that it was based upon and practically limited to an exchange of natural products with the United States, an object hitherto sought by Conservatives and Liberal Administrations alike, "the interests" took alarm. They professed to see, in the removal of tariff barriers of any kind, a possible attack, at some future time, upon their privileged positions. With men and with money they rallied to the side of the opposition, and with men and with money they helped to carry Mr. Borden into power though among the number were several who up to the day victory was assured persisted in maintaining they were Liberals still. One of these was the Hon. W. T. White, the present Minister of Finance. Mr. White and his particular portfolio represent, in part, what the monied interests demanded of Mr. Borden on the morrow of his victory. With Mr. White lies the shaping of the tariff, with Mr. White rests the supervision which the government exercises over the banks; It is Mr. White who has the final word as to railway subsidies and grants. Not that Mr. White will seek to be other than honest, or actuated by other than public spirited motives in the discharge of his duties. But he is himself a wealthy man, whose associates are