

Western Farmers and the Tariff

From the Toronto Sun

The demand for a general reduction in the tariff, and for specific reduction through reciprocity with the United States, presented to Sir Wilfrid Laurier by representatives of the Grain Growers of Manitoba, and supported by the Grain Growers of Saskatchewan, marks the beginning of a well planned campaign by the organized farmers of Canada for relief from existing tariff burdens.

If the campaign is prosecuted to the end with the skill and vigor which have marked the beginning of the same, success will undoubtedly crown the efforts made. But skill and vigor in large measures will be required if victory is to be attained. The forces in opposition are well organized, powerful and alert. The Toronto correspondent of the British Empire Review has stated with exceptional clearness and accuracy some of the elements composing these forces. "Not only," he says, "will the protected interests be against any measure looking towards freer trade with our neighbors, but the great railways and large financial institutions of the country will be in line with the protected interests in this matter. The financial institutions will give their support to the manufacturers because, under protection, which insures excessive profits to manufacturers, financial institutions and their heads are placed in a position to make huge sums by financing mergers and combines. The great railways are interested in the same cause owing to the fact that our lines, laid out with political objects in view, think they see greater revenue for themselves from traffic flowing east and west than from that flowing north and south."

Sir Wilfrid Laurier's reply to the Manitoba Grain Growers, reported in last week's Sun, indicates that these influences had been able to bias the mind of the premier in their favor before he left Ottawa. While admitting at Brandon that the tariff can be improved he frankly stated his intention, in dealing with the United States, of keeping two things in mind: first, the British preference, and second, "protection to vested interests." By protection to vested "interests" Sir Wilfrid plainly meant a continuance of a tariff wall behind which domestic manufacturers have formed combinations for the purpose of enabling them to charge consumers excessive prices for cotton, sugar, cement, hardware, and almost all other articles used by farmers and other consumers. What the premier said to the representatives of Manitoba Grain Growers, when he met them at Brandon, clearly indicated that at that time his thought was that no concessions should be made to farmers which involved a reduction in the protection then enjoyed by manufacturers. Since then, however, the premier has heard from the representatives of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association, by whom the demand made at Brandon was reiterated. This second demand, repeated at different points in Saskatchewan, following so close on the first one, seems to have had an effect, and in reply to the Saskatchewan Grain Growers, Sir Wilfrid seems to have intimated, according to the Globe's report, that he is now prepared to accept the American offer of free trade in agricultural implements, provided this is supplemented by an offer of free trade in agricultural products as well. He has gone further and promised another tariff commission of enquiry with an advance assurance of a downward revision.

This is fairly satisfactory, and indicates that the premier has at last begun to yield to the pressure put upon him by western farmers. Behind Sir Wilfrid, however, are other forces that are less inclined to bend. Part of these forces is represented by Hon. Clifford Sifton, who may perhaps be described as an unofficial member of the cabinet. Mr. Sifton has unequivocally stated his opinion in regard to the tariff. He has said that in his opinion it is very doubtful if any substantial reduction can be made

in the tariff at the present time with advantage to the public. "My belief," he adds, "is that the tariff on the whole is fairly satisfactory, and an agitation for a further reduction is not likely to bring about beneficial results."

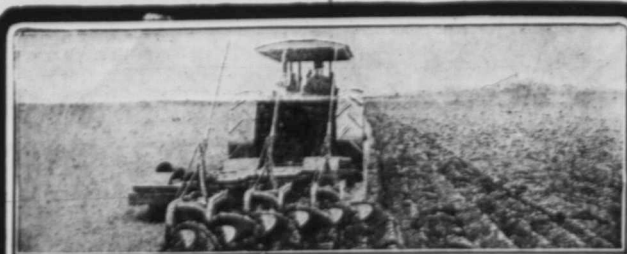
The fact that Mr. Sifton, a Western member, holds the views above expressed, furnishes additional and exceedingly significant evidence of the fact that farmers will meet powerful opposition in pressing their demand for tariff reduction, and more particularly for reciprocity with the United States. They can, nevertheless, win out provided they hold together and continue to urge their case. Western farmers so far are doing their part and doing it well. It is now up to the farmers of Ontario, as represented by the Grange, to once more give formal expression to their views on the same question. A more opportune time for such action never existed. President Taft's speech, delivered at Eastport, Me., last week, indicates that the government of the United States is more than ready to meet our government half way.

The agitation must not cease with the departure of Sir Wilfrid from the West. The tariff should be a topic for monthly discussion in every branch of the Grain Growers' Associations throughout the three provinces, culminating in a monster deputation from all Canada at the next session of parliament. At least 500 farmers who can well afford the expenditure should assemble at Ottawa next winter, thoroughly discuss their grievances and then ask for a face to face meeting with the Ottawa cabinet and members of parliament. Let them line up their representatives. Forget that there is such a thing as party. If the Tories persist in their policy of high protection let them stay in opposition. If the Laurier members continue to support high protection, even though they profess, like the Globe and Free Press, to be low tariff or free trade advocates, then the time has arrived for the farmers to take more decisive action and rally to the support of men nominated by themselves. The game of "jolly" the farmers should come to an end. Sir Wilfrid, we see, suggests another tariff commission. These tariff commissions are a fraud. They just chloroform the public for a time. They are intended to kill agitation when the time arrives for action. Sir Wilfrid knows the human mind. He knows that the majority of men frequently weary in well doing. A tariff commission can tell the people or Sir Wilfrid nothing that they do not already know. The present is the time to put the pistols to the premier's head, and to the head of Mr. R. L. Borden. The latter is as evasive on voluntary tariff discussion as the premier. It will not help the farmers to turn out a high protectionist Laurier and put in a high protectionist Borden. The only difference between Sir Wilfrid and Mr. Borden is that the former is a tariff hypocrite and the latter isn't. Give the leaders of the old line parties their last chance at the approaching session of parliament. Let the Tories understand that they cannot walk into power over the corruption, the pledge-breaking and general incompetence of the Laurier government.

It is becoming more apparent every day that the hope of the farmers and the artisans lies in perfecting their organization and preparing for active participation in the election by the nomination of their own candidates. Unless there is a striking right-about-turn by the present party leaders, the masses have nothing to hope for. The "jolly" process goes on from election to election. The strategy of the party leaders is to keep the masses unorganized.

If no definite action is taken by the farmers before or during the next session of parliament, forcing a satisfactory show down by the party leaders, another election will be called, and the farmers will find themselves for another five years in exactly the position they have been in since the days of Alexander Mackenzie.

[Note.—This utterance of the Toronto Sun should receive the careful attention of every western farmer. Now is the time for action. The western farmers have made a splendid case and if this could be supported at Ottawa this fall along with the Ontario farmers it would produce results.—Editor, Guide.



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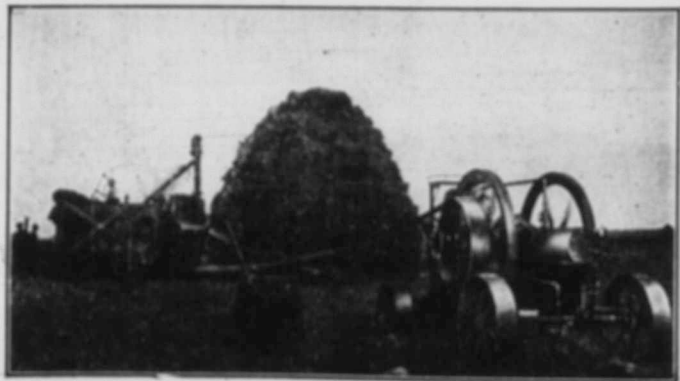
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