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## COALITION AND CONSCRIPTION.

THE negotiations in respect to the formation of a coalition cabinet which originated in the proposition of the prime minister to the leader of the opposition to take part in the formation of a cabinet to be composed of an equal representation of members from the respective parties (outside of course, the prime minister) were definitely disposed of in the letter addressed to Sir Robert Borden by Sir Wilfrid Laurier under date of June 6th. This communication so comprehensively epitomizes the whole of the negotiations that it is of instructive value and, in view of what has preceded it and may follow it, worthy of reproduction:

Ottawa, June 6, 1917.

Dear Sir Robert:

On the 12th of May you asked me to meet you on the following day, which I did. After explaining fully the conditions of the war in the light of knowledge acquired during your recent visit to Great Britain you stated the reasons which had led you to the conclusion that compulsory service was necessary, and you explained to me the provisions of the military service bill.

You then proposed the formation of a coalition Government upon the basis that, outside of the Prime Minister, each of the two political parties should have an equal representation in the Cabinet, and you emphasized the importance of avoiding, if possible, an election during the war.

I told you at once that if my co-operation was desired, I regretted that I had not been invited before you had announced a policy of compulsory service, as I dreaded very serious difficulties if a conscription law was passed by the present Parliament. You rejoined that you had thought it preferable to invite me after the policy had been enunciated rather than before.

At an interview which took place on Tuesday, the 29th of May, you suggested to me that you thought it necessary to hold a caucus of your supporters, but desired to consult me before doing so. I suggested to you that to hold a caucus pending negotiations would not likely tend towards the objects to be attained. At the same time I suggested that as I wanted to consult particularly Sir Lomer Gouin and some other friends I would like to have a clear statement in writing of your proposal, which you formulated as follows:

That a coalition Government should be formed:

That the military service bill should be passed:

That a pledge should be given not to enforce it until after a general election;

That Parliament should be dissolved and the coalition Government should seek a mandate from the people.

At the conference on Friday, the 1st of June, and again on Monday, the 4th, the possible personnel of a coalition Government was considered. Some not insuperable difficulties in that personnel were anticipated, and the subject was not concluded. On Wednesday, the 6th of June, the final conference took place, at which I announced that I had not seen my way clear to join the Government on the terms proposed. I asked you at the same time if conscription was the only basis to which you replied in the affirmative.

At this and previous interviews, I always stated to you that whenever conscription was adopted, after a consultation of the people, I would certainly urge in every possible way obedience to the law.

Believe me, yours very sincerely,

(Signed) Sir Wilfrid Laurier.

The reply of the prime minister in fairness to all sides, should also be reproduced. Sir Robert Borden's letter reads as follows:

Dear Sir Wilfrid Laurier:—

I beg to acknowledge your letter of yesterday in which you set forth the substance of recent negotiations respecting the formation of a coalition Government. At our first interview you had expressed the opinion that compulsory service should not be enforced until it had been approved by a referendum or at a general election. It was for this reason that I submitted the further proposal on the 29th of May, which is described in the fourth paragraph of your letter.

I agree that it was the policy of compulsory service which, in your judgment, made it impossible for you to join a coalition Government. I was convinced that compulsory service was necessary, and must be included in the policy of the proposed coalition. You, on the other hand, decided that you could not accept such a policy, and that you could not join a Government which adopted it.

Yours faithfully,

R. L. Borden.

While the letter of Sir Wilfrid gives a general idea of the course of the negotiations, it is significant that it does not deal with details, which is to be expected, considering the confidential nature of the conferences between the two leaders. Yet Sir Wilfrid's letter hints at terms other than those dealing with the subject matter of the communications.

Hon. Robert Rogers.

The reference to the uncompleted proposals concerning the suggested personnel of the new administration is interesting in view of the well known friendship between the prime minister and the discredited minister of public works, who has since temporarily relinquished his portfolio but who continues to use his office in the Department and also draws his salary.

Is it not a reasonable conjecture that the honored leader of the opposition could not see his way clear to becoming associated with or even sanctioning with his approval, an administration which contemplated retaining the services of Hon. Robert Rogers? And is it not at least open to conjecture that the prime minister was unable to eliminate the minister of public works even at the risk of wrecking the proposed coalition? Subsequent events have lent color to these possibilities. The minister of public works, feeling himself slipping, in view of the disclosures of Mr. Justice Galt, now constituting a most formidable indictment against him, has demanded a royal commission to clear himself of these serious accusations—a request which was complied with by the prime minister, as was to be expected, and the personnel of the tribunal decided upon after due deliberation (by the premier and his cabinet). Is it not obvious that it would scarcely have been possible for the premier to have so easily disposed of the presence of the minister of public works in the way which Sir Wilfrid, in all likelihood, suggested—viz., by informing him that his services were not required in a coalition cabinet needing the confidence and respect of the people of Canada in general?

The Nationalists.

As regards the presence of the three Nationalist