

# REFLECTIONS

By THE EDITOR

## An Unedifying Spectacle

**D**ESPITE all warnings and pleadings, the two political parties have come to a deadlock on the navy question. The leaders on both sides have been urged to settle the matter on a non-partisan basis, but they have refused. There is no need of saying which side is most to blame; it would not help the situation. The leaders of both have shown disrespect for each other and for the country's good name which is not calculated to heighten their reputations as statesmen. They may all regret it, but the result is there.

Last week the House did, what it has not done since 1895, when it remained in session continuously for five days. The Liberals talked incessantly, day and night, and the Conservatives listened with as much patience as they could muster. In the meantime, the business of the country is delayed and no good purpose is served.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier says it is not his fault, as there is an important principle involved. He and his followers believe that they are fighting in a just cause. On the other hand, Premier Borden maintains that the party which he leads is entitled, after a fair amount of discussion, to have its proposed legislation passed on division. Each side thinks it is right and refuses to yield.

Obstinacy in a man is a vice or a virtue. It is a vice, when there is no superlative reason why it should be exhibited. This is an occasion when it is difficult to see the superlative reason for the obstinacy of both parties.

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## The Public Unconvinced

**C**URIOS how the public refuses to take the naval debate seriously. Neither side has impressed the people with the fact that there is a great principle at stake. If the people believed that the Borden administration intended to support a policy of permanent contribution they would arise and smite it. It is quite evident that the Liberals have failed to convince any large number of people that the Conservatives are anti-Canadian. On this point, Mr. Borden has stayed fairly well within the limits of Torres Vedras, a famous haven of refuge for astute statesmen. Ninety per cent. of the Conservatives who read and think at all deeply are in favour of an ultimate Canadian navy, and believe the Borden Cabinet is. If they could be persuaded that the permanent policy of the Conservative administration will not include a Canadian navy, there would be a mighty rumpus.

The Liberals claim that the Conservative party is being pledged to a policy which few of its supporters favour—simply because that policy suits some of the Conservative party leaders. The Opposition is hammering away in a vain attempt "to put this over" to the people. This explains last week's prolonged and useless debate. Conservative voters so far have taken Mr. Borden at their estimate of him, and refuse to believe that he is a permanent "contributionist." They refuse to listen to what the Liberals say of him. They are determined to trust their leader until the fullest and most complete proof is brought against him.

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## Why This Situation?

**C**ANADIANS do not relish turning governments out of power. In the first place, it is positively heart-breaking to be forced to read every morning the jumble of political half-truths and party cries which mark the progress of a general election campaign in the daily press. The daily paper is indispensable to the breakfast table, but during political campaigns it is often necessary to avoid pages which are usually interesting. Few of us want general elections more than once in five years.

For example, I take up the *Mail and Empire* this morning and I find "Giddy Gurgle of Sound Continues at Ottawa," in large type, and a special article on "The Ant Would Stop the Elephant." The sporting and financial pages are the only solace. Then I take up the *Globe* and I read, "Opposition Valiantly Holds the Fort and Finds it Easy," and "Conspiracy to Apply Gag Yesterday Became a Fiasco." Again I am inclined to skip over to "The Fall of Janina" and the weather. And yet I am greatly interested in this question.

The ordinary citizen hates this daily menu of

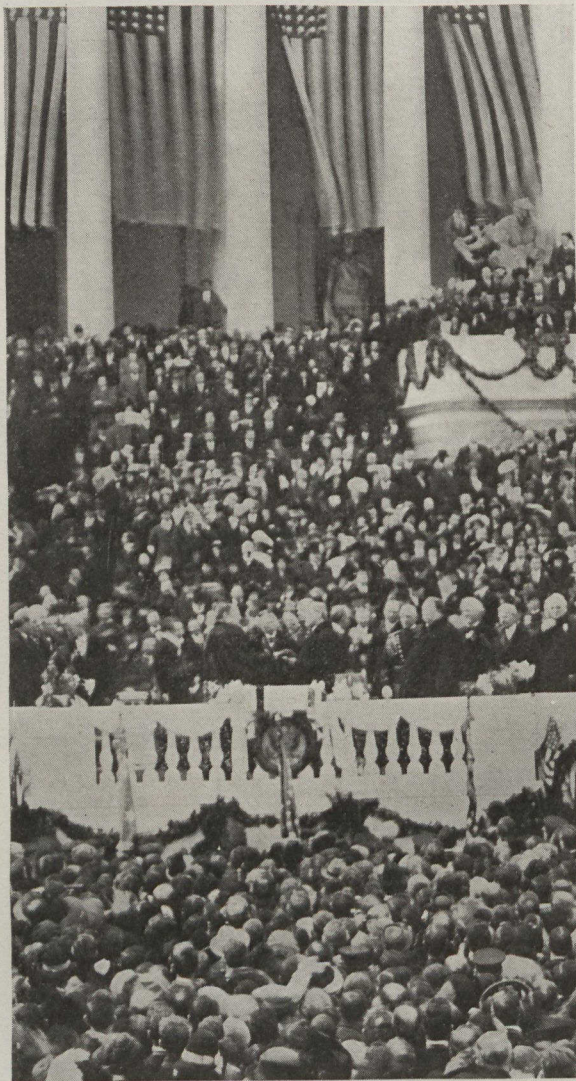
contentious politics such as we had last week. Hence, when he once puts a government in power he is inclined to keep it there. The Borden administration was elected in September, 1911, for a term of five years, and the average citizen is willing to give it a fair chance to serve out that term.

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## The Real Issue

**L**EST there may be some of our readers who may be somewhat doubtful of the real issue, let the *COURIER* state it as we see it. The Conservatives propose to give thirty-five million dollars to Great Britain in the form of three ships, but refuse to state whether or not they intend to follow up with more contributions. The Liberals are willing to vote the thirty-five millions, but only with a declaration of a general policy in favour of

TO GUARD AND DEFEND



President Woodrow Wilson Taking the Oath of Office at Washington on March 4th.

a Canadian navy. Both are in favour of doing something to help the Empire, but each wants to do it in its own way.

There it is in a nutshell. Forty columns of solid brevier type would not make it any clearer. If you are a "centralist" you must sympathize with Mr. Borden. If you are an ordinary imperialist, opposed to centralism, then you may sympathize with either him or his opponents. If you think both sides are playing politics and refuse to take either seriously, fear not—you have plenty of good company.

The issue is vital if pressed to a conclusion, but most of us feel that the dignity of Canada and of the Empire seems to be of less importance to the members of the House of Commons just now than mere party advantage.

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## The Closure

**T**HERE has been much talk of the likelihood of Premier Borden adopting "the closure" in order to force the naval bill through the House. If Sir John Macdonald had adopted it in 1885 he might have forced his franchise bill through instead of being compelled by prolonged opposition

to modify it. If Sir Charles Tupper had adopted it in 1896, he might have succeeded in carrying his Manitoba School Act and thus avoided a general election. If Sir Wilfrid Laurier had adopted it in 1911, he might have saved himself from the same fate as Sir Charles Tupper. All these three prime ministers were opposed to limiting the freedom of parliamentary debate. If, therefore, Mr. Borden follows the precedents of this country, he will not adopt the closure.

If he desires to introduce it, he can appeal to the British precedent, where a closure exists. It was adopted at a special session of the British Parliament called for that purpose in 1887. Under this rule of the House, a member may arise in his place at any time during a debate and move "that the question be now put." This motion is at once voted upon, unless the Chair decides that it would be unfair to do so. This gives the Chair an arbitrary and important power, and the Chair usually follows the wishes of the Premier in exercising that power. Premier Asquith used this rule quite often during the Home Rule debate and was always able to carry the Speaker's judgment, although the Speaker is not one of his appointees.

There has always existed a strong Canadian prejudice against adopting the closure. If it had existed in 1911, reciprocity would have become law and there would have been no election in September, 1911. Mr. Borden might still be leader of the Opposition if he had not been able to prolong the reciprocity discussion for four months of actual debate.

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## Sir Richard's Next Move

**C**ONSIDERABLE speculation exists as to Sir Richard McBride's next move. In the last general election, he swept the boards; not a single Liberal was elected. Hence he achieved a victory which he can never hope to duplicate. If he is to do anything bigger in his life-time, he must go to Parliament Hill or Westminster. There have been rumours of both moves. His friends say he would prefer London to Ottawa, and the British House of Commons to the Canadian.

The B. C. Legislature closed its annual session on March 1st, with businesslike despatch and results. One hundred bills were passed, though none is startling. The finances are in such excellent condition that the provincial poll-tax has been abolished, and the personal property-tax will follow soon. British Columbia is the only province which has had direct taxation for provincial purposes. The excellent state of the treasury has also led to the adoption of a policy of free lands for settlers. This will help the agricultural development.

Will this be Sir Richard's last session? Will he go to England and take a constituency as other ambitious Canadians have done? And will Hon. W. J. Bowser be the next premier of British Columbia? These are questions which are in the minds of the politicians of the sunset province.

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## Life Insurance Age

**A** BILL has been introduced into the Ontario Legislature which proposes to do away with the necessity of proving age in life insurance cases. If a company accepts a man's declaration of age at the time of insurance, the bill proposes that no further certificate shall be required from the assured or his beneficiaries. This seems to be reasonable. After thirty, forty or fifty years have elapsed, under the present system, a man's beneficiaries may be called upon to prove that he gave his correct age at the time he was insured. This is often difficult. Indeed the man may have honestly made a mistake of a year or two. This is unfair to his heirs.

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## The Panama Canal

**G**REAT BRITAIN maintains that Congress having passed an act discriminating against British ships passing through the Panama Canal, there is already in existence a dispute which should be referred to The Hague. The United States says the act must be followed by a concrete case before such a reference may occur. In other words, Great Britain has not been injured until some United States vessel passes the canal free. This is the present situation.

The next move will come from a new United States administration. Whether President Wilson and Secretary of State Bryan will take the same view as their predecessors, remains to be seen. The British opinion is that President Wilson will either order the repeal of the offensive clause, or will at once send the question to The Hague for discussion. In other words, they believe that Wilson and Bryan are fairer-minded men than Taft and Knox. The influence of Mr. Root will be of value at this time.