

## Our Ottawa Letter

Conscription Worries Both Parties—Liberals Demand Tariff Reduction  
(By The Guide Special Correspondent)

Ottawa, May 25.—Last week in parliament closed with a gap of astonishment because of the unexpected announcement by Sir Robert Borden that a measure of selective conscription would be introduced; this week closes with the air charged with uncertainty as to what the developments in regard to conscription, both within and without the house will be. The government is not yet prepared to unfold the details of its proposals, although some have been announced either officially or semi-officially in advance, but a considerable commotion has developed in Quebec province, in labor circles, and it is also stated to a more limited extent in agricultural districts, where farmers do not desire to see their limited supply of labor still further depleted.

In regard to the bill to be introduced it is known definitely that an effort will be made to remove the selection of the men who must fight overseas from partisan control by the appointment of non-partisan boards to make the selections and that youths of less than twenty years of age will not be enrolled for service. All men between the ages of 20 and 40 or 45 will probably be enrolled, from whom the fighters will be chosen. Already steps have been taken to prevent the departure from Canada of men of military age without the permission of the government.

### Laurier's Stand Doubtful

What will happen when the bill reaches the arena of parliament is a matter which is bothering the politicians on both sides of the house not a little. No one knows definitely what position the government supporters from Quebec will take or what will happen within the ranks of the opposition. There are those who predict that the Liberals will be split in twain and that it will even be necessary for Sir Wilfrid Laurier to lay down the leadership of the party unless he can undertake to produce some alternative plan upon which his followers can unite. At present it would appear that those who come from west of the Ottawa river will vote for conscription, while Liberal members from Quebec and the Maritime provinces may oppose it.

Doubtless there will be a demand from opposition members that conscription of men must be accompanied by a conservation of wealth, while the government must take some steps to reduce the cost of living in order that men who go overseas may feel sure that their families will not suffer in their absence. It is suggested that if the difficulties which appear to be developing in Quebec and elsewhere, do not die down the government should be urged to give voluntary enlistment another trial before enforcing conscription.

The government has given formal notice of the resolution praying the Imperial authorities to extend the life of parliament for another year, or until October 7, 1918. The feeling is general that the fate of this bill and of conscription are intertwined, and that, in order to clear up the murky political situation the government will be urged to have to seek a new mandate from the people or consent to the organization of a national government, inclusive of men of both political parties. The argument that a six year old government should not attempt to enforce conscription is one which will doubtless be frequently heard during the next few weeks.

### To Appoint Food Dictator

It is said to be the intention of the government to appoint a food dictator shortly and the names of W. Macdougall Evans and C. A. MacGillivray, both westerners, are mentioned in this connection. According to the semi-official announcements which have been made the dictator would not have the power to fix prices, at least at the outset. He would be given authority to compel the food storage men to sell products in their warehouses and to control the marketing of produce to a considerable degree. Doubt has been expressed in the house as to the effectiveness of control of food prices by legislation. As Dr.

Neely pointed out during the course of the budget discussion the only sure cure is to put farmers in the most favorable position to produce cheaply by reducing their tariff taxation. Large production and competition, he said, would produce the only permanent cure for the present situation.

There is not much stir in regard to railway matters and it is doubtful if the government has yet had time to give much consideration to the report of the Drayton-Arworth commission. Railway lobbyists have been fairly active around the corridors of parliament and some anti-nationalization literature has been distributed amongst the members of the house during the past few days.

### Demand Lower Tariff

The most important thing that has occurred in connection with the budget debate happened on Wednesday when Hon. Frank Oliver moved an amendment, which, presumably, represents the attitude of the opposition in regard to the tariff. Should Mr. Oliver's proposals be adopted, as they will be at this session of course, tariff reform even more sweeping in some respects than was proposed by the reciprocity agreement would become effective. Mr. Oliver's amendment calls for tariff changes under five heads as follows:

First—That wheat, wheat flour, and all other products of wheat be placed on the free list.

Second—That farm implements and machinery, tractors, mining, flour and sawmill machinery, rough and partly dressed lumber, illuminating, lubricating and fuel oils, cement and fertilizers, be added to the free list.

Third—That staple foods and food products (other than wheat flour) domestic animals and foods, therefore, be admitted free when coming from and being the product of any country admitting like Canadian articles into such country free of duty.

Fourth—That substantial reductions be made in the general tariff on all imported articles but luxuries.

Fifth—That the British preference be increased to fifty per cent. of the general tariff.

Mr. Oliver said that his proposal meant that the farmers of the west were willing to give the consumers of the east the benefit of free food importations and asked in return that the western farmers be assisted in competing in the world's market by being enabled to secure their implements, machinery, lumber, etc., as cheap as possible. Wheat and its products, he said, should be on the free list irrespective of the action of any country because they were basic products. As for the British preference, he said that some people were of the opinion that Canada gave, and received nothing in return. As a matter of fact the British preference lightened the burden of taxation on the people of Canada by five million dollars. If Canada secured this benefit under the present preference no one should object to the British industries being benefited.

### White Spars for Time

Mr. Oliver and other opposition speakers supported the changes as being an absolutely necessary change in the method of taxation in order to increase production and thereby contribute to the future development of the country, but these arguments did not meet with the approval of Sir Thomas White, minister of finance. Sir Thomas firmly maintained that it would be unwise to revise the tariff during war time. Owing to the unsettled value of commodities throughout the world, he argued, it would be impossible to bring about such a revision as would be equitable now and apply to conditions which will prevail after the war. No doubt, he said, the time would come when tariff revision would be necessary, but then revision would have to be made in the light of the prevailing conditions and having due regard to treaties which might be entered into with allied nations.

### Carvell Gives Figure

This view was vigorously combated by F. B. Carvell, who seconded Mr.

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Oliver's amendment. The big member from New Brunswick told the minister of finance that the principle of reciprocity was just as strong in 1917 as it was in 1911; that the minister had cheerfully admitted that he was wrong in connection with free wheat and that the tariff could be revised downward under present conditions better than at any other time. The minister of finance had not hesitated to revise the tariff upwards but now he says he cannot revise it downwards. Mr. Carvell thought that such an attitude was ridiculous. Mr. Carvell said he did not consider himself either a free trader or a protectionist. It was not his desire to do harm to any legitimate Canadian industry, but he would not allow any Canadian business to exist under con-

ditions which imposed a tax of from 40 to 50 per cent. on the consumers. In this connection Mr. Carvell insisted that cement, boots, shoes and canned goods for which people are paying high prices, although they are poor producers of revenue. Speaking of automobiles which he said have become a practical necessity on the farm, Mr. Carvell said that an automobile worth one thousand dollars in the State of Maine sells for \$1,400 at Woodstock, N.B., a few miles away. This was about, more particularly in view of the fact that there is really only one concern that manufactures automobiles outright in Canada.

W. A. Buchanan, of Medicine Hat, and Dr. MacNutt, of Saltreids, and Dr.

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