

LOADING DICE FOR ELECTION

War-time Election Act is So Regarded by Liberals on Reading It

DECIDEDLY DRASTIC BILL

(Staff Correspondence of The Globe.) Ottawa, Sept. 6.—The war-time elections act, introduced in the Commons this afternoon, lives up to its advance notices as being a decidedly drastic measure, ostensibly designed, as its sponsor, Hon. Arthur Meighen, put it, to make "obligation to war service the basis of war franchise," and really designed, as members of the Opposition say, to load the dice for the coming elections.

Woman Suffrage Promise Broken.

The promise that Sir Robert Borden gave early in the session that before Parliament ended the Government would provide for a general measure of female suffrage is not kept. Instead, the franchise is given only to the wives, widows, mothers, sisters and daughters of men who have served outside of Canada in the Canadian Expeditionary or other allied forces, or inside or outside Canada in the Canadian or British naval force. No other women, no matter what their war service or sacrifice may have been, are given the right to vote.

Sweeping Disfranchisement.

All citizens of Canada who are of alien enemy birth, unless they have been naturalized before the last fifteen years, and the Poles and other immigrants from European countries whose mother-tongue is that of one of the enemy nations, are struck from the lists. There is no provision for allowing these men, although many thousands of them are now good citizens of Canada, contributing to the Patriotic Fund, law-abiding and pro-ally, to retain the rights they have enjoyed hitherto in the matter of franchise. An exception, however, is made in the cases of the grandfathers and fathers of alien enemy origin who have sons at the front. In such case, the fathers and grandfathers are not disfranchised.

Serious Matter of Lists.

Apart from the general issue at stake as to the national wisdom of partial enfranchisement and partial disfranchisement of particular classes of the people, perhaps the most serious aspect of the new bill is in regard to the creation of a new machinery for preparing new Dominion lists without the safeguard of judicial Court of Revision, and relying almost solely on the honesty and fairness of the special enumerators to be appointed under the sole control of the Administration in power.

Where Real Joker Lies.

The real "joker" in the bill seems to lie in the provisions giving these enumerators power to add to the lists on polling day the names of any voter who swears that his name had been wrongfully omitted from the lists and who satisfies the enumerator that there should be no such omission. The enumerator may then give a certificate and the vote be recorded in the regular way. But if the enumerator is not satisfied that the voter's name should be added on polling day the vote may be cast, but it is placed in a separate envelope and counted in the final result only in case a recount is granted after the initial result is declared. Then such votes would be reviewed and allowed or disallowed in the regular way by the judiciary.

In Hands of Machine.

Meanwhile, as will readily be seen, the Government might be retained in power by the work of partisan enumerators who allow those to vote known to be in favor of the Government, and give only tentative votes, not counted on polling day, to those known to be against the Government. The control of the election machinery and of the preparation of the lists is placed more than ever in the hands of the political machine in power. It is this aspect of the bill that will probably be most vigorously fought by the Opposition.

Complications, Confusion, Likely.

The whole measure is a somewhat lengthy one of four or five printed pages, with a score or more of clauses to be read as amendments to specific clauses of the Dominion election act. The Secretary of State outlined the main provisions this afternoon, but there was no opportunity given until late to-night for any detailed study of the bill, as it was not available in printed form until the morning. The cursory survey of it makes it very evident that the new and untried machinery is liable to cause many complications and great confusion just on the eve of an election, especially in view of the fact that the enumerators' lists are not required to be posted until four days before the actual polling and that complicated provisions are made for adding more names on polling day.

Rolls to Open 9 a.m.

One new feature which may be noted is that the polls are to open at 9 o'clock instead of 8 o'clock in the morning at all polls except those in the cities of Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, St. John, Quebec, Ottawa, Calgary, Vancouver and Victoria.

To Rush Measure Through House.

Present indications are that the Government intends to rush the measure through the Commons and on to the Senate as early as possible. It is practically certain that the bill will be invoked to achieve the desired end, in the hope of preventing any possibility of a holdup in the Senate, where the closure rule is not in force, until October 7th, when Parliament expires.

Valid Only in War Time.

Hon. Arthur Meighen, in introducing the war time elections act, said: "The bill which I now present, affects only an election in time of war or during mobilization, and goes out of existence entirely when such period is over."

The necessity of a war time elections act arises solely from the fact that there is a war time election, and the purpose of the bill now introduced is solely to meet the extraordinary conditions encountered in the necessity of deciding at such a time, by an electoral contest, so vital an issue as now confronts the Canadian people.

Necessity of Election Regrettable.

"We find ourselves compelled to submit what is really the destiny of our country to the arbitrament of the ballot at a time when the best part of our manhood is struggling in the throes of a death combat overseas. Upwards of 300,000 of the sons of Canada are absent from our shores, and of the 300,000 it is a moral certainty that a large percentage will not be physically able to

exercise the franchise. The nearer we approach the reality that a general election is inevitable, the more regrettable the necessity for such an election appears.

Unjust to Country's Defenders.

"We have passed a military voters' bill, which to the best of our power places the franchise within the reach of our fighting men, but no effort of this Parliament can do the impossible and enable all, or nearly all, of these fighting men to vote. It may indeed transpire that a relatively large proportion are, in effect, though not by statute, disfranchised. An election therefore in war time, and particularly at this stage of the war, is an injustice, and a great injustice, to the overseas soldiers of Canada; and of all classes to whom a country should never be unjust, the first in that country's defenders.

"But this is not the entire personal force and influence of these 300,000 men is stripped from them for the purpose of this contest. They are the foremost of our sons, the very bone, sinew and virility of Canada. Those at home who should be at home, and those at home who should be overseas, are in the full enjoyment not only of their ballot, but of the exertion of all their faculties in whatever direction they desire to exert them in this contest; but a penalty falls on those who have been true enough and brave enough to fight our battles, in that they are deprived in part of the ballot and wholly of their electoral influence.

Voices of 30,000 Are Still.

"Nor can we forget that some 30,000 have already fallen in the struggle. Their voices are still, while the voices of those who remained behind can be heard, and will be heard. Some thousands more are prisoners of war, and are suffering hardships unspoken of, for the sake of those at home. These men can have no voice, but those for whom they suffer are in the full enjoyment of every privilege of citizenship.

Task to Repair Injustice.

"The considerations to which I have referred will, I think, make it plain to the minds of all that if a contest at the polls must come, Parliament must address itself to the task of bringing about such electoral conditions as will repair as fully as Parliament can repair the injustice that would under an ordinary franchise fall upon our soldiers overseas. To do this is the primary purpose of the bill which is now introduced. The task has not been an easy one.

Soldiers' Womenfolk Enfranchised.

"It is proposed that by a measure of women enfranchisement a level of strength shall be given to the voice of the soldiers of Canada. Those of their nearest kin at home may be presumed to be most likely to re-echo the sentiments of their sons, husbands and brothers overseas, and this bill the nearest female relatives of the men of our expeditionary forces who have left the shores of Canada, and have given the right to vote. The wives or widows, the mothers, the daughters, and the sisters of overseas soldiers are by this bill enfranchised.

Reasonable Extension of Franchise.

"It will be remembered that earlier in the session the Prime Minister intimated to Parliament that, in his judgment, it would be proper to extend the franchise to the women of Canada, subject to such conditions and limitations as Parliament might provide and that whatever extension of the franchise was made to one Province should be made to all. Under the abnormal circumstances precipitated by the present war, the measure of women suffrage which I have just outlined is deemed fitting and does indeed constitute, in my judgment, a reasonably general extension of the franchise to women. It will be obvious to all that, having regard to the fact that as all female immigrants to this country have become naturalized by marriage or by the naturalization of a parent, and without entailing upon themselves any special oath or obligation, an unlimited admission of women to the franchise at this time would be unfair and unreasonable. A line of limitation must, therefore, be found. The principal reason for adopting the line laid down by this bill is that it is the only means of extending to the soldiers living, dead or in chains an adequate voice in the decision of a great electoral contest fraught with consequences peculiarly vital to themselves.

War Service Basis of Wider Franchise.

"War service should be the basis of war franchise. It has been our purpose to make this, as far as possible, the central principle of the bill now introduced. It is true that war service does not consist wholly of the sacrifice of the husband or the brother for the purposes of the battlefield, but such sacrifice is the greatest of all, and I believe the women of Canada generally will consider it not unfair that such sacrifice should have special recognition. As the war is over a wider franchise may well be given the women of Canada, and it is my earnest hope and belief that the step now taken may lead to such result.

Two Classes Barred Out.

"So far as legislation can attain the end, the obligation to war service and the right to war franchise should go hand in hand. On this principle, which underlies this act, it is proposed that those who, for reasons special to themselves, are unavailable for the highest of war service, should not while exempted from such war service, be in the position to exercise a measure of control over those who bear the burden. We have in Canada, broadly speaking, two classes so exempt. The one class is now exempt by law, and the other has been in effect exempt, and is by this act made exempt by law.

lists of those entitled under the military service act to be relieved on conscientious grounds from combatant service, and the second class is constituted by that portion of our foreign population who have recently come to Canada, and are of alien enemy birth or near extraction.

Conscientious Objectors.

"As to the conscientious objectors, it is not considered right that those who refuse on conscientious grounds to bear arms should be enabled in the midst of a war either to compel others to fight for them or to deny to those who do battle the right to reinforcements. If it is their belief that a nation should not defend itself by arms, and if on that belief they refuse to fight for the existence of their country, then they should not be in a position to exercise control over their country while it is in arms and while it has to fight to live. This, I believe, will be the view shared in the main by themselves. We find no fault with them for their beliefs. This is a free country and they have been welcomed to our shores, but they will, I am sure, deem it not unfair that those who are liable to do battle and to all the sacrifices of the war should constitute the democracy which controls the destiny of the country in the time of war.

Enemy Aliens.

"As to the second class, those born in enemy countries and who have in recent years become naturalized in Canada, and those who, though born in European countries but geographically within the enemies' domain, are nevertheless of German, Austrian, or Turkish blood, kin and language, it has, from the commencement of hostilities, been found undesirable to enlist them for combatant service. I am free to admit, and indeed proud to say, that in the main, having regard to peaceful pursuits within this country, this portion of our population has, all things considered, conducted itself satisfactorily. Many of them, however, have sons or brothers, their very nearest of kin, fighting against us on the soil of Europe. It would seem unnatural, even were it desirable, to compel these men to do battle against their kin and against the country from which they can scarcely wholly as yet be divorced in sympathy.

British and Australian Examples.

"Great Britain has recognized this principle since the outbreak of the war, and with very few exceptions has declined to admit to her army men of alien enemy birth or near extraction. The Commonwealth of Australia, in legislating for a general elections held there some months ago, refused to admit to the franchise all of its citizens of alien enemy birth, no matter how long they had been in the country.



before the matter was definitely decided. Sir Thomas White, Minister of Finance, gave denial to a statement emanating from Toronto to the effect that it had been decided to increase military pensions by sixty per cent. This announcement, he said, was without authority, the Government not having arrived at any decision as to the increase in pensions to be granted.

Conservatives Glout Over It.

Conservatives frankly and enthusiastically proclaimed the bill as a purely party measure. "Good-bye, Grits," they chanted in the corridors, "we've got you now." They gloried in the fact that the bill "had good sharp teeth," and the praises of Hon. Robert Rogers were sung loud and long. The measure is openly credited to the Honorable "Bob," and it is claimed that the price Premier Borden paid for continued life in leadership at the recent caucus was the abandonment of his previously expressed abhorrence for a drastic franchise act and an acceptance of that part of the Rogers program.

Sir Robert Did Not Appear.

Hon. Arthur Meighen, the new Secretary of State, who introduced the bill, which stood in the name of the Premier, said he did so owing to the regrettable illness of Sir Robert Borden. The Premier was confined to his home yesterday and to-day, and the rumor persists that he did not endorse over the task of standing sponsor for the measure his erstwhile colleague had forced upon the Government.

The Bill's Leading Points.

The outstanding features of the bill itself, as submitted to the House by Mr. Meighen, are the disfranchisement, in all Provinces where women now have votes, of all women who are not wives, widows, mothers, sisters or daughters of men who served in the overseas Canadian forces; the enfranchisement in all Provinces where they have not votes of all women who are wives, widows, mothers, sisters or daughters of men who served in the overseas forces; the disfranchisement of all Canadian citizens of alien enemy birth or blood who have been naturalized since March 31, 1902, a period of fifteen years and the disfranchisement of all exempted from the operation of the military service act by reason of conscientious objection and of all who may be convicted of offences under the military service act.

the statutory law for male voters as to age, race and residence operates. From the operation of the alien enemy disfranchisement Armenians and Syrians out of sympathy with Turkey are exempted.

New machinery is provided for the preparation of the voters' lists. For Ontario the existing lists stand, except for the amendments provided.

To Be Taken Up Friday.

Parliament will proceed with the consideration of the measure to-morrow, despite the protest of the Opposition. The bill, Mr. Meighen announced, would be printed to-morrow morning and be ready for the afternoon sitting. Sir Wilfrid Laurier thought more reasonable opportunity should be given the members to study the measure, which was one of great importance and possibly far-reaching consequences. It was not fair treatment to place the measure in the hands of members just before the sitting and require them to proceed with informed and intelligent consideration of it. In view of the fact that the Conservative members were reported to have had two caucuses upon the measure, Liberals claim opportunity should be given them to discuss it before its consideration in the House.

Relying to Sir Wilfrid Laurier's request not to proceed peremptorily with the consideration of the measure to-morrow, Mr. Meighen stated it was late in the session and it was better to proceed at once.

"I am sorry the bill has been brought down so late, but the fault is not ours," replied Sir Wilfrid. "It gives very little time for the consideration it deserves."

Certain Exceptions Made.

"By this bill only such as have been naturalized since March 31, 1902, are affected. All others are left untouched. In Australia an exception was made of Armenians and Assyrians, and of those who had sons or brothers enlisted. In Canada we make the same exception, and we exempt also those whose grandsons joined the forces.

Exempt If Disfranchised.

"Furthermore, the bill specifically states that wherever there is disfranchisement for this war election there goes with it exemption from combatant service. Under the military service act no man will be forced to fight who is not under this act allowed to vote.

"Included among those of enemy birth naturalized within the last fifteen years are those who, though born in other European countries, speak as their mother-tongue the language of an alien enemy. These may fairly be presumed to be of non-enemy extraction, and not essentially different from those of enemy birth. To them also is granted exemption from combatant service under the compulsion law. Wherever the privilege of voting is withheld the exemption from military service is granted, and extends also to their sons who are under age.

Requests From People Themselves.

"I may add that as to both these cases there have come from some of the people themselves, requests that this step be taken. Plainly it is not fair either to those men themselves who would be called upon to send or to those who would be called upon to do battle against their kin, and on the other hand it certainly is not fair to the rest of our people, on whose shoulders and on whose hearts is the burden of the war, that its conduct and its vigor should be even in part determined by those who cannot participate and whose necessities cannot be as those of the rest of Canada.

Provincial Qualifications in General.

"Beyond the two features I have mentioned, namely, the addition of women and disfranchisement of a certain limited class of aliens, the Provincial franchise and qualification for voters are adopted throughout every Province.

"These are the main features of this act. The alteration of the franchise, of course, requires adjustments in the machinery of the preparation of lists. Hitherto, the Provincial lists have been adopted in seven of the Provinces, and the Yukon. By this bill Provincial lists are still adopted wherever they exist, and so far as it is possible to adopt them, in the four Western Provinces where the Provincial lists contain the names of all women as well as men they cannot, of course, be adopted, and provision is made for the preparation of the lists in these four Provinces in like manner to the method obtaining for