

THE ALIEN LABOR QUESTION.

A great meeting of war veterans held in Toronto on Saturday demanded that enemy aliens in the country be employed in work of national importance or in industries essential to the war, the wages of each in excess of a Canadian soldier's pay and allowance to be retained for war purposes. The veterans also asked that the Military Service Act be made applicable to all Allied and neutral aliens on the lines of the treaty between the United States and Canada.

Able-bodied aliens are profiting by the shortage of labor, and those of military age have a special advantage over Canadian citizens. It is impossible not to share the resentment at this discrimination in favor of foreigners, of whom many are secretly hostile to the cause of the Allies, but can it be remedied without jeopardizing the national interest? The labor scarcity is so acute that the work performed by aliens, much of it of a class that Canadians do not court, cannot be sacrificed without serious loss in essential industries. A reduction in their earnings might bring a corresponding reduction in the volume of their labor, through malingering or absolute refusal to work. Those who were interned as a punishment would become a public charge. The Prime Minister of Ontario reported to the Legislature a few weeks ago that the attempt to employ alien labor in farm operations in Northern Ontario, under military surveillance, had been a failure. If there is any possible way of deriving public advantage from the labor of enemy aliens it should be found, but the solution of the problem is not an easy one.

The case of Allied and neutral aliens is complicated by international law, but it ought not to be impossible to meet the request of the veterans that negotiations be opened with other nations in an effort to reach agreements similar to that with the United States. The option of enlistment or deportation is offered Canadians of military age in the United States and Americans of military age in Canada. It is a just provision, but it ought not to be enforced against the nationals of any country without its consent.