

Our Parliamentary Letter

From Our Special Correspondent

Our Correspondent at Ottawa is writing a weekly letter, and we publish both because they are a complete record and a splendid resume of the work accomplished and the problems discussed in the House. These letters will be continued to the close of the session and should be of absorbing interest to our readers.

Ottawa, April 26th, 1918

The House has been occupied with a variety of routine business. On April 19th the Premier brought down a motion seeking ratification of the Order-in-Council making amendments to the Military Service Act which cancelled all exemptions for men be-



tween twenty and twenty-three. Sir Robert Borden, Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Mr. Rowell in turn went over the old ground which had been so often traversed before. Mr. Molloy of Provencher, Man., moved an amendment providing for the exemption of farmers, to which Mr. Carvell replied. Mr. Carvell does not wear the guise of a completely happy man as he sits on the Unionist benches but on this occasion he spoke with considerable force and effect though he had very little new light to throw on the subject. He, however, strongly emphasized the fact that the youth of Quebec were not alone in scheming for exemptions under the Act but that the men registered in other provinces and particularly in Ontario had been equally energetic in the process of avoiding its call. Mr. Lapointe of Montreal moved an amendment for a six months hoist when both this and Mr. Molloy's were defeated by majorities of about fifty and the resolution was agreed to by the same number of votes. It is understood that the most of the opposition were decidedly against encouraging the Lapointe amendment and they refrained from making any speeches to the great disappointment of the Ontario Orangemen, who were loaded up with their usual cargo of froth and vituperation. The Military Service Act in its original form has proved a grievous fiasco and if the Government in November had offered a three hundred dollar bounty to every man who enlisted they might have saved themselves a vast amount of trouble and secured infinitely more recruits. Of course the necessities of the situation in Flanders are very great but it may still be found that food is a greater necessity of the Allies than men. Orangemen in the House are the most useless and dangerous element in the Canadian Parliament. They are all men of narrow education and restricted views and have little thought save preserving the petty grafts and interests which may secure popularity among their own constituents and may help their return at the next election. Their attitude has completely disgusted a large number of Western Unionists, some of whom are said to have registered a protest with the Cabinet against it. Mr. H. A. Mackie of Edmonton, who has a French-Canadian mother voiced their sentiments in the House by rebuking the ill-tempered and futile abuse on Quebec which the Orange patriots indulge in, and won general commendation therefor. The said Mr. Mackie is a speaker of considerable powers and knowledge.

The Government have recently done one or two good things. They have provided

funds for a statistical department whose absence was a deplorable gap in our machinery of administration heretofore. They have also introduced a measure providing fifty thousand dollars which will be increased annually to one hundred and fifty thousand dollars for assisting the provinces to establish state labor bureaux. Whatever money the provinces provide for this purpose, will be duplicated by the Federal Government. There was some sharp criticism of the scheme and its deficiencies were pointed out. What is really needed is a complete co-ordinated system of bureaux under Federal control and sooner or later this will have to be devised.

Considerable discussion has taken place at various times in the House over the resignation of Mr. W. F. O'Connor, the Commissioner of Enquiry into the cost of living, who was a very fearless public servant and was the author of what is now known as the Flavelle report on the pork-packing industry. Mr. O'Connor resigned after a petty quarrel with his superior, Mr. Crothers, the Minister of Labor, over the question of disciplining some fair satellite in his office. But there are grave suspicions that this was merely a visible pretext and that certain powerful and offended influences forced his withdrawal from office. Mr. Crothers is a genial old busy-body who is absolutely innocent of all real understanding of industrial and labor problems. He has a penchant for dismissing capable subordinates and his rule of life seems to be, "Well, I don't know much but I know enough to fire somebody." In all other countries the complexity of labor problems and their vital relation to the successful conduct of the war has demanded the close attention of Governments and resulted in the allocation of the most competent and progressive ministers to the departments of labor. But here in Canada we are content to run along with an ancient Ontario lawyer in charge of our labor department and then we wonder why labor troubles spring up in every quarter of the country.

Motions by Mr. Clements of B.C. and others which were consolidated by the speaker into one, caused a discussion of the problem of conscripting aliens which is being urged with great force from many quarters. The Government is well aware of the difficulties and complications with which the problem bristles such as the objections of labor to the thin end of the wedge of industrial compulsion, the possibility of complications in international law and the effect in Eastern Europe, in Poland and elsewhere, where the Germans would certainly utilize effectively any such action on our part. There was a heated denunciation of the aliens and their greed and apathy towards our war efforts. Everybody wanted something done but no one came forward with practical and feasible proposals. Intelligent and thoughtful speeches were made by Mr. F. L. Davis of Neepawa and Dr. White of Brandon who are both members of more than average ability. Their common sense and liberality formed a striking contrast to the airy vapourings of a large number of their colleagues who took occasion in the course of the debates upon the labor bureaux and the alien problem to utter their views upon the problem of labor and capital. It was an amusing sight to find some of the most obvious reactionaries posing as valiant champions of the labor interest.

Mr. Meighen has been putting through a bill to amend the Indian Act whereby among other changes, the Indian Commissioners will be empowered to lease tracts of the Reserves, which the Indians are not utilizing, to farmers and ranchers, the proceeds of the leases being turned over to the Indians. Mr. Cahill of Pontiac asked very pertinently why, if the main purpose of the bill was to secure the cultivation of additional land, we should take from the Indians their rights when they are living on the land in their own way and yet do nothing to disturb the vested interests of the C.P.R. and many large landholding corporations who are keeping absolutely idle for speculative profit, vastly larger areas of land.

Wednesday, the 24th, was devoted to two subjects, hay and straw, whose sale it is proposed to inspect rigorously, and the new Parliament Buildings. In the discussion on the first subject, the rural members seized the opportunity without stint to air their views upon various pet grievances and the speeches were more copious than enlightening. The question of the New Parliament Buildings came up when Mr. Carvell brought in the Public Works Department estimates, and he caused great disappointment by announcing that the new buildings would not be completed in time for next session. The Victoria Memorial Museum where Parliament now sits is far from ideal quarters; the acoustics are deplorably bad and the difficulty of hearing combined with the discomfort of all save the front bench chairs are, according to Mr. Hume Cronyn, responsible for the apathy which often marks the attendance on debates. There was considerable criticism of the high cost of the new buildings and the failure to utilize the old walls and some objection was raised to the proposal to provide the Speaker with a home inside the building. But if any servant of the Canadian people deserves consideration it is the present Speaker, Mr. Rhodes, who is both very capable and absolutely impartial and makes an ideal tenant of the chair. It was expected that Mr. A. K. Maclean, who is acting-Minister of Finance in the absence of the elusive Sir Thomas White, would bring down his budget on Thursday the 25th but its introduction has been deferred till next week. Possibly Sir Thomas in distant California still likes to keep his finger on the switches and the theory is that the budget has been dispatched to him for revision and ratification.

Ottawa, May 3rd, 1918.

Tuesday, the 30th, was budget day in the House of Commons and in the absence of Sir Thomas White, A. K. Maclean, who has been acting as Minister of Finance, introduced it. Mr. Maclean is an experienced politician who since 1911 has acted as financial critic for the Laurier opposition. He has never been noted for any aggressively radical views having always taken a very moderate line on most public questions. He spoke for about an hour and his exposition of the financial situation of his country was an agreeable surprise to most of his audience. He has a good talking voice and his marshalling of facts and figures was lucid and intelligible. He confined himself to the cold facts of the case and showed a fine grasp of the art of condensation. Whether one differed with his proposals or not there could be no question but it was an admirable budget speech, on this, friend and foe alike are agreed. His detailed statement of the Canadian finances have already been

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