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Our Ottawa Letter

A cut of \$37,000,000 in estimated expenditures for the current fiscal year reflects the long weeks of study and of paring practiced by the Bennett ministry. When it is considered that not more than 25 per cent of total expenditures is controllable, the extent to which economy has been carried out will be appreciated. For example the interest on government debt to the public cannot be cut. Nor can the outlay for pensions, nor for civil government. Almost all economy must be effected at the expense of public works. Naturally, therefore there will be some disappointment on the part of communities quite convinced that now public works are their immediate right.

The situation is that falling revenues and railway deficits and fixed charges of government leave only two courses open. One is radical advance of taxation and the other is economy. When the budget is brought down it will perhaps indicate that even though the strictest economy consistent with maintenance of essential services has been practiced, some readjustment of taxation is also necessary. Customs tariffs cannot be expected to yield more because the policy of the government is to manufacture more of our requirements in Canada. Income tax for 1931 can scarcely produce as much as in the last year and it will not be surprising if there is a raise in the sales tax to prevent borrowing as Premier Bennett dislikes that kind of financing. He will resort to it only in extremity.

The opening of parliament after Easter brought the "Red International" to Ottawa to demand non-contributory employment insurance. There were thirty-five in the delegation representing the unemployed of Canada. Mr. Bennett—and later Mr. King—expressed their interest in unemployment insurance but the former assured his interviewees that no government with which he was associated would sponsor non-contributory employment insurance, nor would there be any dole. Mr. King was less emphatic. He confessed his party had never considered non-contributory insurance. A poll of the delegates showed scarcely a single native-born Canadian and most of the delegates were from Central Europe. When some spoke of appealing to Moscow and of Communism Mr. Bennett told them the government might find it possible to aid them to get to the land where they might live under Communism. There was no enthusiasm.

One of the most controversial items which has arisen in recent years is the reorganization of the Department of the Interior. Handing over of natural resources to the Prairie provinces has reduced the labor of this department by probably forty per cent. There isn't any work for several hundred employees and the government has declined to keep on the payroll that number of guests. There has been one tremendous howl about the unfairness of the treatment. Down here at Ottawa the belief persists that every one in town has a Heaven-born right to perpetual employment by the rest of the people of Canada. The Bennett government does not subscribe to that principle. Hence the wails. The truth of the matter is that in 1926 the King government announced the transfer of the resources to the Prairie Provinces. For four years it toyed with the question and in those years, instead of pruning down the department and taking care of employees by transfer to other departments it actually increased the employees from 2,068 in 1926 to 2,415 in 1930. And the employees did nothing to help themselves to new jobs. After four years or more of notice the complaint is made bitterly that it is now all heartless and sudden. No city in Canada has had the steady flow of wages enjoyed by Ottawa in the current depression. wages out of the taxes of all Canada, and now, when the government refuses to spend public money where there is no work to be done the old town squeals like a stuck pig. In fact the town is squealing a lot more than the men and women directly affected.

A few months ago the government announced that after March 31 the fleet of private motor cars maintained for ministers and officials would be disposed of. The bill last year for these cars was some \$550,000, exclusive of gasoline and oil. The latter probably cost another \$200,000 a year. Against this expenditure the government now proposes to allow \$42,000 per year in lieu of cars. Here is a net saving to the country of probably \$700,000 a year.

While the Dominion awaits the presentation of the budget the government continues to receive a great deal of advice, particularly from its political opponents. The thought is, of course, that it will not be accepted and may later become the background of the inevitable "we told you so."

Mr. Bennett is warned daily that we cannot sell unless we buy. That argument is trotted out almost daily as the genesis of sound economy. The fact is there is just enough truth in the doctrine to make it dangerous. Of course we have to buy but if we were to buy everything the

world had to sell we couldn't sell a nickel's worth unless we had something to sell that the world wanted to buy. And if we never bought a nickel's worth and had something to sell that the world had to have the world would buy it.

For example, for many years we have been buying two dollars worth of goods from the United States for every dollar worth the United States have bought from us. And we have been buying from the United States hundreds of millions of dollars worth of goods annually that could be economically made in Canada—while the United States have chiefly been buying raw materials from us to keep their factories engaged.

The veriest child in economics knows such a practice is not to the advantage of Canada and the same child knows that, while there are things we must buy outside our own country, we have things to sell—the greatest store of them ever given to a people of our number—that the rest of the world must have. Until our vast heritage of resources begins to wane there is every conceivable and logical right to believe that Canada should enjoy an overwhelmingly favorable balance of trade—even when other nations suffer depression due to economic exhaustion.

It is upon this theory, this fact, that the 1931 budget will be built. For more than fifty years we have been toying with the underlying principle but never has it been given ungrudging application. Never has its efficacy been fully proved or disproved. The Bennett government was returned because it gave assurance that in such a test would be made and that the consumer would be adequately protected. Up to now the consumer has been protected but a sterner test will come with the general tariff revision. There is no weakening visible in the assurance of the ministry that it can continue to guard against exploitation of the public under tariff benefits. The machinery will be broadened and the same summary penalties imposed upon these guilty of exploitation.

Definite announcement has been made that the adjourned meeting of the Imperial Conference will be held in Ottawa in August and the statement recalls another entirely erroneous statement which has very largely gone unchallenged. It is that Canada offered, in return for a preference upon the entry of Canadian wheat, a further margin of ten per cent. preference to British goods, and that such a margin means nothing to Britain.

The situation is this. We have been importing in the neighborhood of \$600,000,000 a year worth of manufactured, or semi-manufactured goods from the United States. The man and non-existence of a preference in favor of British goods on these imports, or the insufficiency of existing preferences allowed, made it impossible for British manufacturers to overcome the geographical or mass production competition of the United States in the Canadian market. Mr. Bennett's plan has in mind the bridging of this gap. In many cases probably even five per cent additional advantage would transfer the market to Britain. In others ten per cent will do it. Elsewhere perhaps even greater preferences will be necessary. But the basis of the whole offer that Mr. Bennett made on behalf of Canada can hardly be dismissed as of no benefit to Britain. It is simply the transference of probably \$300,000,000 of our purchases from the United States to Britain each year.

There will no longer be any guessing as to whether or not this government will "peg" the price of wheat. It will not. The experience of the United States—where less than twenty per cent of the total crop is raised for export—has been a disastrous warning. In a country such as Canada, where 75 per cent of the wheat crop is customarily available for export, pegging might not take more than three years to throw the whole country into a financial tragedy that would out-rival the present situation in New South Wales.

Miss Macphail's Letter

Parliament cannot be accused of having been dull this past week. The long Speech on the Address came to an end. The Prime Minister made a remarkable contribution on the last day of the debate. While the speeches emphasized difficult times all over Canada, the plight of the West was more particularly stressed and in his reply the Prime Minister devoted himself largely to answering Western members. He charged them with over-stating the conditions: "Members of Parliament are sometimes accepted as being more important individuals than they are, and their opinion has attached to it an importance that is not warranted." He denied that there was general privation in the West. "The bank reports show that tens of thousands of farmers in Western Canada have money in the bank." One of course needs to remember that in bank reports borrowings from the bank appear as deposits.

Mr. Bennett took the statistics of the years 1928, 1929 and 1930 and from them showed over two billion dollars of new wealth had been pro-

duced in the western provinces, from the farms and mines. This new wealth could not all have disappeared, he said. "They are not bankrupt and insolvent as has been claimed." He went on to prove this by showing the amount of money spent on automobiles. The cost of gasoline in the prairie provinces last year was shown to be \$9,926,000. In the figures given no distinction was made between the towns and cities and the rural population nor were the great distances in western Canada alluded to. He claimed to have increased the sale of wheat in Great Britain in the last year by a million bushels over the year before and the sale in France by five million bushels.

"What is the cause of the great depression in Western Canada?" the Rt. Hon. gentleman asked the house, and then proceeded to answer his own question. "Hon. gentlemen opposite know that the most important cause is speculation. No speculations in wheat options or in oil or mining stock but speculation in the large—speculation in what term is used. Hon. gentlemen opposite know that the most important cause is speculation."

Immigration was given as another cause of the unemployment, but Hon. members interrupted to point out that both parties were responsible for the foolish immigration policy of the last ten years.

It seems difficult to explain what appeared to be a direct attack on the West and the speech of the Prime Minister is comparable to the "five cent speech" of the Rt. Hon. Mr. King in the last parliament. It quite evidently surprised the house. One need not have a long memory to remember having heard from lips of the same gentleman a very different story. The Independent Farm members deeply resented the speech as Mr. Speakman, the U.F.A. member for Red Deer, said, "I remind the house that during the entire debate every Hon. member in this corner of the chamber who spoke, refrained most assiduously from making any statement of a condemnatory character. They have refrained from taking an attitude of partisanship. They have outlined conditions as they knew them to exist; they have offered certain suggestions, as they thought tending toward their amelioration and today, I am sorry to say it, when at last the Prime Minister takes part in the debate, he throws back in our faces our offer of friendly co-operation. He repudiates the assistance we thought to give in meeting the conditions which prevail and he characterises our statements as exaggerated, as being not according to facts, as tending not towards the betterment but towards the imperiling of the future of this country." "He characterises our statements regarding conditions with which we are absolutely familiar as not only exaggerated but as carrying weight throughout this country and throughout the world only in virtue of the position which we occupy and not by virtue of either the common sense, the knowledge or, I might say, the accuracy of statement on the part of the members themselves." Mr. Speakman was followed by Mr. Robert Gardiner, the house leader of the Farm group who said he did not know where the Prime Minister obtained his information, "unless it be from the secretary of the Canadian Bankers Association. If he believes that such information is absolutely correct then I can understand the position he is adopting this afternoon." In answer to Mr. Bennett's question "where had this great volume of new wealth gone?" Mr. Gardiner said a great deal of it had gone in high interest rates. "When you ask farmers to pay 8, 9, or 10 per cent for a long term and when the profits of the farmer are not large at any time, you can understand that even a profitable year does not mean very much if the farmer happens to have many debts. The legal rate set out in the Bank Act is 7 per cent, but the rate charged is, as I have said, 8, 9, or 10 per cent. In answer to Mr. Bennett's question "where had this great volume of new wealth gone?" 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