

CANADIAN HIERARCHY FIGHTING CONSCRIPTION

THE VEILED OPPOSITION of the Catholic clergy in the province of Quebec to the Canadian Conscription Law has passed, in the view of Government circles, into a phase of active hostility. The signal for this change is held to be the interview with Cardinal Begin, Archbishop of Quebec, published in his own official organ, the *Quebec Action Catholique*. The Cardinal's hostility to the draft seems to be based upon the fact that a handful of young men in the Catholic seminaries of the province are not exempted from the operation of the law. The Cardinal, who is the leading churchman in the Dominion, says:

"This conscription law is a menace which causes the Canadian clergy the worst possible apprehensions.

"This military service . . . is not only a serious blow to the rights of the Church of Christ, independent in its domain, and whose laws and practice exempt the clergy and that class of the society which that name designates from the service under arms, but also it (the conscription law) constitutes a fatal obstacle to the recruiting of ministers of God, shepherds of souls, as well as to that of the staff of clerical teachers, and through this very fact it creates, in our society, an evil much worse than that which it is alleged to attempt to remedy."

The Archbishop thinks that the "evil" might be mitigated if the exemption boards were composed entirely of "Catholics, enlightened and good-willed":

"The class as it is written might lose some of its ill if it were interpreted in the spirit of the Church. But what guarantees have we that the members of the special tribunals will be all Catholics, enlightened and good-willed, capable of pronouncing with sincerity and knowledge on a question of its importance?"

"I like to believe . . . that no one will dare, on a matter so important and delicate, hurt the sentiments of the whole Catholic population of the Dominion and imprudently sow, on this side of the Atlantic, the seed of the fatal religious discords that have divided the Old World."

In the neighboring province, of Ontario the Cardinal's utterance is frankly characterized as "treasonable," and the *London (Ont.) Advertiser* indulges in some very plain speaking. It says:

"Holding that the conscription law constitutes a fatal obstacle to recruiting for the priesthood, and for the staff of clerical teachers, Cardinal Begin declares it thus creates an evil 'much worse than that which it is alleged to attempt to remedy.'

"The evil which it is hoped the law will remedy (without dealing with the 'alleged' part of the phrase) is the lack of men to take the place of the fallen and wounded and to fight the cause of humanity against the cursed Prussianism of Wilhelm and his militarist parasites. What greater evil than this Prussianism can the conscription law cause?"

"Presumably the Cardinal's main objection to the law is that divinity students are not to be exempted because of their calling. Why they should want to be excluded from the operations of the bill, if they possess red blood, is hard to see."

The *Advertiser*, somewhat unkindly contrasts the position



Louis Nazaire,
Cardinal Begin

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of Cardinal Begin with that of another member of the Sacred College, Cardinal Mercier, of Malines:

"If Germany wins, the liberty which the Cardinal prizes so highly will vanish. If he doubts that, he has only to look at Belgium and France. Let him ask Cardinal Mercier. Have the Belgian Roman Catholics any liberty of speech or action? Is there any ground for supposing better treatment would be afforded the Canadian? If there were, it would not be to the Canadians' credit."

The Cardinal is assured that the law will be administered not by "Catholics, enlightened and good-willed," but with entire impartiality. *The Advertiser* remarks:

"If the conscription law is carried out without fear or favor, and without religious discrimination, but simply with a view to taking those best fitted for service and least necessary at home for national work, there can be no more injustice to the Roman Catholic than there is to the Protestant. If there are more young men in Quebec unmarried and fit to fight than in other provinces, more will be taken; if there are fewer, fewer will be taken."

Meanwhile the Quebec clericals have found a scapegoat upon which to fasten the opprobrium for the conscription law. The Montreal *La Croix*, which circulates largely among the clergy of Quebec, quite gravely writes that the Masonic order is responsible for it all:

"No one ignores the brutal principle at the base of the conscription bill which an English majority wishes to introduce in our laws in order to be able to send French-Canadians to the European butchery, and to any other butchery which may happen in the future. Sir Robert Borden, who received the word of command from London and from the Grand Lodge of England, of which he is a member, and whose reunions he must have attended during his last trip to Europe, will not listen to the language of reason and good sense."

La Croix further remarks:

"We hope that the elections will show so clearly and so firmly that the great majority of the people is opposed to conscription so that no Government will in the future even think of supporting such a measure."

The anti-Masonic sentiments of *La Croix* raise the ire of one of the leading weeklies of Canada, the *Toronto Saturday Night*, which caustically remarks:

"Imagine such fool stuff being handed out for consumption, and moreover believed to be true by a lot of people ignorant of every principle of Masonry. Masonry is not confined by sect, creed, or nationality. Nor does it interest itself in political issues. No doubt it suits the book of such journals as *La Croix*, well knowing the ignorant superstition which exists against Masonry in the Province of Quebec, to couple conscription with it. It is of such trash that anti-conscription arguments are made."

Characterizing the Canadian Conscription law in his own official organ as a serious blow to the rights of the Church of Christ," Cardinal Begin, Archbishop of Quebec, is held by many to have thus given a lead to the French-Canadian clergy in their opposition to the draft in the dominion.