

COL. BIGGAR'S STRANGE LETTER.

The scores of letters reaching this office daily for publication included, a few days ago, one from Mr. O. M. Biggar, K.C., of Ottawa, whose public record and experience command respect, if being a grandson of Sir Oliver Mowat, once Liberal Premier of Ontario, were not sufficient in itself. He served in the last war as an officer, was later Judge Advocate-General of Canada, was made a colonel in 1919, went with the Canadian delegation to the Peace Conference, became vice-chairman of the Air Board under Hon. A. L. Sifton, was Canada's first Chief Electoral Officer, and is now chairman of the Canadian Section of the Permanent Joint Defense Board for collaboration between the United States and Canada.

This is not the limit of his activities, and it would now appear from his letter to this paper that he has joined the Government's propaganda forces. Although addressed to The Globe and Mail, it was also sent to the Winnipeg Free Press, which published it conspicuously on the editorial page, because, doubtless, it was intended as an indictment of The Globe and Mail's advocacy of compulsory selective service with equality of sacrifice.

Colonel Biggar starts with the premise that this paper is concentrating attention on the question whether the Government of Canada should or should not take power to compel Canadians to serve overseas, and adds that "this question is entirely irrelevant at the present time." Quoting Mr. Churchill's statement that there is "a place for every one, man and woman, young and old, hale and halt," he observes that this would mean the requisition of manpower and womanpower for five purposes, as follows:

- (1) To ensure the continuance of such peacetime services and supplies as are necessary to maintain the physical and mental health of the population;
- (2) to prevent the invasion of Canadian territory by the enemy;
- (3) to build as many ships and to manufacture as great quantities of munitions as the facilities and materials available will permit;
- (4) to supply Canada's allies with as much food as can be transported to them;
- and (5) to form as strong forces as possible to meet and defeat the enemy wherever he may be found.

The Colonel states that "compulsory overseas service" is relevant only to the fifth of these objects, and only in part. And from this he proceeds to reason that The Globe

and Mail must assume a heavy responsibility for concentrating public attention on this point, although "no one yet knows" how far the nation's humanpower can be stretched "or which of the five essential objects will turn out to be the most important."

"Not only is the point at this stage, and comparatively speaking," writes Colonel Biggar, "a very minor one, but it is one upon

which the existence of violent differences of opinion is suspected." Finally, he sees the possibility that our "preoccupation with an irrelevant point may be due to your sharing with residents of your own local area in a deep-seated and unconscious hostility to a distant group whom you are unconsciously disposed to irritate and whose opinions on the point you assume to be in conflict with your own."

We think we have given a fairly complete summary of a letter which, we are compelled to say, condemns The Globe and Mail on an utterly false basis. If Colonel Biggar followed this paper in its advocacy of public policies he would know that we do not assume the opinions of any "distant group" to be in conflict with our own, but assume that, on the whole, there is no division of opinion, that the semblance of conflict has been created by the politicians at Ottawa.

The letter in its entirety, however, so misrepresents the position of The Globe and Mail that we can hardly credit Colonel Biggar with its real authorship. This paper is advocating, not what he calls "compulsory overseas service" alone, but compulsory selective service for all five of the essential services he mentions, according to need and ability. If no one knows which of the objects are most important, isn't it time some one found out, or at least organized the country so every competent person will be doing something worthwhile? The Colonel declares "only a negligibly small fraction of the overseas army has so far been in contact with the enemy," and "there is no prospect of an immediate change in this respect." Does he think the time to train, equip and forward reinforcements is after 1,000 men have been put out of action by 10,000, instead of giving them a fair chance by equality of strength to put the enemy out? Let him ask Major-General Kenneth Stuart, Brigadier Vanier, Brigadier-General Panet, Major-General Constantine, if they meant what they said about the need of more men.

As co-chairman of the Joint Defense Board, Colonel Biggar spoke in the broadcast series "Let's Face the Facts," and said: "If the war is finally won in Europe, we in North America need not worry for a long time about an attack on this continent." If the war can be won in Europe, isn't that a good place to win it? But isn't Colonel Biggar rather ashamed of his position with regard to a joint defense program that prevents

Canadian soldiers from crossing a border to participate in joint defense when American soldiers are enlisted to serve here or wherever they are needed? This is something he ought to write a letter about.

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