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The West India Agreement

The terms of the agreement made some weeks ago between the Canadian Government and the delegates representing the West Indian colonies were very properly withheld until a date on which they could be simultaneously made public in all the countries concerned. Hence it is only now that the details of the new arrangement have become available. A main feature of the agreement had, however, previously become known—that the preference granted by Canada to some of the West Indian colonies was to be increased from twenty to fifty per cent. An important fact is that while the previous arrangement embraced only a part of the West Indies, the new agreement is assented to by representatives of all the colonies. The difficulty that has been experienced in dealing with this question is indicated by the different provisions that have to be made to meet the conditions of the several colonies. Barbados, Trinidad and British Guiana agree to allow the products of Canada a preference of 50 per cent; British Honduras, the Leeward Islands and the Windward Islands 33 1-3 per cent; Bermuda and Jamaica 25 per cent; Bahamas 10 per cent. Special provision is made for certain Canadian products, including flour, spirits, wine and beer, though the Bahamas withhold assent to preference on spirits etc. The Canadian representatives seem to have assumed that though Canada is supposed to be practically a prohibition country as respects the consumption of spirituous and malt liquors, she is still to be a large manufacturer and exporter of these articles.

It is to be noted also that while the preference hitherto granted in Canada to most British countries has not included spirits, in the new agreement it is provided that a preference of 60 cents per proof gallon shall be allowed on rum from the West Indies. Rum being still a considerable product of the West Indies, this provision was doubtless regarded by the West Indian delegates as an essential feature of the new arrangement. The clause will look well, on paper, to West Indian readers. But in the presence of the wide prohibitory

movement in Canada the imports of the time-honored rum of the Indies are not likely to be large.

The difficulty of extending our trade with the West Indies has been largely one of transportation. Steamship communications were infrequent and slow, as compared with the connections with American ports, freight rates were high, and there was particularly a lack of adequate facilities for properly handling the fruit which forms a large part of the produce of the Indies. The new agreement fully recognizes this, and contemplates the establishing of new and more efficient steamship lines. Hitherto all Government aid to the steamship communication has been paid by Canada. The present agreement provides that, though Canada, as the largest partner, must still take the chief responsibility, the principal West Indian colonies shall make substantial contributions. Altogether, the details of the agreement seem to have been carefully worked out, with due regard to the conditions prevailing in the several colonies concerned. The approval of the Canadian Parliament is not likely to be refused. It is to be hoped that the endorsement of the legislative authorities of the several islands will also be given, and that ere long this praiseworthy effort to effect larger and closer relations with the West Indies will be entirely successful.

Talking to the Public

The Canadian railways are to be congratulated on their adoption of the policy of frank communication with the public whom they serve, and from whom they derive their rights and their revenue. Much misunderstanding and prejudice might perhaps have been avoided had this policy been adopted earlier.

In their early days on this continent, railways, like other public service corporations, seem to have been confident that so long as they remained on friendly terms with the legislators and the press they need not concern themselves very greatly with the public. But the result of this policy, carried on over a long period of time, has been that the public has grown to feel it-