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INSURANCE AND THE COMPANIES' CASE.

As the opinions of the judges of the Supreme Court of Canada in what has come to be known as the companies' case are to be appealed to the Privy Council, for all practical purposes things are as they were before the opinion was given out. They remain in that beautiful state of confusion which is a consequence of the British North America Act (of pious memory) and the deliberations and opinions of learned lawyers thereupon. So far as the insurance companies operating in the Dominion are concerned, they will still try and serve ten masters—the Dominion and nine provinces—and pay with a cheerful countenance the taxes due to each. So long as the companies do that, and don't kick too vigorously, when they are asked for more, the masters are in the main content. Tax collection, even in these enlightened days, is a highly important part of what is commonly known as insurance supervision.

Anything more ridiculous and unsatisfactory from the point of view of the mere business man than the present condition of affairs as regards the supervisory and taxing powers of the various authorities over the insurance companies it is difficult to conceive. The condition of things in the United States in regard to the supervision of the insurance business is usually regarded as the last word in idiocy of this kind, but proportionately things are just as bad in Canada, and in some respects even worse owing to the conflict between the Dominion and the provincial governments in regard to the powers of each. The insurance manager from abroad who comes to Canada with the idea of opening-up all through the Dominion finds himself the unwitting centre-figure in a farce which is screamingly funny for everyone concerned except himself, who does the paying. Naturally on his arrival here, he proceeds to Ottawa, and having deposited a fat bundle of approved bonds as security for his prospective policyholders, he receives the license of the Dominion Government to operate in Canada. Naturally he would conclude that he can now do business. Not a bit of it. He comes to Montreal and finds that before he can open up here the Quebec Government will be much obliged for his cheque. He goes to Toronto—the Superintendent of Insurance follows the example of his Quebec brother. In the hospitable West, our manager is received with open arms, but the provincial authorities at Winnipeg and Regina and Edmonton

take care to have his cheque before he completes his organization in their provinces. Finally, having got to the Coast (after taking the precaution of cabling for more funds), our manager finds another Superintendent of Insurance at Victoria, B.C., who also desires a cheque. On his way back, he goes down to the Maritime Provinces—the cheques are still required. And having made this weary round of cheque giving, our manager angrily comes to the conclusion that about the only places in Canada where a Dominion license gives him power to transact the business of insurance are the Yukon territory and the islands in Hudson Bay.

Under present circumstances about all that can be said in favor of a Dominion license is that it gives to the Company holding it a certain amount of prestige which a company holding a provincial license lacks. But prestige is a very intangible thing and it may be doubted whether in the case of a large number of insurance companies operating in the Dominion, they secure even that advantage from their Dominion license. In the case of the big British and foreign fire companies here, forty Dominion licenses wouldn't add anything to their prestige with those who know anything about them, and with those who know nothing, it may be doubted whether the license has any effect.

What line the Privy Council will take in regard to the questions appealed to them remains to be seen. But if their decision continues the present condition of affairs, a state of things will develop which in time will be found almost intolerable by those who have to bear it. The provinces are becoming increasingly rapacious in the matter of fees and taxes and there is no limit apparently to what they may inflict in this connection on companies owning a Dominion license, except their own moderation. Anti-corporation feeling is being steadily fostered in various quarters and insurance companies of all kinds are beginning to get included in the lengthening list of the alleged oppressors of the people. In the United States the insurance interests, having been driven nearly crazy by the harassing demands of 48 sets of legislative laws of all kinds and descriptions with a good proportion of stupid ones amongst them are beginning to look for salvation in federal supervision. It would not be surprising if in due course of time, and with the companies' case going in favor of the provinces, Canadian insurance men are driven to a somewhat similar course, with a view to unity of authority at present lacking.