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# VICTORY BEHIND DOORS

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SOMETIMES and quite unaccountably—the association is really strange to its intrinsic nature—our particular type of democracy becomes truly scriptural in its technique. It refuses to let its right hand—which is the House of Commons—know what its left hand—which is the Government Caucus—is doing.

The result is rather unfair to it. For instance: Just suppose the Canadian people were to take their Parliament on its own showing of the past month. Suppose they were to accept the House of Commons brutally as a chamber which, with a major recession in the nation's principal markets to be studied, and an international crisis containing something more than the mere threat of war to engage its attention, babbled on about the establishment of a corn elevator in Windsor, about the desirability of state medicine, about the issuance—foredoomed in advance—of purchasing power by the state! How long would the Canadian people tolerate such a sovereign chamber? They are not notorious for their long-suffering qualities.

This question of the "unrealism" of Parliamentary debates really deserves more consideration than the Federal legislators seem disposed to give it. When they picture themselves to themselves as thrilling duellists of the pointed tongue, with the nation as an audience for every two-edged word that is thrust by an opposition member and skillfully parried by some perspiring government supporter, they are simply seeing themselves through the rose-colored glasses of imaginative fancy. And they are inflicting an unintentional libel upon the art of fencing which they employ as their allegory. A truly first-rate exhibition of fencing is usually something worth watching.

Consequently merely in its own interest, Parliament should give more publicity to such events as last week's meeting of the Government Caucus. Even if the occasion did approximate a mild version of Armageddon, what of it? That circumstance surely does nothing more than illustrate to an electorate which is inclined to be less worshipful of the splendid creatures of the House of Commons that it is disposed to become critical of them; that these creatures can become—in the immortal words of Hon. Dr. R. J. Manion—"red-blooded" over an issue which vitally affects the everyday welfare of the body politic.

For last Wednesday's meeting of the Government caucus fought out the tariff issue. It would be premature to say that it settled it. But it did, in the first initial skirmish, achieve a smashing victory for the wholly practical cause of tariff protection for the efficient secondary industries of the Dominion.

To tell the "inside story" of the episode is to chronicle one of the rarely vital—so far—chapters of the present session of Parliament.

IN THE first place, it is of passing interest to note that it was, in its immediate inception, a newspaperman's quarrel. Cheers for the surviving power of the press which—C. George McCullagh notwithstanding—is all too rarely demonstrated in this age of such marvels as a gas helmet for every citizen and 400-mile-per-hour bombing planes.

In the second place, it is only fair to mention that the engagement has resulted in the triumph—temporary enthronement may not be too strong a term—of one Honorable C. A. Dunning, an individual who may not be so well-known in the East, despite his post of Finance Minister, as he is in the West by the literary phrase in which that plain-speaking section of the country delights, whenever it thinks of the present Dunning tariff policy, namely, "Et Tu Brute."

But to elucidate: battle over the tariff has hung suspended over the head of Parliament in the same manner as that well-known sword once hung poised over the head of Damocles. Sooner or later it had to fall. To the credit—and to the high intestinal fortitude—of one Chester A. Bloom, Ottawa Correspondent for the Sifton Press, a chain of newspapers in Western Canada which are usually favorable to the government, the blow fell when it did, namely in last Wednesday's meeting of the Government supporters.

For Chester Bloom, along with those papers which he represents, is a human species only slightly less extinct than the mythical Dodo bird. That is to say, in a world of rampant nationalism, of manipulated currencies and of clearing-house agreements, he retains a sublime and beautiful faith in the efficacy of the Liberal doctrines of the Manchester school. And his papers apparently share his views.

Consequently, it was a high moment for Mr. Bloom—then bathing in the refreshing heresy of Rooseveltian New Deal economics in Washington—when in 1935 the Liberals sent a practically solid low-tariff representation to Ottawa. He was snatched by the Sifton papers from his Washington post, brought to the Canadian Capital, instructed to watch developments—and did so with a fidelity which had a touch of grimness about it.

The result was that some ten days ago he wrote a despatch to his papers. And his papers, for the good of their soul if not for the benefit of the Mackenzie King Government, published it. The general purport of it was that the West was being betrayed by its representatives in Parliament, that they had been taken into camp by a Finance Minister (Mr. Dunning) whose views on the subject of tariffs were only less extreme than were those of the celebrated Mr. Haman on the subject of gallows and the lottiness which was appropriate to the same. The Prairie Liberals, in other words, were represented by Mr. Bloom in deft word pictures as having been flattened out by the Dunning high-tariff steam-roller. The broad intima-

tion was that the cause of the West, to the extent to which it rested in any hope of relief from high tariffs, was lost—and lost irrevocably.

TO SUCH plain speaking by crusader Bloom, there was only one answer for the Western Liberals to give. That was to go into the Government Caucus and, by nailing the Finance Minister's hide to the fence, demonstrate that they were not the spent force in Parliament that the Sifton press had described them as being. The Westerners were game. They attempted to compass their own salvation. But when the Parliamentary fence was inspected following the government caucus, it was their hides that were on display and Hon. Mr. Dunning—of "Et Tu Brute" tariff fame west of the Great Lakes—was tapering off a morning of hard politics in the Parliamentary restaurant by eating a jag of oysters from that Prince Edward Island which afforded him political asylum in 1935, after the Prairies had refused to reveal a single spot in which he might lay his statesman-like head.

It was a notable Dunning victory. It is not an exaggeration to say that it was the greatest which the Finance Minister has enjoyed since he reentered public life. And it came, appropriately enough, on the day following that on which he had championed orthodox finance—none too eloquently but as effectively as his rather dry treatise which Messrs. Graham Towers and Clifford Clark had placed in his hands permitted—against a parliamentary amendment proposed by the Social Credit group.

THERE is always someone who is intent upon taking the frosting off any ginger-bread. Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen, Conservative Leader in the Senate, falls into that class. The day after Mr. Dunning had posed as the hero of a policy of reasonable tariff protection and had also ground the noses of the Social Credit M.P.'s into the House of Commons dust, Mr. Meighen paid him a tribute in the course of the railway debate which the Red Chamber was staging. The Conservative Upper House Leader could not mention, of course, Mr. Dunning by name. Parliamentary etiquette prevents either chamber from mentioning the other—for fear the references might sometimes be uncomplimentary. All Mr. Meighen could say was that he knew who was responsible for the Canadian railway problem to the extent to which it had arisen from the purchase of branch-lines that could only be a mill-stone

around the neck of the C.N.R., by the erection of hotels that could never be opened—the Hotel Vancouver being Exhibit "A"—and by the acquisition of ships that had to remain tied up to government docks because they could not be operated except at huge loss. That was all, under the rules of Parliamentary etiquette, that Mr. Meighen could say. He could use no names. He could only point his finger unmistakably at Mr. Dunning, who was Minister of Railways when the majority of these transactions were carried out.

MR. MEIGHEN'S timely intervention simply raises the interesting point as to whether or not Mr. Dunning has really reformed. Is he really on the side of reasonable tariffs and of sound economics—or is he simply Dunning the politician, ranging himself on the side of the strongest battalions? It was obvious at last Wednesday's meeting of the government caucus, with the support which the Ministry has from the industrial provinces of Ontario and Quebec, that the Westerners could not win. It did not take, accordingly, any great perspicacity to choose the side of fair tariff protection.

The incident leaves Mr. Dunning as one of Ottawa's major enigmas. Has he really adopted the Eastern point of view of giving Canadian industry a fair chance in competition against the world? The answer will probably not be known until the forthcoming Canada-United States trade treaty is tabled and the Finance Minister's attitude upon it becomes revealed. At the present time there are many disturbing rumors traveling official and semi-official circles on Parliament Hill concerning the nature of that treaty and the extent to which it proposes to expose Canada's domestic market to outside competition. If the treaty fulfills the worst predictions that are being forecast on its behalf, then Mr. Dunning will face a golden opportunity to consolidate a reputation as a modern Leonidas bent upon defending the nation's industrial interests against odds no matter how terrific. At the present time, despite his efforts to date, there is a large-sized question mark surviving his efforts in this regard.

Conceivably, therefore, the pending United States treaty will not only determine the economic fate of Canada. It will also seal the political fate of the glamorous Dunning—at present the "Et Tu Brute" of the Prairies, not yet accepted as the official wielder of the flaming sword of Eastern industrialism.

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