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CURRENT TOPICS.

With the expenses of the country now exceeding the revenue by a million of dollars a week, direct taxation in the United States is inevitable. Some form of income tax, in addition to a heavy tax on inheritances, which are seemingly the preferred if not the only available forms, will probably be adopted. In order to counteract the attempts, which past experience has taught the Government to expect, to escape from the just incidence of the income tax by means of false and even perjured returns, a method proposed by Mr. Thomas G. Shearman, in a speech before a sub-committee of the Ways and Means Committee, seems highly ingenious and is supposed to be the method which will be recommended for adoption. Mr. Shearman proposes, instead

of a general tax on all incomes above a certain large minimum, a tax on incomes from investments only, to be made payable not by those who receive, but by those who pay the incomes. He would have, also, all corporations of whatever kind, or at least all corporations possessing franchises from the people and enjoying monopolies, pay a tax based upon an estimate of their net receipts, the amount of which could be ascertained from the reports which they are required to make. The corporations would, of course, deduct the amount of the taxes thus paid from stock dividends and the interest paid on bonds. He would further require all tenants to pay a tax proportioned to the amount of their rentals, and make the tax-receipt a legal tender to the landlord to that amount in payment of rent. Mr. Shearman estimates that a tax of two-and-a-half per cent. on rents and monopolies would produce an income of \$62,500,000, and permit the reduction of the tariff to an average of twenty-five per cent.

The hot words in the French Chamber of Deputies during the first declaration of policy of the new Government, and the victory of the latter by a majority so small that it is interpreted as moral defeat, illustrate afresh the singular instability of French politics. Governments succeed each other like the views in a kaleidoscope and each new combination seems to be weaker than the last. It may be that out of all this confusion there will be evolved in time the elements of stability, that in this way the innate restlessness of a strangely mercurial people is working itself out, while the undercurrents of national life are still steadily flowing. From the meagre records of the debate of Monday it is evident that the new Premier has taken a leaf from Germany's book and will try to cut the sinews of socialism by socialistic measures. His obscure declaration that the home and foreign policy of the Government would be inspired by the dignity of a great nation, able to defend its rights by pacific means, may mean anything or nothing. If it should mean that the Government would strive, by internal reforms adapted to improve the condition of the people and to distribute more equitably the burdens of government, to soothe the excitable susceptibilities of the nation, and to divert its thoughts from the ever-burning thirst for revenge, it would be a boon not only to the nation but to Europe, should the Government prove able to develop its policy. But

the people are now so accustomed to be fed upon sensations that it is doubtful whether any Government which does not provide something of the kind for them can maintain itself. In the presence of conditions so uncertain and impulses so fluctuating, any attempt to forecast the future would be folly. We can only wait for developments, prepared not to be surprised by any new turn of events.

According to the *Empire's* report, the Premier, at the Pictou demonstration in honour of Sir Hibbert Tupper, spoke as follows: "We need have no difference with our opponents as to a revenue tariff. We propose a tariff-reform that will be as low as possible to produce the revenue absolutely necessary to carry on the public service of the country, and that will give the preference to Canadian workmen over foreigners, whether mechanics and manufacturers or farmers." Sir John went on to say that the necessary duties would be levied on articles that can and ought to be produced in Canada. This seems at first thought to be a satisfactory announcement. It certainly is a serious divergence from the tenor of the speeches which have been from time to time made by the Finance Minister and other ardent protectionists in the Government ranks. But it is an announcement which, simple though it may seem, can hardly be thought out into an unambiguous proposition. The more one ponders it the less able, we venture to say, will he be to find any clear economic principle behind it. The two ideas which are combined in it, those, viz., of protection and revenue-raising are at the bottom incompatible and irreconcilable. In order to obtain the most efficient protection, the duty should be made prohibitory, hence, non-productive of revenue. In order to obtain the largest amount of revenue the duty must be so proportioned as to encourage importation. Its tendency will then be to discourage home-production, and so to become non-protective. We assume, of course, that the articles in question are such as can for some reason be produced so much more cheaply abroad than at home that the greater cost of carriage, which of itself usually affords considerable protection to home manufacture, is more than counterbalanced, since when that is not the case, there is no inducement to importation and no need of protection.

In order to make it clear that to talk of protecting home manufacture and improv-