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Gompers and Moore

Mr. Tom Moore occupies a position at the head of organized labor in Canada corresponding to that held by Mr. Samuel Gompers in the United States. There is much in common between them. Both are men of character and ability. Both are regarded by their fellows as moderate men. Both have in times of stress given wise counsel to their followers in the handling of the labor problems of the time. Both, we believe, can be counted on to advise moderation and order in these times, when there is so much unrest and so much temptation to men to take extreme positions. Both, however, in their zeal for their cause, seem to have failed to appreciate the force of the economic laws respecting demand and supply. Many months ago, while the war was still on, a thoughtful business man in the United States in a public address spoke of the inflated conditions existing and remarked that in due course there would have to be a readjustment of affairs, including the prices of commodities and wages. Mr. Gompers at once sprang to the defence of his fellow workmen and laid down the principle that, while the prices of other things must come down, the price of labor must remain at the high figures of war-time. On several occasions since Mr. Gompers has forcibly expressed similar views.

Precisely the same declaration was made a few days ago by Mr. Tom Moore in an address before the Canadian Club of Montreal. Mr. Moore was able to argue, truly enough in many cases, that with the high cost of living the working man, even with his high wages, was no better off than form-

erly. It is probable that many of the working people, especially those with families to maintain, have found the higher wages no more than sufficient for a comfortable living. Those with less responsibility have had the opportunity to save money, whether they have done so or not. No reasonable person should desire that wages go back to the pre-war figures. It may readily be admitted that in the times past often the working man did not fully share in the prosperity created largely by his labor. A higher standard of living has of late years come to the working classes. Their desire to keep that standard is a natural and to a large extent a commendable one. But the economic law of demand and supply cannot be set aside as easily as Mr. Gompers and Mr. Moore suppose. There is a general tendency toward lower prices which will soon reduce the cost of living. There is, unfortunately, at the same time, an evidence of growing unemployment. In several of the large cities the situation in that respect is already grave. With the advance of the season unemployment will increase. These conditions must ultimately make for reduction of wages in some lines. The employer who has to find the money to pay the wages will be obliged to tell his people that he must choose between reducing wages and closing his factory. To expect that wages will keep up to their present high figures while the price of commodities is falling and unemployment increasing would be to expect the law of supply and demand to cease its operation.

P. R.

While it would be too much to expect that the system of Proportional Representation will prove as fully satisfactory as its chief advocates claim, there can be no doubt that it has merits which make a fair trial of it very desirable in the minds of reformers. The inequalities produced by the present system of voting occasionally become so marked as to call loudly for some better method. Probably it will be impossible to devise any system that will at all times give minorities the representation that they desire. We are so accustomed to the system of majority representation—or, to be more exact, plurality representation, for it frequently happens that the elected representative has received less than a majority of the votes polled—that there is in many quarters a disposition to accept it is unavoidable. But when glaring cases occur, such as the representatives of large districts, even Provinces, being all of one complexion, when nearly half of the electors are of the other shade of politics, the weakness of the existing system and the need of reform become apparent. The schemes of Proportional Representation, alike in principle but varying in detail, have of late received increasing attention, and there is every prob-

ability that they will have at an early day widespread application. The method known as the single transferable vote was given a trial in the city of Winnipeg at the Provincial general elections, and the results seem to have been satisfactory. It is now proposed to give the system a wider trial in the Province of Ontario. A committee of the Ontario Legislature, representing all parties and authorized to sit during the recess, have agreed to a report recommending the adoption of the system in a sufficiently wide area to test it fairly. It is proposed to form a group of six constituencies in Western Ontario and a similar group in Eastern Ontario, in each of which the elector will have the right to vote for six members. The system will apply also to the cities of Ottawa and Hamilton, each of which returns two members. It is recommended also that the system be applied to the single member constituencies wherever there are more than two candidates. As the committee making these recommendations is composed of representatives of all the parties in the Legislature, and the Premier, Mr. Drury, is known to favor Proportional Representation, it is quite probable that the recommendations will be adopted, to have effect at the next Provincial election in Ontario.

The movement will be viewed with satisfaction by most of the people who desire progressive legislation. Yet the changes proposed must be regarded as experimental. Sound as the principle of Proportional Representation seems to be, especially in the presence of some of the glaring inequalities arising from the existing system, it does not pass unchallenged. In England, where the subject has been discussed for a long time, the advocates of the new system have not been able to obtain Parliamentary approval for it. Strange to say, it was the House of Lords, a body usually regarded as very conservative, that became convinced of the need of some such change. When the last measure dealing with elections was before the House, provisions were inserted for the purpose of applying the system of Proportional Representation to several groups of constituencies. But when the Bill went back to the House of Commons, the body that might be expected to respond quickly to a proposal of that kind, the amendments made by the House of Lords were rejected. In this case, at all events, we cannot claim to be following the example of the "Mother of Parliaments," to which we so often look for guidance in matters concerning Parliamentary government.

The new system has been put on trial too in the Australian State of New South Wales, and, according to statements made by Premier Massey in a debate in the New Zealand Parliament, the system has not proved satisfactory. "He had no hesitation," remarked Mr. Massey, "in saying that the system of Proportional Representation tried there was an absolute and ghastly