

WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION AND CONFISCATION.

THE CHRONICLE has frequently pointed out the serious character of the precedent set by the Ontario Workmen's Compensation Act which came into force at the beginning of this year, and has since been copied in Nova Scotia while essentially similar legislation is also threatened in British Columbia. It has been consistently maintained in these columns that the passing of the Ontario Act entailed, in fact, nothing less than a virtual confiscation of interests, against which nothing could be alleged in regard to their being inimical to public morals—the only ground on which, where the civil law is in force, confiscation can be justified. It has also been pointed out that the effect of this exceedingly dangerous precedent was to give a feeling of insecurity to capital, which might quite possibly have serious results. When once a precedent of this kind has been established, there can be no telling upon whom a similar blow will next fall.

AUSTRALIAN ACTION.

The State of Queensland in the Australian Commonwealth has recently established for that continent, and apparently contrary to previous advices, a similar precedent to that set by the Province of Ontario in Canada. It has passed legislation which in effect, if not in detail, has the same characteristics as the Canadian legislation and, equally, rides roughshod over legitimate interests which it was once supposed to be the business of government to protect. The Queensland legislation creates a State monopoly of the workmen's compensation business in the State, insurance with the commission to be created being compulsory. The insurance companies have been treated with the same kind of discourtesy that they met with in Canada when the Ontario legislation was being adumbrated. Hitherto, they have been working in the State on the assumption, which it might have been thought was justifiable, that their legitimate operations would not be interfered with—let alone confiscated—and have spent large amounts in building up efficient organisations and staffs, have acquired properties, invested funds and generally identified themselves with the life of the State, as in Canada. When, however, the companies asked for permission to be heard at the bar of the House of Legislative Assembly, the request was curtly refused by vote and the prompt passing of the Act confiscated the companies' property without giving them a single chance to be heard in self-defence.

SOCIALISTIC METHODS.

The parallel of high-handed action between the State of Queensland and the Province of Ontario is curiously close. Where there is divergence, Queensland shows up somewhat more creditably than Ontario. The Government is a Labour one,

and State insurance formed part and parcel of its programme at the last elections. In the case of Ontario, the Government calls itself Conservative; it had no mandate on the subject of State insurance and there is more than a suspicion that its enthusiasm for a purely Socialistic measure of workmen's compensation was in part due to a desire to "dish the Grits" and to assure the working-man's support to itself. The Nova Scotian and British Columbian Governments are also Conservative in name, and the necessity of obtaining a good election cry appears to be largely responsible for their essentially Socialistic activities in this connection. The stealing of an opponent's thunder is sanctioned by long usage as a legitimate piece of political tactics, but when the theft involves, as in the present case, the confiscation of property without good cause, the practice degenerates into a grave abuse of power. It cannot be urged by those responsible that confiscation of the companies' property is necessary in order that workmen's compensation along modern lines may be instituted for the general good of the community. It is perfectly feasible, as British experience shows, to work an "advanced" measure of workmen's compensation with perfect fairness to everyone concerned, and without confiscation.

INJURIOUS CONSEQUENCES PROBABLE.

Why at this time those in charge of the affairs of the Canadian provinces should be so keen on following essentially Prussian methods in dealing with this problem, instead of the normal British precedents, it is impossible to understand, unless the purely political exigencies already suggested, account for it. In any case, the course which some of the Canadian provinces have followed and are following in this connection is calculated to do them considerable injury. London comment upon the course of events in Queensland is that the State will only have itself to thank if capital, initiative and enterprise come to regard it as a danger zone. There is no province in Canada, which can afford to have this kind of reputation abroad without prejudice to its future development, least of all British Columbia, which has already a difficult task on hand in the living-down of an undesirable reputation as a home of loose methods of finance.

The following, according to the Insurance Critic of New York, is the text of a letter recently written by a home office to the Pacific Coast Manager: "In perusing an interesting document known as the 'White Bulletin,' we note that our company has been fined \$200 for allowing a special agent to bet the local agent \$10 that the next policy written by the local agent would not be placed in our company. Inasmuch as the premium received was only \$2.45, we would respectfully ask that you have this practice discontinued. It increases our expense ratio too much."