

ESTABLISHED 1866.

## THE MONETARY TIMES

AND TRADE REVIEW,

With which has been incorporated the INTERCOLONIAL JOURNAL OF COMMERCE, of Montreal, the TRADE REVIEW, of the same city (in 1870), and the TORONTO JOURNAL OF COMMERCE.

ISSUED EVERY FRIDAY MORNING.

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TORONTO, CAN FRIDAY, MAR. 21, 1890

## THE SITUATION.

*Le Temps*, a Paris journal, is authority for the statement that the British and French Governments have agreed upon a *modus vivendi* in regard to the Newfoundland fisheries. No particulars are given, and if the statement be true, it could scarcely go into effect with the consent of the island authorities, and they have always been found difficult to deal with when any international agreement depended upon their consent or dissent. Both parties are inclined to go beyond their extreme rights, feeling runs high on both sides, and sometimes there is danger that some act of folly by one side or the other may add new complications to a difficult problem. We trust it may be true that some means of averting trouble and giving reasonable satisfaction to the contestants may have been found.

The reply of the Government, through the mouth of Sir John Macdonald, to the Board of Trades deputation which went to Ottawa to urge the early enlargement of the St. Lawrence canals, was fairly satisfactory. The Premier, on the authority of the chief engineer, Mr. Page, said, "We may fairly calculate upon the enlargement of the St. Lawrence canals throughout within the next three years." But if his contention that this work has been constantly going on and that the recommendations of the commission which enquired into our water communications years ago have been steadily pursued be any guide to future progress, we fear that at the end of three years the work will be still far from complete. The Confederation compact pledged the Government to enlarge these canals as soon as the state of the finances would permit. It might fairly be argued that this engagement ensured priority for this work, and it could not be reasonably postponed to others respecting which no such stipulation existed. Sir John says the canals afford facilities for only part of the Dominion and the rest is entitled to railway aid, and in this way seeks to account for the delay that has taken place. It does not at all follow that, because a great natural waterway was to be improved, railways were to be built

or aided by the public treasury. The Intercolonial was a condition of Confederation no doubt, but many railways to which no such condition attached have been aided to the delay of canal enlargement. Still, all this may be forgotten if the promise can be kept that the work will be completed in three years.

The object of the deputation in desiring to find out the time when enlargement of the St. Lawrence canals will be complete was not a mere matter of curiosity. Mr. Thompson, of Montreal, said that as soon as the enlargement was completed vessels capable of carrying 75,000 bushels would be launched. Many large vessels now on the upper lakes are unable to get down to the seaboard, and when they are able to do so, the opinion was expressed, they can carry grain to Liverpool at a profit. The belief found expression that enlargement will immensely increase the ocean tonnage to Canada. There will no doubt be an increase, but the necessity of getting freight both ways will sometimes tell in favor of the largest ports in the States, where return freight is to be had. But the fact cited by Mr. Cumberland of a vessel which brought 5,000 bbls. of cement from London to Chicago passing through the canals is encouraging. There seems to be no good reason why transactions of this kind should not increase, as the vessel that brought the cargo would be able to take back a load of grain. And even when no freight can be got for lake vessels, either here or in the States, they can go into the West India or the English trade. The vessels to be built in future will have to be suited to the enlarged canals, and in the meantime there will be no encouragement to build such craft as are able to pass through our canals. The interregnum will imply stagnation in ship-building for this route for a couple of years, even if the promise of complete enlargement be before the end of that period in a fair way of being realized in three years from the present time.

There are already over fifty demands for aid to railways before the Ottawa Government. Whatever grants are made, Sir John Macdonald explains, they will have to be divided among the several provinces. This is no doubt true, because unless some such division was made any province which did not get a share would "kick." So these grants have to be looked at by the Minister from a political point of view. This is really the regrettable part of the affair, because it is a confession in fact though not of terms that the distribution must be made on some other ground than the merits of the several roads. The grants are carried by a system of log-rolling. This is very much the same sort of system of local grants that Lord Durham denounced and Lord Sydenham deplored, and that formerly made grants for the amelioration of harbors and rivers a party question, in the United States. Ontario has improved on this haphazard method by making its railway grants subservient to colonization, and refusing them to parts of the country in

which this purpose is not applicable. A system which opens up the public domain and has the merit of adding to the value of the resources of the Crown, including timber in its forests, is defensible on economic principles, which is more than can be said of railway grants distributed in a way to ensure the vote of the several provinces in their favor. The question which such grants raises is more complicated in the Dominion Parliament than in a single province, and its solution is more difficult. One thing is certain: all the demands made for railway aid at Ottawa cannot be conceded, and if ever the number of refusals come to exceed the grants, a degree of discontent would be produced that would imperil the whole system.

Berlin has the honor of the presence of the International Labor Congress, which assembled on the invitation of the German Emperor. The questions to be discussed are whether women and children shall be permitted to work in mines; how many hours shall be a day's work for miners; the limits of Sunday labor; the age at which children shall be put to work; and the nature of the work in which both women and children may engage. Some of these questions have been dealt with locally, though there is no international agreement on any of them. If the hours of labor should be restricted anywhere, it is in mines; and women and children who cannot protect themselves may reasonably be accorded special protection by statute. The hours of labor vary very much in different countries and in different occupations. Light labor can be pursued without injury longer than that which entails great physical exertion. Though there has been legislation, in some countries, on several of the lines marked out in the programme of discussion, the difficulty of an international agreement on them will be great. It will be least in the case of miners and women and children; it will be greatest in respect to occupations in which the length of a day's labor varies most, in different countries. In regard to the latter, no agreement is likely to be reached. Eight hours for a miner, who does not stop for dinner, may be enough, but the farm laborer, to say nothing of light manufactures, cannot be similarly restricted. The work of the farm could not be done in eight hours; in the United States and Canada many owners of farms work themselves fourteen hours a day. The Berlin conference will be carried on with closed doors; and the protocols will be published when its labors are done.

Demands, as yet feeble it is true, begin to be made that the Ontario Government should make loans to farmers, at a low rate of interest. The Plympton Farmers' Club, at a fall meeting, has put forth this demand. The allegation was made that the farmer's profit is only 3½ per cent., and it is argued that if he pays much more for money than he can make on it, he is on the road to ruin. The loan of the British Government to Irish tenants, to enable them to purchase their holdings, is pointed to as a precedent. But in that exceptional case a great social evil had to be met in some