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THE FIELDING BANQUET.

THE banquet tendered Hon. W. S. Fielding, by the Montreal Reform Club at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Montreal on December 9th was a well-merited tribute by fellow Liberals to a great Liberal statesman, who as Premier and Provincial Secretary of his native Province of Nova Scotia for twelve years, and as Minister of Finance of Canada for fifteen years, has had opportunities of public service given to but few men in the course of generations. It is perhaps the worthiest praise that can be bestowed to say that in the discharge of the responsible duties of these high offices, years of service but helped to enhance public confidence in Mr. Fielding's ability, integrity, and devotion to public duty. The occasion of the banquet was Mr. Fielding's assumption of the presidency and editorial direction of the *Daily Telegraph*, and it was the expression of Liberals generally of their continued confidence in a great administrator and a great man.

Method of Tariff Revision.

It was natural that at this banquet the Tariff should have been the principal subject of discussion, this being a time when tariff revision is uppermost in the public mind, and Mr. Fielding having been the one who, more than any other, was responsible for the fiscal legislation, which throughout the Laurier Administration helped to bring Canada her years of unparalleled prosperity and advance. It was natural, too, that Sir Wilfrid Laurier, under whose leadership the Tariff revision was effected, and the British Preference adopted, should have taken advantage of the occasion to remind his immediate hearers and the Canadian public of the methods by which he and his colleagues, on coming into office in 1896, set about the task of Tariff revision.

"I will tell you" he said "what we would do if we were in office now, what Mr. Fielding would do if he were in office. He would head a commission, on which the Minister of Trade and Commerce, the Minister of Customs and the Minister of Labor would sit, and they would go all over the country from Halifax to Victoria investigating the situation, asking the producers to give testimony, asking the consumers to give testimony, asking the workingmen to give testimony, and asking the manufacturers of every large city to find what would be the best means of reducing the tariff, so as to bring down the cost of living, and

do no injustice to anybody. We have done it before. We can do it again."

Sir Wilfrid was not less direct in setting forth the remedy proposed. "The tariff as it is today," he continued "promotes combines to increase the cost of living, to put an undue toll on articles which go upon the poor man's table, as well as upon the rich man's table. The price paid to the producer for food that comes upon the table is not the price asked for from the consumer. Knowing the condition of production the combines are able to fix the price to the farmer, and to fix it to the consumer, giving as little as possible to the farmer and charging as much as possible to the consumer. If the tariff were reduced as I propose to do we would take away the tax which unduly weighs upon the poorer classes of the community. It does not affect so much those who sit at this board. But it does affect very nearly the artisan, the mechanic, the clerk, the clergyman, the professor, the teacher".

A Contrast in Remedies Proposed.

In striking contrast to the initiative and practical foresight revealed in the policy outlined by the Liberal Leader is the helpless inactivity of the Government to which reference was also made at the banquet. Instead of a fiscal policy which may help to relieve distress and ensure prosperity, the Government, through its Minister of Labour, announced at Halifax on December 8th, that "The high cost of living is an indication of the prosperity and expansion of this country," and said to the people of Canada, "If you want cheap living let us have a few years of hard times."

Instead of a commission appointed to obtain first hand knowledge and composed of responsible Ministers with power to act, and before whom manufacturer and farmer, employer and workman, producer and consumer may publicly appear, instead of a commission which would visit all parts of the Dominion with a known and definite obligation of shaping a policy which would be submitted to Parliament, and find expression in legislation, Mr. Borden and his Conservative colleagues have appointed three members of the Civil Service to collect in private from other members of the Service, and from blue books, such statistical data as is already known, and can be brought together.

The duties of these three gentlemen are rigidly circumscribed. Their powers are severely restricted. They are kept under the thumbs of their respective Ministers. Such a body may be in name a Commission, but it is hardly less unfair to the men who compose it than to the public, that such means should be taken by the Government to clothe its incapacity, and to continue its special protection of particular interests under the pretence of serving the public weal.

The Fielding banquet was on the 9th of December. The announcement by the Government of its Departmental commission to investigate the high cost of living was made on the 18th. With the wisdom of the Laurier suggestion and the knowledge of past experience before it, the Government has deliberately sought to ignore both. Its alternative method has but helped to reveal the duty it hopes to escape and the ends it seeks to serve. The Liberal method is one of action, the Conservative, one of evasion.