

ESTABLISHED 1866

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### THE SITUATION.

As had been foreseen for some time, the necessity of dropping the Remedial Bill for this session of Parliament has been recognized. The near approach of the close of the session enabled the minority in the House of Commons, by having recourse to the weapon of systematic obstruction, to do what, under ordinary circumstances, only a majority can effect. If a disposition to resort to obstruction were to become the settled policy of the minority, the result would be, as it has been in France, England and the United States, counter-action in the form of closure, which cuts short debate and brings on a vote. The moving of "the previous question" can sometimes be used to the same effect. But it was perhaps better that free rein was given to the minority, for closure is best reserved for cases of intolerable nuisance. While both parties may be acting upon a strict sense of duty, one obstructing and the other insisting, the time comes when the necessity of finding some means of removing the obstacles that clog the legislative machine becomes imperative. The Opposition would make a mistake if it revived obstruction tactics on the vital matter of the supplies, and on some essential points there would be danger that its motives would be misinterpreted. In the face of an election, the responsibility of both parties is not greatly unequal.

Whatever may become of Mr. Chamberlain's suggestion of a British Empire Zollverein, it has already had a visible effect in evoking expressions of sentiments hitherto latent, which are not without their value. "We would," says the Manitoba Board of Trade, "approve of the closest possible trade relations between all the different colonies and dependencies of the Empire." It also desires that this intercourse should rest on the basis of the widest freedom. The question here involved is how close these relations can be made. The greatest obstacle is to be found in the protectionist tariffs, which the interests involved will not willingly surrender. The Toronto Board of Trade had already made a distinct advance in the direction pointed by that of Winnipeg. Their resolution leaves the protectionists to speak for themselves. Australian opinion is not, at the outset, favorable to the Zollverein idea. Just now South Africa feels its dependence in an especial manner, and

though in a complaisant mood, can scarcely ignore the difficulties in the way of the proposed Zollverein. Though no immediate practical result of the suggestion of a Zollverein can reasonably be expected, the idea will not be without its value.

A notable step in the development of municipal government is the creation by law of the power to form a Board of Control in the cities of Ontario which have a population of 100,000. At present Toronto only will have a Board of Control as the executive of its municipal machinery. This board will not supersede municipal committees, and it also sees the survival of the School Boards, the Police Commissioners, and the Free Library Board. The Board of Control will consist of one *ex-officio* member, the mayor for the time being, and three aldermen, elected by the council. Of these the mayor, when present, is to preside at the meetings of the board, and in the event of a tie, he is to have the casting vote. In his absence, a temporary presiding officer is to be elected. The members of the board are to be paid, but the \$700 maximum makes their pay little more than nominal, and considering the nature and extent of the duties they will have to perform, their honors may be purchased dearly. The requirement of important public services at less than their value is not without example in high quarters; it is seen conspicuously on the judicial bench, and though it does not always work badly, it cannot well be otherwise than a mistake. It must be a mistake in the case of a body which has the awarding of all city contracts.

The powers of the Board of Control are extensive; and on that account care has been taken to secure their responsibility to the council. That responsibility cannot be made effective by a mere majority vote of the council, a two-thirds vote being required. This is eminently proper, for in effecting so great a change it is necessary to move tentatively. And the responsibility is not merely collective: an individual member of the Board may be called to account and obliged to resign, on a two-thirds vote of the council. And as any member of the Board of Control, so may all, even if it were necessary to designate them individually. Reasons for a loss of confidence in one member may exist, which would not extend to others. The provision for securing the resignation of one member of the Board may possibly give rise to internal intrigue; but perfection is not to be expected at once. It is important to get a municipal executive, and to exact from it some real responsibility other than that of the securing municipal election. How to obtain this has long been the despair of municipal reformers. One of the merits of this measure is that it provides for such responsibility in a reasonable way.

The Board of Control will act as a check upon the council in the matter of expenditure. Under our responsible governments, the executive alone can initiate money votes. Mr. Hardy, in framing this bill, has not ventured to carry this principle into the municipal government even of our largest city, in which expenditure ordinarily exceeds that of the Provincial Government, but he has made a step in that direction. He has placed the preparing of the estimates of expenditure in the hands of the Board of Control, and made it impossible for the council to go beyond the amount of the estimates without a two-thirds vote. This restriction, of course, leaves untouched payments for which the city is legally liable. Practically the effect is to curb the initiative in the case of money votes, in respect of which individual members of the council have so many temptations to run riot.

All contracts will be awarded by the Board of Control.