

on human nature that it should be so, but there can be no doubt of the fact that things being as they are and human nature being as it is, it is much safer for the people to entrust the making and selling of the necessities and comforts of life to the selfish strife of the many than to the selfish co-operation of the few. Take, for instance, the manufacture of any article in large demand, as that of reapers, or even of binding twine. Everybody knows that in these days of costly machinery and subdivision of labour the greatest economy both of production and of distribution could be effected by the concentration of capital and skill. On the other hand, under the unfortunate conditions which exist, the public have no means of protection against exorbitant prices save that afforded by the unseemly struggles of self-interest, under law of competition. The protectionist theory which aims at the reduction of competition from abroad in order to promote the interests of home producers, seeks, on the other hand, to stimulate competition among the latter, as the only means by which the interests of the consumer can be guarded against the rapacity of the protected producer. In the abstract what is more natural and sensible than that all the individuals and firms engaged within a certain area in the production of a given article, should combine their resources, thereby effecting a great saving in many directions and making it possible for them if they would do so, to give the public a better and cheaper article without diminution of their own gains. But all our experience and all our knowledge of human nature unite to warn the public against allowing themselves to be thus put at the mercy of any such combination. Hence almost the only point in regard to which the Government and the Opposition were at one in the recent debates was in the view that protection must not be continued to a given industry in which advantages are being taken of it to form combinations and increase prices and profits. But of course there is almost infinite room for differences of opinion as to the merits of the different cases which may or may not be supposed to come under this rule. We have unfortunately no reliable tribunal to decide what are and what are not exorbitant prices and profits.

Philosophically considered the whole business is humiliating to our pride of civilization. It is unpleasantly suggestive of the incapacity of even so-called Christian communities to work together for the general good on even an enlightened selfish principle, to say nothing of any disinterested or altruistic one. Nor does there seem to be any sufficient reason to expect any radical improvement in the near future. Even co-operation, to which many are looking with hopefulness, and which seems to afford a practicable means of reconciling the interests of capital and labour within a certain sphere, and thus putting an end to the suicidal struggle between the two closely related interests, while its general adoption would be a great boon to any community, would still be but a species of combination which might be made a means of oppression to all consumers outside its sphere. The general union and co-operation of all classes of a community, or state, or even of civilized nations for the good of all, which is the only complete solution of the problem

is, for the present at least, obviously impracticable. It is impracticable either because the people in any given community cannot trust themselves to select and place at the head of affairs their most competent and trustworthy men, or because the most competent and trustworthy men in the States cannot be trusted to devise and operate a system of the only kind worthy of an enlightened and Christian community. Otherwise a solvent of the difficulty might soon be found in some socialistic system, either of Government control, or of State ownership and management of all the great sources of national wealth. As it is, it is not easy to see why, even from the point of view of the protectionist, it would not be both safer and more effective for the Government to take power to fix maximum prices in the case of protected combinations than to threaten such combinations with the abolition of the tariff and the letting loose upon them of the dogs of free competition. The former method could always be made successful; the latter often fails to prevent gross extortion from the consuming public. The admission that free trade is not a panacea for all economic ills is not at all inconsistent with our view that it is the only policy worthy of a free people.

We are not sure that Hon. C. H. Reeve, in the American Journal of Politics, does not enunciate a valuable principle in his proposal to make a clear distinction between individuals and corporations in economic legislation. While rightly leaving individuals free to buy and sell in the labour market, he would have all corporations subject to regulations specially made for the protection of the employee and consumer and all concerned. A special feature of such legislation he would make the preservation of the individual responsibility of each member. Thus, instead of a corporation being an entity without a soul, he would have it henceforth a thing made up of as many responsible souls as there were individuals composing it. The further postulate that the State which creates the corporation has the right to say upon what conditions a charter shall be given it, and to retain all the power of control necessary to the protection of the rights of individuals and of the public in all their relations to it, is one which no one can well refuse to grant. Yet it is one which might enable the State to hold a key by which many at least of the problems created by combines and trusts and strikes could be solved off-hand.

THE RIGHTS OF PARLIAMENT.

The Opposition at Ottawa did well to be somewhat indignant at the way in which not only the House of Commons but the people of Canada have been treated by the Government in the matter of the Washington Reciprocity Conference. It does certainly seem a little too bad that it is not till two years after the event that Parliament and the public are permitted to know that a full record of the proceedings at that conference is in possession of the Government. Whatever may have been the exact terms in which the repeated inquiries for fuller and more definite information touching the discussions which took place at that time between the representatives of the two Governments may have been from time to time

answered, there can be no doubt, that the impression was conveyed to all interested that no record of those discussions was kept. The absence of such record was obviously the only thing which could have justified the Minister of Finance in drawing upon his personal recollections of what took place on that occasion in order to furnish himself with material for defence against those who challenged the acts or policy of the Government in the matter, without affording the Members of the House the means of comparing those recollections with an authentic record, or of studying the statements recalled in their relation to the context. The impartial onlooker could not help feeling surprised at the time that Mr. Foster could have deemed it consistent either with the courtesy of debate, or with common fairness, to use for his own purposes such portions as suited him of a document which was not within reach of his opponents. That surprise is increased when it now becomes known that it was quite within his power, had he been so disposed, to have laid the documents in question upon the table of the House. On a par with this was the flimsy excuse of the premier for its continued non-production, viz., that it is necessary first to obtain the permission of the British Government, and the still flimsier excuse for not having before obtained such permission, that no formal demand had before been made for the production of the papers in question. How could the House be expected to ask for the production of papers which they were permitted—not to say led—to believe non-existent? What more natural, on the other hand, than for a Government which had a proper respect for the rights of Parliament and due regard to the principle of responsibility, which is the cornerstone of the Canadian political system, than to have sought such permission of its own motion and hastened voluntarily to take the people's representatives into their confidence? Sir John's defence in this matter has, we are forced to say, too much the nature of a lawyer's quibble, and reminds one unpleasantly of some features of one or two noted speeches made by him on a former occasion, on which we commented at the time. But whatever may have seemed to him permissible in the way of special pleading in his capacity as a subordinate member of the Administration, it surely ought not to be too much to expect from one occupying the exalted position of First Minister, that he should exhibit that profound respect for the rights and dignity of Parliament which is happily characteristic of the successive premiers of Great Britain, and should treat the well-understood wishes of the people's representatives with corresponding frankness and courtesy.

In saying so much we are by no means unmindful of the well-known and very necessary constitutional usage which accords cabinet ministers the rights to withhold at discretion any documents or other information on matters of international concern, whenever they are prepared to say on their responsibility as Her Majesty's advisers that, in their opinion, the bringing down of such papers at the time would not be in the public interest. Had Sir John Thompson or Mr. Foster taken that position in the present case we do not suppose that anything more would have been said, however difficult it might