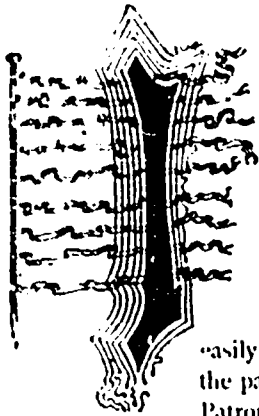


THE POLICY OF THE PATRONS OF INDUSTRY.



N the Toronto Saturday Night of August 4th, "Mack" scores the "patron" policy in the following terms:

Two weeks in the country have convinced me that the newspapers of the various cities in Ontario, and the politicians by their speeches and manoeuvrings, have put an injury upon this province that will not be easily remedied. During the recent elections the papers and the politicians discussed the Patrons of Industry movement as something

that was purely political, and whenever a Conservative paper had the opportunity to announce that a Patron had taken the field against a Liberal with big chances of defeating him, it dwelt upon the fact with great relish. Whenever a Reform paper could state that a Patron had come out in opposition to a Conservative with chances of flooring him, it also manifested joy. The fact that the Patrons were commercial revolutionists were quite ignored. The movement was regarded simply as one that lent a new interest to the campaign, and the politicians vied with each other in extending courtesies to the new-comers where any small advantage could be gained. In a constituency where a Liberal and a Patron were in opposition the Conservatives thought it good politics and very cunning to put up no candidate, but to plug straight for the Patron and elect him. Where the conditions were reversed the Reformers evinced the same cunning and elected the Patron. Nearly every Patron in the House owes his election to the remarkable cunning of one or other party machine in his constituency. And the business depression that will now sweep over the towns of Western Ontario will be due to the same remarkable cunning. Up in Huron Mr. M. Y. McLean was a Liberal nominee, opposed by Mr. Weismiller, a Patron, and while the latter found the organized farm vote at his back, Mr. McLean was soon made aware that in Seaforth and the other towns or villages of the constituency, he could not count upon any more votes than if it were an ordinary party contest. Conservative townspeople thought such an opportunity of defeating a Reformer was a great political joke. They did not pause to reflect that in defeating one man another must be elected, and that Mr. Weismiller was sworn to a dry goods and grocery policy that would, if triumphant, empty seventy per cent. of the residences of Seaforth and other towns, and leave no business solvent but that of liquor selling. The townspeople, infatuated with political cunning, did not pause to consider that every vote they cast for a Patron candidate added length of days and gave succor and strength to an organization that would have cows pasture in the market squares and have bats fly about in every shop at present occupied by a local retailer of merchandise.

In South Grey the situation was the same. * * *

This language [of mine] can only be called exaggerated on the ground that the Patrons are too human to stick together long enough to accomplish the ends they have in view. The town of Seaforth and the town of Durham and the town of Kincardine and all other towns and villages, are considered unnecessary in the Patron scheme of political economy. If we may assume that their logic is indicated by their commercial

scheme, we must conclude that they consider the existence of a town in the centre of a farming district as conclusive evidence of their being robbed, and when, by diverting their trade, they succeed in drying up the channels of business that have kept the town alive, and cause it to languish and its buildings to decay and fall into the streets, then only can they rest assured that that robbery has ceased. The idea that all men who do not grow grain or produce food or manufacture implements used upon the farm are middlemen and useless drones in the hive of life, is a favorite dogma with a prevalent variety of farmer who is more given to argument in the village bar than to cultivating his fields. The attempt to organize all these theorists into a compact body and to gather round them all those hard-headed and honest men who abound in agricultural Ontario, was not to be feared until the cause was engineered through a general election with considerable success. But now, with 16 or 17 representatives in the Legislature and the prospect of further gains should other constituencies be opened up, there is reason to fear that the movement will in some districts embrace the entire farming community, and leave retail businesses no option but to go out of existence. And this is the charge against politicians and local party papers, that they have, in their blind eagerness to discomfit an old time opponent, fostered a new antagonist, who will turn out to be not only politically adverse but who is bent upon financial reprisals that extend to the bitterest limit and cease only when its strength fails.

Suppose that the attempt to organize the farmers should succeed the movement has been assisted in every unexpected quarter and they should become a compact body for business purposes. The pith of Patron gospel is that the middleman is an excrescence, and that the farmer can and shall deal direct with the factory, the refinery, the first producer of whatever he needs. This sounds very simple. Goods, however, require to be stored and insured and parcelled and shipped whether the distributing point be in a country town or in the wholesale quarter of the metropolis. The starving-out of retail stores would result in fattening a host of so-called wholesale houses. They could not handle the trade of the country without increased premises and a multiplication of clerks. The man who formerly conducted a little business in a western village and supplied a hundred farmers with necessities, would now hustle behind a counter in a Toronto supply house and fill the needs of his old customers. But there would be many points of difference between the first and the last condition. For one thing, there would be a little building, a combined house and store, standing idle in Elmroot. It would yield no taxes for school purposes, contribute no sum to church support, and into its kitchen there would not daily disappear a basket of vegetables, meat, poultry or dairy produce. The local markets that dot the country would disappear, except in so far as they are shipping points. The large cities would grow larger, and the towns and villages would shrivel up, if all farmers became Patrons. There would be no gradations between metropolitan and bucolic life. Those who could not find employment in the cities as "middlemen" (after the location of middlemen had thus been transferred from a thousand points to one central point where all such lines of business could be organized into monopolistic strength) would be forced to take up land and vastly increase the bulk of grain, roots and meats produced without widening the present market by an inch. In fact, all these people thus forced into the business of agriculture would not, as at present, be consumers, but would become producers, so that for a reduced demand there