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SEMI-WEEKLY TELEGRAPH.

ST. JOHN, N. B., JANUARY 17, 1900.

THE TAXATION ISSUE.

The Toronto organ of the Tory party makes the bold statement that, "taxation in Canada has been increased by the Laurier-Tarte government just $1 per head." In a sense this assertion is approximately true, although in another sense it is wholly untrue Taxation has been increased in the sense that a larger sum than heretofore has been derived from customs duties; but that result is due entirely to causes which have operated in the face of a very material reduction in the rate of taxation. The rate of taxation is one thing and the volume of taxation is another. The rate is the only thing which the government can control while the volume depends upon the people themselves. Keeping this important consideration in mind, what is the fact in relation to the controllable measure of taxation? In 1896 the average rate of duty was 18.28 per cent; in 1898 it was 1.93 per cent less.

The volume of taxation was larger last year than in 1896 simply because of the enormous increased importation of dutiable goods. Why was there this large importation? The answer is obvious. The country is in a state of abounding prosperity, and the people have deliberately chosen to bring more luxuries from abroad than in previous years. If they had chosen to buy no more than they did in 1896 the total duties collected at the custom houses would have been over $2,000,000 less than was actually paid, the difference being due to the lower scale of duties under the Liberal tariff. On the large importation of last year the saving to the people was upwards of $3,000,000, as compared with what they would have paid had the Foster tariff remained in force.

A simple illustration will make the present tariff situation plain, and will at the same time expose the humbug involved in the criticism of the Tory press. In 1896 if a Canadian brought $100 worth of goods from England he paid $30 in customs duties thereon. If in 1899 he purchased to the same extent he would not have been required to pay more than $20.50 in duties on his importation, the difference being made up in a general reduction of about two per cent. on all goods and a specific reduction of 25 per cent. of the duties in the case of British goods. That is to say, on every $100 worth of merchandize brought from England the Canadian purchaser would have saved $9.50 as compared with what he would have had to pay if the Foster tariff had remained in operation. No one will deny that this would represent a very considerable reduction in the actual measure of taxation. He would be paying just $20.50 where he had paid $30 before. But suppose he found himself in such a position that he felt he could afford to import $200 worth of British goods instead of the $100 which he had formerly bought. He would then actually have to pay $41 where he had only paid $20.50 in 1896. Thus he would be paying more taxes, although the rate of taxation had been substantially reduced.

Apply this illustration to the whole taxation of the Dominion and the case assumes its proper aspect. The Liberals have kept their anti-election pledge by making an all-round cut of about two per cent. in the rate of the customs duty and they have done much better in the case of importations from Great Britain. But, of course, we do not import all that we buy abroad from England. Our trade with the United States is very large, and to American goods the preferential tariff does not apply. Hence the net reduction of duty on the total imports of the country is materially less than the measure of what we buy from the United States and other countries. The result, however, is just as we have stated—a saving to the people of over $3,000,000 last year in consequence of the operations of the Liberal tariff. If, on the other hand, the total taxes were larger last year it was because a prosperous people chose to consume a larger volume of imported luxuries. That is essentially the people's business. The government has done all that it promised to do, and all that could be fairly expected of it.

IS IT A FRAUD?

The opposition press, among which the Sun has stood out conspicuously for the sweeping character of its opinion in the matter, have been unsparing in their condemnation of the preferential tariff. To quote their exact words, they have pronounced it "a fraud." Opposition leaders have been equally outspoken and have employed pretty much the same terms. The conclusion in both cases has been based upon the same fact—the fact that while our imports from Great Britain have not greatly increased, our purchases from the United States have been much larger than they were before the preferential tariff came into operation.

It will be noted in the first place that this off-hand judgment is founded upon the figures for less than a single year. The preferential tariff was primarily introduced in 1897; but at that time the German and Belgian treaties were in the way, and nothing definite and effective could be done. Sir Wilfrid Laurier took that matter in hand and almost immediately thereafter these obstacles were removed by the imperial government. The Conservatives had talked for years about the impediment presented by these treaties; but having done little else than talk, the impediment remained. Then came the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1898, and ending on 30th June last. The official figures relating to that year have not yet been made public; so that the opposition newspapers and their platform friends have been jumping to a conclusion on the strength of data referring only to the fiscal year 1898, during which the new tariff had been in force for but a few months. It is just like them, however, to act in such a hasty way when dealing with a matter of government policy.

The Conservatives have, therefore, pinioned themselves down to the judging of the preferential tariff on the basis of our imports from Great Britain. We join issue with them on that ground. The increase between 1897 and 1898 having been but a little over $3,000,000, while our purchases from the United States went ahead by $17,0000,00, they have chosen to declare the preference to be a fraud, a mere delusion. They may have to revise their views when the figures for 1899 are available, inasmuch as the returns of the Imperial Board of Trade indicate a very considerable improvement during the past year in our import trade with Great Britain. They show that our purchases from the mother country have increased by something over 28 per cent. as compared with 1897, and no one will say that 28 per cent. is not a very substantial rate of progress. A tariff which accomplishes such a result within less than two years can scarcely be denounced as a fraud.

At the same time our trade with the United States has also grown. We have bought from that country probably 50 per cent. more than in 1897. But an analysis of the returns plainly shows that the goods purchased in the United States are not for the most part of the class which we could as well have bought in Great Britain. If the contrary were true, there would be room to question the full efficacy of the preferential tariff. It is capable of easy demonstration, however, that the fact of our largely increased trade with the United States does not cast the least doubt upon the usefulness of the new tariff in relation to British goods. It all turns upon the nature, rather than the volume, of what we have bought from the Americans. It would be contrary to the fixed laws of trade if we had purchased anything from the United States which we could have got cheaper from England. It must be, therefore, that our imports from the United States have been of articles which Great Britain does not supply. That seems to be plain. Canada has been enormously increasing her buyings abroad during the past three years, and it is quite certain that the preferential tariff has had an important effect in deciding the share which England should receive.

There are other reasons why the preferential tariff is not a fraud. In the first place, its adoption was a proper step in the direction of greater freedom of trade within the empire. It was a right and timely thing to do. In the next place, it has given Canada a better status in the British market. Gratitude and sentiment may play but a small part in directing trade; but the fact remains that our action in giving British goods a preference has done more to stimulate the sale of Canadian products in England than anything else that has happened within the last quarter of a century. This statement is supported by the British press and the testimony of everyone who has visited England since 1897. What is more convincing, perhaps, is the substantial fact that Great Britain has increased her purchases from us since 1897 by $50,000,000. Under the Liberal trade policy our imports from Great Britain have increased 28 per cent. and our exports to Great Britain 72 per cent. Our aggregate trade with the mother country is now $75,000,000 better than it was in 1896. With such proofs before them, how can the opponents of the government continue to speak of the preferential tariff as a fraud? And why should they be so anxious to sneer at it, before it has had even a two years test? Whatever may be their fundamental reason, it is quite certain they are not disposed to treat the matter with fairness and common sense.

Lastly, the opposition have failed to recognize the general effect of the preferential tariff in reducing the burden of taxation. All goods imported from Great Britain have been lowered in their cost to the consumer by the full measure of the 25 per cent. preference. And more than that, every dollar's worth of merchandise sold to us by the Americans which England could supply has been cut in the cost by the same percentage. If a manufacturer in the United States wished to sell an article in Canada that England also produces he would have to meet the advantage given by the preferential tariff or be shut out. That proposition is self-evident. So that the effect has been to not only cheapen the great bulk of our imports to the consumer to the extent of the preference, but to reduce the cost of home productions to the same degree. The domestic producer must compete with the British producer, and in order to do so has been obliged to meet the reduced cost of the imported article. Thus, a double benefit has been conferred on the home buyer.

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THEIR LEADER'S DILEMMA.

Sir Charles Tupper has at last broken a long sustained silence on a subject which must have been giving his friends a good deal of anxiety. At Vancouver he undertook to explain why he had at first condemned the Liberal tariff, and of late has been claiming that the National Policy is still in operation. The two positions were inconsistent. The tariff could not be open to condemnation in 1897 and the subject of approbation in 1899 Liberal newspapers and speakers had been pointing this out, and Sir Charles' friends were at a loss to make reply. In this dilemma it became of the first importance that a satisfactory explanation should be forthcoming, and Sir Charles has finally after due deliberation, taken up the subject in a public speech

In order that the difficulty of Sir Charles Tupper's undertaking may be understood, it will not be thought amiss to show what was his exact attitude on the tariff in 1897. In the budget debate he said a great deal; but it cannot be said that we have misrepresented the scope and tenor of his remarks in selecting the following quotations from Hansard:—

"I can understand how indignant the people of this country will feel at the outrage that has been inflicted upon them, not by a fair, open and manly declaration of policy, but by false pretences, under the guise of solemn declarations that no harm would be done the industries of this country."

"I deplore from the bottom of my heart the ruin that is going to be inflicted upon the best interests of Canada, and upon its great industries."

"They are showing the people of this country that no reliance can be placed upon the most solemn declarations that they make, either in the house or out of it; they are showing the people of this country that, having obtained power, which was all they wished for, they are now prepared to abuse that power at the cost of the sacrifice of the industries of Canada."

"The result is that this tariff goes into operation and the honorable gentleman knows that the industries are already paralyzed. I say that a deeper wrong was never inflicted upon Canada."

It will be seen that these opinions and forecasts were quite in harmony with what the Conservative leader and his friends had been saying during the campaign of 1896. They had always maintained that the life of Canadian industries hung on the retention of the Conservative party in power, and that Liberal rule and industrial stagnation would go side by side. With the new tariff before him in all its details, and after taking ample time for the consideration of the matter, Sir Charles saw no reason to modify his ante-election views. Indeed, he declared in his most dramatic style that the disaster long foreseen had already burst upon the country. But the catastrophe did not materialize. Feeling certain that it would come in due time Sir Charles maintained a discreet silence, awaiting the day when he could say: "I told you so;" but circumstances were against him. At the end of the first year the official returns showed that our aggregate trade had jumped up some $30,000,000. This was a disappointment, indeed. Next year it took another long leap forward, and today it stands more than $100,000,000 better than it was in 1896, or some $35,000,000 ahead of the increase achieved during the long eighteen years of Tory rule.

With such facts before the country it becomes imperative that the Conservatives should alter their tactics in relation to the Liberal trade policy. They were in a corner. So they dropped their talk against the tariff and said: "Oh, certainly the country is prosperous. It could not be otherwise, for the National Policy is still in force." This right about face, however, left them in the awkward position of having to explain away the sweeping condemnation with which their leader had criticized the Fielding tariff when it was introduced. And at Vancouver Sir Charles faced the task of reconciling his stand in 1897 with his attitude now. He did it in true Tupperian style.

It is unnecessary to quote from Sir Charles Tupper's speech at length. He said in substance: "I did condemn the tariff brought down in 1897, and I now say that the present tariff is practically the National Policy. And why? The tariff of 1897 is no more like the tariff of today than day is like night." This explanation will be received with surprise, although no one should perhaps be surprised by anything Sir Charles may say when he has to turn a sharp corner, and public amazement will be intensified when it is learned that the veteran leader did not offer a single comparison to show wherein the difference lay. He simply made the bald statement and let the matter stand at that. Now, we say without fear of successful contradiction that Sir Charles is in error. The tariff of 1897 and the tariff of today are the same. No change has been made. It is all very well to get out of a hole in the best way possible; but Sir Charles has only offered an explanation in this instance which must make him ridiculous in the eyes of every thoughtful man in the country.

This is not the first time, however, that Sir Charles has employed such tactics. A parallel case is well within the public memory. When the Yukon railway proposition was first announced Sir Charles was in Montreal. He read the full text of the government measure in the press and straightway sent for a reporter of the Gazette to whom he gave an interview. In effect he said: "I want to take the opportunity at once of saying that this is a plan of establishing communication with the Yukon of which I heartily and fully approve. When parliament meets I will give to this government measure my unqualified support." Well, as everyone knows, parliament did meet in the course of six or eight days, and Sir Charles turned up as one of the bitterest and most uncompromising opponents of the Yukon railway bill in the house. Two or three days of dragooning at the hands of Mr. W. F. Maclean, of Toronto, had been sufficient to work this change. And his explanation then was identical with that which he presented at Vancouver in respect of the tariff: "This is not the bill I approved of at all. It is no more like it than day is like night." Yet it was absolutely and precisely the same bill.

A POLITICAL BOOMERANG.

In the earlier stages of the discussion over the sending of Canadian troops to South Africa, it was a favorite occupation of some of the opposition journalists to quote passages from French Canadian journals adverse to imperialism, in the hope that this course would embarrass the government. Mr. Tarte's remarks, usually presented in a distorted and exaggerated way, were jumbled up with articles in La Patrie, in the hope of proving that the Quebec supporters of Sir Wilfred Laurier were disloyal. This trick has proved to be a boomerang of the most dangerous kind. Within the last few weeks nearly all the opposition to the sending of the contingent has come from public men and journals in Quebec hostile to the government. The latest and most remarkable of these deliverances is that of the Semaine Religieuse of Quebec. One peculiar feature of this article is that it attacks the United States as bitterly as England. If, it says, this "insolent Republic' be humiliated with England and if the English race be stricken both in Europe and America "its people will be less overbearing and less insolent towards the rest of the world and will leave at last to the French race the right to develop freely their country of Canada." The writer goes on to predict the downfall of England and of that 'superb arrogance which seems to defy not only the peoples of the earth but heaven itself."

It will be observed that Great Britain, the United States, and Sir Wilfred Laurier are all put into the same category and denounced as enemies of religion. Leberalism says the article "introduces at the present time among the French race in Canada profound diversions which are probably going to increase and a sad and perhaps irremediable weakening of religion and good customs." It declares that Anglomania is twice as formidable since it has Liberalism as an instrument and it therefore calls upon Quebec to get rid of Liberalism. Some time ago the Trifluvien, a Conservative paper published at Three Rivers, pronounced a solemn warning against Imperialism as likely to produce a revolution in the religious and social customs which French Canadians hold dear. It is evident that the intention is to present Liberalism and Imperialism together as twin evils, dangerous to the maintenance of the religion, language, and customs of the people of Quebec. Those who are carrying on this attack will find it easy to prove that Imperial ideas have made more progress in Canada during the three years of Liberalism than during the whole period of Conservative administration. The preferential tariff, Imperial penny postage, and the sending of two thousand men to fight the battles of the Empire in South Africa are events without precedent in the history of confederation. The Quebec opponents of the government also point out that it is under Liberal rule that the hopes of restoring separate schools in Manitoba have been destroyed.

On the whole therefore it will be seen that the government is being attacked in Quebec on entirely different grounds from that taken in the other provinces. Everywhere outside of Quebec the Conservatives are claiming to be more imperial than their opponents. The cry of the political Pharisee is "I am more loyal than Thou." In the Manitoba elections the Conservatives posed as a Protestant party and a party which sought to protect the British races from foreign domination. In Quebec Liberalism is attacked as being identified with imperialism and with modern ideas which tend to sap the foundation of the Roman Catholic religion.

THE MACDONALDS AND MONOPOLY.

Hugh John Macdonald, of Winnipeg, and Ernest Albert Macdonald, of Toronto, entered upon their duties on almost the same day, and in one respect under similar circumstances. A claim is made in both cases that there was a victory against "monopoly." There is this difference, however, that the present mayor of Toronto did come out on a distinct anti-monopoly platform, declaring his intention of smiting the corporations hip and thigh. He, or some of his friends, coined the phrase "strap-holders," a phrase which in its way must be regarded as a positive stroke of genius. There have been loud complaints of over-crowding in the street cars, especially about the hour when people are returning from work, and the strap by which the seatless passenger maintains an unstable equilibrium was much in evidence. "There are," said Macdonald, "three classes of holders in the Street Railway Company: the bond holders, the shareholders and the strap-holders. I represent the strapholders." In less than twenty-four hours the phrase was on every mouth in Toronto, and it is no exaggeration to say that it contributed materially to the victory. What Macdonald will be able to do with the corporation now that he has his chance, remains to be seen. It will be an interesting year in Toronto.

In the other case the issue was not distinctly raised. There may have been, probably was, a good deal of discontent with the railways, and it is quite likely that many voters thought that they would be striking at the railways if they struck at the government. Hugh John Macdonald and his friends were doubtless willing to use this discontent, as they would have used any other stick that would help to beat the government. But they did not raise the issue, and the Manitoba railway corporations were not alarmed by the prospect of their coming into power. The Northern Pacific is said to have aided them, while the Canadian Pacific was neutral, if not friendly to the opposition. The latter did not take up the cause of the strapholders. The Clarke Wallace wing of the party may be moving in that direction, but the Tupper and Foster wing shows a decided disposition to march the other way. If Hugh John Macdonald adopts a strapholder policy, it will be in spite of the gentlemen who claim a share in his victory, not because of them. The hostility of Messrs. Tupper and Foster to private corporations, and their friendship for the principle of government ownership or control of railways, has always been kept under severe restraint. Grants to private railway corporations they have allowed to pass through parliament with little criticism or opposition. The measure which they obstructed with all their might, keeping parliament in session from day till midnight, from midnight to dawn, from dawn to dewy eve, filling the pages of Hansard with rubbish, was the extension of the government railway to Montreal. Sir Charles Tupper declared himself opposed to a railway commission, and he obstructed an amendment intended to deprive the railway companies of the power to make and destroy towns by the arbitrary exercise of their will. Neither he nor Mr. Foster is competent to play the role of the strapholders' friend.

THE WAR IN SOUTH AFRICA.

The arrival of General Roberts has had the effect of breaking the monotony of inaction which has hung over the British armies for several days past. General Buller, whether forced on by the orders of his commanding officer or by his own volition has at length moved, and a small ray of hope has sprung into being in the breasts of the British people. Let us hope that this is the beginning of a change in the method of conducting the campaign in South Africa. The British people, proud and self-reliant, have recently experienced a succession of defeats and reverses which to them have not only been humiliating but incomprehensible. Yet as there is an underlying cause for everything that takes place we may be sure that these disasters have not come by chance, but are due to some neglect of those rules of warfare which cannot be set aside except by men of genius who are a law unto themselves.

The effect of the movement of General Buller has not yet been fully developed, but it seems to be on the lines that any general of even moderate ability would at once have laid down as the proper way to relieve Ladysmith and punish the Boer army We have heard a great deal of Buller's massive jaw and his short curt speech, but the fact that a man is rude does not always imply that he is a genius, and neither Marlborough, Wellington or Napoleon were men with the countenance of a bull dog. This canine is a good enough dog in his place, but no one gives him credit for high intelligence or wants to place him in command of an army.

When General Buller faced the Boers at the Tugela River he ought to have remembered that the great masters of the art of war never made front attacks on fortified positions unless such a course was unavoidable. The Boer line of intrenchments, however long, had an end and it should have been his business to turn it by the extension of his lines or by a flank march by part of his force. This is what he now seems to be doing, for the scene of his operations on the Tugela River is perhaps twenty miles to the westward of Colenso. He holds the south bank of the river and the enemy's fortified position is four or five miles distant from the position he holds on the river. As we read the despatch he had not crossed the Tugela, that river being in flood, but that will be an easy operation with no enemy to oppose him and with his guns commanding the north bank of the river. If this turning movement is successful, and there seems to be no good reason why it should be otherwise, the British general has a chance to capture the larger part of the Boer army. The route he is following will place him across the line of retreat of the Free State forces and if the operation is properly conducted, it ought to be impossible for any of the Free State troops to return to their own country.

The arrival of General Roberts and General Kitchener at Cape Town appears to have had the effect of stirring up all the British armies in the field to a state of unwonted activity. Before that time General French was the only British commander in motion, but now it seems that all the armies are more or less active. This may be merely a coincidence, or it may be the result of the orders of the new commander-in-chief, who has never been in favor of Fabian tactics. General Roberts evidently thinks that the proper way to overcome the enemy is to advance against him. And now that all the British armies are advancing against the enemy we may assume that in the course of time he will be overcome.

Whatever we may think of the other features of the campaign the fact remains that our principal interest has been centred in the relief of Ladysmith. Mafeking, although it has been splendidly defended, was too remote as well as too small to become a very great cause of anxiety; Kimberley was the city of the millionaires whom many hold to be responsible for the war and who certainly are hardly doing their part toward bearing its burdens. But Ladysmith contains ten thousand brave British soldiers, and its surrender to the enemy would not only be a great military disaster but it would go down into history as a proof of the decline of British generalship, and possibly of the decay of British courage. That it had no such significance might be stated and with truth, but those who think that failure is always the result of known and preventable causes would still maintain that Ladysmith's fate had been decided by the capacity of the British generals and soldiers.

The assault which the Boers made on Ladysmith on the 6th inst., seems to have had a very damaging effect on their morale for since then they have remained wholly on the defensive. This was really the first time during the present war that they made a determined assault on a fortified position held by British troops, and although they were in overwhelming numbers they wholly failed to accomplish their object. Their losses were very heavy, as the fighting was close and severe, and the indications seem to point to an early retreat from their position around Ladysmith, which they must now see cannot be carried by any assault they can deliver, and which must be speedily relieved by the operations of Buller's army. The movement for the relief of Ladysmith began last Thursday when he marched a part of his army to the westward and occupied Potgieters' Drift on the Tugela River. On the same day General Warren, with a strong column marched to the eastward from Frere by way of Weenan. This place is about five miles south of the Tugela River and twenty miles east of Colenso. As Potgieters Drift is about fifteen miles to the westward of Colenso it will be seen that the British operations in Natal cover a front of fully thirty-five miles, and that it will be impossible for the Boers to prevent the crossing of the Tugela either to the eastward or the westward of Colenso or at that place itself. The only column whose strength is given is that of General French who is represented as having 11,000 men with him, and if this figure is correct he