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MR BLAKE ON PROTECTION AND FREE TRADE.

Eight years and three months ago a considerable majority of the people of Canada declared themselves to be in favor of a National Policy of Protection, not only for Home Manufactures, but for Home Production generally. Mr. Alexander Mackenzie, the former leader of the Reform party, has been a pronounced Free Trader all his life, and his views on the trade question have never been matter of doubt or dispute with anybody. Ever since Mr. Blake became leader the public have felt greatly interested to know what his views are on the same question; but somehow or other the same certainty has never been obtained as with regard to Mr. Mackenzie. It was not considered extraordinary that Mr. Blake, being a lawyer, should speak mostly on questions political and constitutional, rather than on questions economical, leaving the latter to be dealt with by an ex-Minister of Finance, Sir Richard Cartwright. At all events it is a fact that he spoke very little on questions of the latter kind, and it is another fact that even since 1878 much uncertainty as to what his views on commercial policy were, has prevailed. The most definite statement the public have yet had from him was made on the occasion of the great meeting of his supporters which was held in Toronto some weeks ago. What he said then has already appeared in our columns, having been taken from the *Globe's* full report: but let us repeat. He said:

"I desire to refer very briefly to the attitude of the Liberal party upon the question of the tariff. It has been grossly misrepresented. In 1882 I stated my views upon that subject in the most formal manner, by means of the address I issued to the electors of West Durham as a manifesto to the country: by the principles then laid down I stand, abide, I said.

"You know well that I do not approve of needless restrictions on our liberty of exchanging what we have for what we want, and do not see that any substantial application of the restrictive principle has been or can be, made in favor of the great interests of the mechanic, the laborer, the farmer, the lumberman, the shipbuilder, or the fisherman. But you know also that I have fully recognized the fact that we are obliged to raise yearly a great sum, made greater by the obligations imposed on us by this Government, and that we must continue to provide this yearly sum mainly by import duties, laid to a great extent on goods similar to those which can be manufactured here; and that it results as a necessary incident of our settled fiscal system, that there must be a large, and as I believe, in the view of moderate protectionists, an ample advantage to the home manufacturer.

"Our adversaries wish to present to you an issue as between the present tariff and absolute Free Trade.

"That is not the true issue

"Free Trade is, as I have repeatedly explained, for us impossible, and the issue is whether the present tariff is perfect, or defective and unjust.

"I believe it to be in some important respects defective and unjust.

We expressed our views last session in four motions, which declare that articles of such prime necessity as fuel and breadstuffs should be free; that the sugar duties should be so adjusted as to relieve the consumer from some part of the enormous extra price he is now liable to pay to a few refiners; that the exorbitant and unequal duties on the lower grades of cottons and woollens should be so changed as to make them fairer to the masses, who now pay on the cheapest goods taxes about twice as great in proportion as those which the rich pay on the finest goods; and that the duties on such materials as iron, which is in universal use, should be reduced, so as to enable the home manufacturer, to whom it is a raw material, to produce a cheaper article for the benefit of his home consumer and the encouragement of his foreign trade.

"I believe that by changes of the character I have indicated monopoly and extravagant prices would be checked, a greater measure of fair play and justice to all classes would be secured, and the burden of taxation would be better adjusted to the capacity of the people who are to pay. Depend upon it, a day will come when by sharp and bitter experience we shall learn the truth, and many who even now applaud will then condemn these particular incidents of the tariff."

Mr. Blake's repetition is of more importance than his original utterance, and that for a reason which is universally recognized. To re-affirm a thing, after an interval of time with its changes and events has passed, is to imply that your views have not changed on the matter in question, and that these views of yours are even more decided now than they were before. Mr. Blake gives us to understand that his mind is made up on the question of Protection or Free Trade, and has been for some years back. He admits absolute Free Trade to be impossible, but he wants a reform of the tariff. And his allusion to "four motions" pressed in the House by his party in 1882, implies that the party was with him then, and is with him still. Both leader and party, therefore, are responsible for the position assumed.

First, the coal tax and the bread tax, so called. As to the former our reply is that the price of coal to Canadian consumers would not fall five cents per ton were coal made free to-morrow. The price of coal is fixed by the great American coal-carrying railway companies, and they actually favor Canada at the expense of their own people, in order to hold the Canadian trade, which they deem to be of great and yearly-increasing value. These companies fix, not merely the price at which they will sell to wholesale buyers, but also the price at which it must be sold to retail buyers on both sides of the border. Then the alleged coal-tax does not touch the farmers at all, a point that is never alluded to in Free Trade speeches.

Mr. Blake and his friends say in one breath that the "bread-