The Colonist.

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THE SEMI-WEEKLY COLONIST

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AGAINST THE PROVINCE.

The hostility of our evening contemporary to everything suggested by anyone else in the interest of the province is developing into a craze. Some weeks ago the Colonist suggested that if the Dominion government would either surrender the 3,500,000 acres which it is entitled to select in the northeastern part of the province, or choose land not likely soon to be occupied, it would only be simple justice. To this suggestion the Times opposed columns of sarcasm, and utterly refused to endorse it. When Mr. McBride declined to accept $1,000,000 in driblets as adequate compensation for the exceptional permanent burdens borne by the province, the Times assailed him with sarcasm, vituperation and misstatement, although in taking this position in relation thereto it flies in the face of the leader of its own provincial party. On Sunday the Colonist expressed the opinion that public men in the East did not appreciate British Columbia, and instanced the probability of delay in the completion of the Grand Trunk Pacific through this province as proving it. That there has been delay in beginning the work of construction, not even the Times can deny; that it is possible that the company may ask for an extension of time in which to finish the road is not outside the bounds of possibility; and that no one in the East thought it of the slightest importance to provide a time when work should be begun in this province is a matter of record. To say these things is not to attack any one; it is simply to give expression to an unfortunate fact—a fact that we should all labor to remove in the quickest possible time. But all the Times finds in it is an excuse for exhibiting more of its characteristic malevolence. This is very unfortunate. There are a sufficient number of political questions for us to differ upon, without disagreeing in print upon the matters upon which in conversation every man in the province is of the same mind. We repeat that our contemporary appears to have developed a craze.

THE PROVINCE MISREPRESENTED

The Toronto Globe has a keen sense for anything to the disadvantage of British Columbia. Its latest discovery is that "systematic land-grabbing" is being practiced here, and "that even the loose distinction which the province established between pasture and agricultural lands is said to be ignored." To this follows a homily upon the unreasonableness of asking for better terms while the heritage of the country is being squandered. It may be too much to ask the Globe to inform itself as to the facts of any particular case before making condemnatory criticisms, but perhaps its sense of justice will lead it to correct an error into which it has been led by placing too much credence upon the statements of certain provincial papers, whose sole object day and night is to invent things prejudicial to the provincial government.

For the information of the Globe we may mention that the government has nothing whatever to do with the manner in which applications to purchase crown lands are advertised. If a thousand applications are advertised, the only assumption is that a thousand people want land. Years ago a law was passed to govern such matters, and it is in force today. In this vast province it is utterly impossible for the government to know the character of each square mile, and when any one applies to purchase land, its classification is determined by the provincial land surveyor, who surveys it for the applicant. Provincial land surveyors are sworn officers of the province, wholly independent of government control. We take leave to doubt if there ever was an instance in which the government of this province directed one of them to report land as anything different from what he found it, and we also take leave to doubt if we have any provincial land surveyors, who would take instructions of that kind, if they were given. When the surveyor makes his report, the price of the land is fixed by the statutory scale, and there is not a man, from the Lieutenant Governor down, who can alter it. If he reports it as agricultural land, the price fixed by statute for agricultural land must be paid, and so on as to other classes. It must be admitted that the government has the right to step in and say that the land shall not be sold at all, but this is a power very rarely exercised, and only for special causes, and properly so, because the people of the province are anxious to see its land settled, and they would not permit any administration to make fish of one and flesh of another.

Let us, for illustration, take the first case, which we find advertised among our exchanges. It begins as follows: "Sixty days after date I intend to apply to the Hon. Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, Victoria, to purchase the following described land." Then follow a description of the tract by metes and bounds, the statement that it contains 160 acres more or less and the signature of the applicant. There are probably hundreds of such notices in the British Columbia papers. The Chief Commissioner knows nothing about them. If he should happen to see one, he could not know from it whether the land was agricultural or some other kind; in all probability he could not point out the area on the map, nor could any one of his officers do more than make a more or less close guess at its location. At the expiration of the time mentioned in the notice, the applicant will take the next step, and will get an order for survey. After the surveyor has reported as to the quality of the land, the applicant will know how much he has to pay. All this is the simplest matter of routine. Quite a long time is necessary to go through with it. In the case of applications for the purchase of land along the route of the Grand Trunk Pacific, where the Globe says most of the grabbing is going on, an applicant would be fortunate if he was able to get his land within four or five months after he gave his notice. That means that the applications, which have aroused the suspicions of the Globe, and all of which are for areas not exceeding 640 acres, have probably in very few cases passed beyond the application stage and have never yet come under the notice of the Land Department. No man, except the applicant, has, in the great majority of cases, any idea what the character of the land is, and even he may be mistaken as to how the provincial land surveyor will classify it.

There may be a better way of dealing with Crown Lands than to require public notice of every application to purchase, and a report by a sworn officer of the government, whose tenure of office, amount of employment, or pay do not depend upon political favor, as to the classification of the land, but it would puzzle the Globe to suggest it.

The Globe chides the government for a policy of "alienation to speculative companies" at "virtually nominal prices." There is absolutely no foundation whatever for any criticism on this score. The government is not parting with land to speculative companies at nominal or any other prices. If a company or an individual wants to buy not more than 640 acres of vacant unreserved crown lands, it or he can do so by complying with the law. If, after the land has been bought, the owner wishes to hold it for speculative purposes, there is no law to prevent him, but he will have to pay a round sum annually in wild land tax. When the Globe says: "British Columbia should immediately abandon this policy of alienating large tracts of land to companies," it assumes a condition of things which does not exist. On the contrary, not a week passes in which the government does not receive and decline applications for the purchase of large tracts by companies for speculative purposes. Is it too much to ask the Globe to correct its misrepresentation?

THE OTTAWA CONFERENCE.

Among the matters dealt with at the inter-provincial conference was the abolition of the tax on commercial travelers. The resolution adopted recommends the repeal of the laws now in force, with the exception that the repeal shall not affect any licence "payable under any act concerning the sale of intoxicating liquors."

A second resolution recommends that the provinces shall make no discrimination in respect to taxation between companies incorporated under local status and those incorporated under the laws of the Dominion. Mr. Whitney, premier of Ontario, and Mr. Murray, premier of Nova Scotia, while not objecting to this resolution, indicated their desire to consult their colleagues before assenting to it.

Another resolution recommends that annual conferences of provincial premiers be held, to be called by the prime minister of Ontario jointly with the prime minister of Quebec.

Mr. McBride does not appear to have been present when these matters were discussed, as far as we understand from the official announcement given out to the Toronto press.

Other subjects which came up were: The matter of the boundary of Manitoba, which is to be heard by the Dominion government on November 12th, and Ontario and Quebec are expected to be represented at the hearing; the control of the fisheries, which was left in abeyance; technical education, which the premiers agreed was purely a provincial matter; the organization by the Dominion government of companies with purely provincial objects, which the Ottawa authorities were requested to watch very closely; the succession duties, which will be equalized if possible, and there is to be correspondence between the several provincial governments on the subject.

On the whole the conference does not appear to have accomplished very much, if, as some of our Eastern exchanges seem to think, the attitude of British Columbia will prevent action from being taken on the financial resolutions adopted. It is impossible to read the expressions of opinion in the papers supporting the federal government in the East without surprise at the tone adopted by them towards British Columbia. They appear to be unanimous in thinking that it was a piece of impertinence for this province to ask simply for what is her due. Although the premiers all admitted the principle for which the province contends, that is the principle expressed in the resolution, moved in the legislature in 1905 by Mr. McBride, seconded by Mr. Macdonald and unanimously adopted, the papers referred have only the language of abuse to apply to the representative of the province for his refusal to accept temporary assistance. The whole base of our claim is the permanent nature of the conditions out of which it arises. We are not so poor that we must suffer for the lack of $100,000 a year for ten years. Yet because our representative would not accept this, he is assailed with very scant courtesy. This spirit of itself is not calculated to make further conferences a success.

THE CASE REVIEWED.

There ought to be no politics in the case of British Columbia for better terms. There was none, until certain newspapers set themselves to work to thwart the efforts of the present provincial ministry to obtain recognition of those claims, which up to that time we had all united in pressing upon the attention of the federal authorities. We shall endeavor in what follows to review the case from a non-partizan point of view.

While there has been for many years great dissatisfaction with the treatment received by the province from the Dominion, the first occasion when the case was formally stated was in 1897, when Mr. R. r. Rithet, then a member of the legislature, made a speech in the House, in which he reviewed exhaustively the contributions of British Columbia to the federal exchequer and the expenditures of the Dominion in this province. His able treatment of the subject created great interest in it, and from that day to the present "Better Terms" have been constantly in the minds of the people. In October, 1900, Hon. James Dunsmuir, who was then premier of the province, brought the subject under the notice of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and in January, 1901, he went to Ottawa, accompanied by Mr. D. M. Eberts, who was then attorney-general, and placed the provincial case before the federal ministry. Nearly a score of subjects were dealt with by the provincial delegation, some of which received due attention, others yet remaining open. The only one with which we are specially concerned today is the first one mentioned in the memorandum of January 28, 1901, to Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and stated as follows:

"The province is entitled to increased subsidies or financial assistance in some form."

The reasons given for this claim are thus stated:

"In considering the subject, the peculiar circumstances and physical conditions by which the province is surrounded must have special cognizance. These may be enumerated as follows:

"(a) Its remoteness from the populated centres of Eastern Canada and the seat of government;

"(b) Its vast extent, wide distribution and diversity of resources and its sparseness of population;

"(c) Its rugged exterior and the physical obstacles to communication and development."

In the Dunsmuir cabinet were Messrs. W. C. Wells and W. W. B. McInnes, both well known Liberals, and they fully endorsed the position taken by the Premier, and indeed, as far as we are able to recall the facts, there was not a word of adverse criticism either in the House or out of it. Everyone felt that the case of the province had been ably presented, and there was not the slightest suggestion that it had been overstated.

In January, 1903, Hon. Col. Prior, who was then provincial premier, accompanied by Mr. Eberts, went to Ottawa and discussed the "better terms" question, among other things, with the Dominion government. They met Sir Wilfrid Laurier on January 26 and laid their case before him. As on the occasion of the visit of Hon. Mr. Dunsmuir, the first proposition presented was:

"Readjustment of the financial relations of the Province with the Dominion."

On the following day the British Columbia delegates met the representatives of the eastern provinces and Manitoba, who had been holding a conference in Quebec. At this meeting the special claims of British Columbia were submitted. No action was taken, and when all the provincial representatives met Sir Wilfrid Laurier on the following day, the special claims of this province were laid over for consideration until February 4, when our delegates saw the federal Premier, and, as they say in their report, "were afforded every facility to present their views." Col. Prior's statement of the financial aspect of the case will be found in the sessional papers of British Columbia for 1903, the paper being numbered K 8. Substantially what he said is epitomized in the following sentence: "The government of today is entitled in equity to recognize the consequences of these errors (i. e., the errors of the framers of the Terms of Union as to the future requirements of the province) and compensate for the inordinate benefits the Dominion has received, and also increase the allowance for the requirements of the public service in a province demanding so extraordinary a rate of expenditure for its settlement and development." It may be mentioned that Col. Prior had already forwarded to Hon. Mr. Parent, then premier of Quebec, a statement of the case of the province substantially as laid before the federal premier.

We pause here in the history of the case to point out that, although it was made known to the provincial premiers assembled at Quebec that British Columbia made a claim for exceptional treatment, and that the same was also done when Col. Prior met those gentlemen in Ottawa, and also when the representatives of all the provinces met Sir Wilfrid, no one appears to have raised any objection to it; but on the contrary, the meeting with the federal Premier ended with the understanding that our representatives should have an opportunity to meet him again and present our special case. No one then pretended that the premiers of the other provinces ought to be consulted, and in fact be unanimous, before British Columbia would be accorded a fair measure of justice.

In July, 1903, Hon. Charles Wilson and Hon. R. F. Green went to Ottawa to meet the Dominion government. As on the former occasions, the first subject urged upon Sir Wilfrid Laurier's attention was:

"Readjustment of financial relations between the province of British Columbia and the Dominion of Canada."

The case as presented by Mr. Wilson will be found in the sessional papers of 1903-04 and is numbered G 13. In it this passage occurs: "Constitutionally we believe the government of British Columbia is entitled to consideration, and that the Dominion authorities are bound in equity to consider, and if possible adjust, the state of affairs which has arisen out of our relations with the Dominion." Mr. Wilson also suggested that the province might be willing to accept a return of the lands in the Peace River country "in lieu of some of the demands upon the Dominion treasury." Among those present on this occasion was the Hon. Mr. Templeman.

On December 24, 1903, Hon. Mr. McBride wrote to Sir Wilfrid Laurier, urging an adjustment of the financial relations between the two governments, and reminding Sir Wilfrid that Messrs. Wilson and Green had suggested the reference of "the whole matter to an independent commission of enquiry, not for an award of final settlement as by arbitration, but for a report as to the merits of our claims; also, if agreeable, to suggest equitable and practical lines of adjustment." Replying to Mr. McBride, Sir Wilfrid said that he "saw difficulties in having separate arrangements for each of the provinces," and he added that some "uniform, systematic and final basis" ought to be reached. He expressed his regret that, owing to the length of the session, the government had been unable to give the matter full attention. In answering this letter, Mr. McBride reviewed the case in general terms, pointing out that, while previous representatives of the province had recognized the principle of a general readjustment affecting all the provinces, they had not relinquished our special claims. To this letter there was no reply.

The next stage in the case was the presentation of a resolution in the legislative session of 1905 by Mr. McBride, seconded by Mr. Macdonald, leader of the opposition. It was drawn up by the latter, because, as he alleged, that prepared by Mr. McBride was not strong enough. It read as follows:

"Whereas the government of British Columbia has from time to time made representations to the government of Canada urging upon the latter a re-adjustment of the financial Terms of Union;

"And whereas such re-adjustment has not yet been granted by the government of Canada;

"And whereas the claims of the province are based upon permanent conditions peculiar to British Columbia and entitle this province, as distinguished from the other provinces, to distinct and separate relief,

"Be it therefore resolved, that in the opinion of this House, the province is entitled to such distinct and separate relief from the Dominion of Canada, based upon an equitable consideration of the conditions in the province, the large contributions made by the province to the Dominion by way of customs and otherwise, and the exceptionally high cost of government in the province and the development of our natural resources."

This resolution was carried unanimously, and the mover and seconder vied with each other in the earnestness with which they advocated it.

Here the matter rested until this year, when at the invitation of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Mr. McBride went to Ottawa to meet the premiers of the other provinces. The account of what there took place is as yet unofficial; but at some stage of the proceedings the federal premier appears for the first time during the discussion of better terms to have taken the position that there must be harmony among the representatives of the provinces as to what allowances should be made to each of them. Against this course Mr. McBride appears to have protested, claiming that our case rests upon its own merits, and is a matter between this province and the Dominion alone. He also renewed his proposal that an independent commission should be appointed to examine into it. This was rejected; but the provincial premiers were unanimous in recognizing the right of this province to exceptional treatment. This was one point gained. It was an admission that the resolution of 1905 was based upon correct premises, and that the several representations of the successive British Columbia premiers were reasonable in principle. As we understand the sequence of events, it was after this that Mr. McBride proposed the commission of inquiry. Instead of acceding to this, the conference offered $1,000,000 in ten annual instalments as a full compensation for the claims of the province, based upon "permanent conditions." Whether or not this offer was made with the prior sanction of Sir Wilfrid Laurier we are not informed, and therefore in what is intended as a historical review of the subject we shall not draw any inference on the point. Mr. McBride refused to accept it, and when an effort was made to couple with it some additional concessions to the new provinces, he withdrew from the conference. Afterwards he was seen by Hon. Mr. Fielding, who offered on behalf of the Dominion government to supplement to some extent—how much is uncertain—whatever amount the conference might recommend, if Mr. McBride would return and accept the offer of the conference. This he declined to do.

This is the history of the case, and the only comment, which we propose to add today, is that, if it is true that Mr. Fielding offered on behalf of the Dominion government to supplement what the conference might suggest, the position that the premiers of the other provinces must consent before justice can be done British Columbia becomes wholly untenable. If asked why Mr. McBride did not accept Mr. Fielding's offer, the reasonable answer is that at that stage of the proceedings it was too late to do so; the conference was about to close, and to have taken the $1,000,000 and left the matter open would have been an exceedingly injudicious course. As the matter now stands, if the resolutions of the conference are acted on, we will get the $1,000,000; but it will not be in full of our demands; our right to exceptional treatment has been conceded both by the Dominion and the provincial governments, and Mr. Fielding has admitted that it is not necessary for all the provincial premiers to agree before we can get what may be decided upon between the government of British Columbia and the government of Canada as a reasonable measure of justice to our province, because of the permanent character of the conditions, which render the administration of its affairs exceptionally expensive.

EXTRAORDINARY DOCTRINE.

One of those extraordinary things, for which it is to be hoped "the Hon. Mr. Templeman is not responsible," appeared in the Times of Tuesday. The important part of the sentence was as follows:

"As emphasizing the point that any government in the future will be careful about meddling with a matter, which public opinion in the East thinks should be left alone, we quote from several of prominent newspapers."

Then follow quotations in regard to the attitude of this province on the better terms question. So the view of our contemporary is that public opinion in the East, as expressed in the newspapers, is the court of last resort in matters vital to the interests of this province. We think that the Times will find that British Columbia is old enough, big enough and strong enough to stand on its own feet and speak for itself, irrespective of what public opinion in the East has to say about it. For nearly ten years the people of this province have clamored for better terms, and for the first time in the agitation we are told by the leading Liberal paper of the province that we must be very careful in future about meddling with such things. We must wait until the spirit of fair play inspires, say, the Toronto Globe, or the Montreal Gazette, or the Halifax Chronicle to tell us what we have a right to ask. When Mr. Macdonald next hands a resolution to Mr. McBride, dealing with our claims on the Dominion, he will insert a preamble, we presume, asserting that public opinion in the East has been sounded, and we are safe to meddle. If he does not, he must expect to be classed by our contemporary with the blunderers, poseurs, and so on, about whom it is so fond of talking.

In all seriousness such a sentiment as that quoted has never before appeared in a British Columbia paper, and there is no public man in the province who would have the hardihood to utter it on a platform. He would be hissed from the hall. The harm the thing does is not local. Here we know what value to attach to the utterances of the Times; but in the East it is not known that our contemporary denies Mr. Templeman's responsibility for its utterances, and what it says will be quoted as expressing the views of British Columbia's representative in the cabinet. In this way much mischief may be done.

PROVINCIAL SUBSIDIES.

The Toronto Globe renews the discussion of provincial subsidies, and expresses the opinion that the adjustment of inequalities might rather be in the way of leveling down than leveling up. We are not disposed to verbal criticism, but the Globe's observation suggests the thought that in the leveling down process Ontario and Quebec would find themselves deprived of the exceptional advantage they derived under the terms of confederation. For example, Nova Scotia has reached the limit of her per capita subsidy. Her population has passed beyond the 400,000 mark. She can never, under the original terms get more than $320,000 a year from this source. Even if her population should become upwards of a million she cannot get the per capita allowance which Ontario and Quebec receive, because it so happened that when the union was formed their populations exceeded a million. On the other hand, if there was a leveling up, all the provinces might hope in course of time to get as much per capita subsidy as the two just mentioned.

Continuing its argument, the Globe claims that the effect of the subsidies is to free the provincial governments from the responsibility of collecting revenue. We shall not undertake to say how true this is in respect to the Eastern Provinces, but examination of the revenue of this province will show that it does not apply to British Columbia. The total revenue, which this province collects is about $2,000,000; the total amount received from the Dominion is $300,000. The revenue tax and timber dues together exceed what we receive from the federal exchequer. It must be obvious to the Globe that the amount which we get from Ottawa is not much of an incentive to extravagance.

Our contemporary repeats its statement that this province has freely wasted its heritage, which it describes as the richest owned by any of the provinces. The richness may be conceded, and because of it the Dominion would find it exceedingly profitable to expend largely in works for the development of the province. But the case against us of squandering our resources cannot be made out. "Her timber and mineral resources properly administered would yield a revenue away beyond all the reasonable demands of the provincial administration." This is a statement, which the Globe cannot substantiate. Most people, who know anything of business conditions here, will tell our contemporary that mining and lumbering in this province are taxed quite as much as business will bear. "But her public men," adds our contemporary, "have preferred to waste this heritage and appeal to the Dominion for aid. Let it be known that the appeal has been made for the last time." The Colonist invites its Liberal contemporaries to join with it in declaring, for the information of the Globe and all others, that the appeal for justice has not been heard for the last time; and it also asks them to unite with us in saying that, admitting the most that can be truthfully urged in regard to the disposition of its lands by this province, the urgency of our claim for better treatment has not been occasioned thereby. The only "squandering" that can be laid to the charge of our provincial ministries is in connection with certain land subsidies to railways. It is easy to be wise after the fact, but at the time these subsidies were given they apparently afforded the only means whereby railway construction could be secured, and the province derives just as much from the timber cut and the minerals taken from such lands, as it would have done, if the title to them had remained in the Crown. There have been some fairly acute political critics in the British Columbia legislature, and a very critical press, but never yet has it been alleged in this province that our demand for better terms arose from the squandering of the public domain. Our Toronto contemporary does not understand the subject which it essays to discuss.

THAT NEW PARTY.

Some estimable people in St. John, and some others of the same type in Toronto and in Vancouver are talking very loud about a new party in federal politics. The exact nature of the propaganda for which it is to stand has not yet been disclosed, and its numerical strength has not been stated. It has reached that stage in the process of incubation, when its foster father, the true and only discoverer of "The Star in the East," Mr. Billy McLean, M. P. can only do it justice by printing things about it on the front page of his paper with borders around them. And thus the work goes on. The Guardian, of Vancouver, is disposed to dispute the Toronto man's claim to be the originator of the new movement, and says it is responsible in the premises. Perhaps it is. While it seems hardly possible to regard the so-called new party very seriously, in view of the sources from which it originates, there are some things said by its advocates, that are well worth considering. For example, the Guardian tells us that Responsible Government at Ottawa has degenerated into a servile following by the dominant party, of whatever "the Premier and a few of his closest advisers determine upon. There is much truth in this, but unfortunately the same thing is true of all political organizations, in every country, and, unless human nature in the new party is to be developed along different lines from what we have been accustomed to see, we fear it will not be any different when Mr. McLean and his friends get upon the treasury benches. At the same time it is only too true that administrations are steadily growing more and more autocratic, that we are drifting away from the cardinal principles of our system, and that an effort ought to be made to get back to them again. But it seems to us that the way to do this is by reforming the old parties, not by creating a new one. Let there be greater freedom of expression within the parties; let newspapers supporting a government insist that they have a right to have their ideas respected; let members of parliament and the legislatures do the same thing. Parties would be all the stronger, and ministries all the more successful, if this were done.

Lieutenant-Governor Clark of Ontario, in a speech delivered in London, England, not very long ago, spoke of the apathy of the British public towards things Canadian. To this the Canadian Gazette replies that the statement is unfounded, and that during the eleven days from September 5 to September 16, both inclusive, 10,011 inches were printed about Canada in such British papers as had come under its notice. This is very gratifying, and will be a surprise to most people. The papers in the list include all the leading journals and quite a considerable number of the less important publications. At the same time, it is to be remembered that there are millions of people who do not see the leading periodicals. Hence they are not able to get much information about this country. But the showing presented by the Gazette completely disposes of the charge of apathy.

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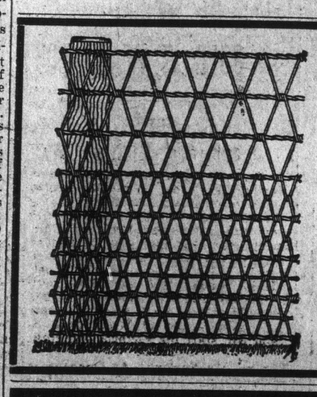

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