

## POLITICS, NOT BUSINESS.

How long is the Chamber of Commerce of Halifax to be used as an arena for political discussion, and how long are the business men of Halifax inclined to tolerate the practice of certain politicians who are members of that body? A general meeting of the Chamber and City Council was convened to re-open and discuss the Short Line question. The large attendance proved that our citizens were fully alive to the importance of the issue, but before the meeting was half over the enthusiasm was dead, and at least one-half of the members had quietly left the Chamber, feeling no doubt utterly disgusted with the turn affairs had taken. What had politics to do with the question under discussion? Nothing whatever, and yet stripped of this element of discord, the transactions of the meeting need not have occupied one-third of the time. It is time the Chamber adopted a new policy and a new code of regulations. That policy should be the fostering of the trade of Halifax, and the code of regulations should stipulate that no member should be allowed to speak for more than ten minutes at any one meeting, and that the member introducing politics into his speech should be quietly but firmly ruled out of order by the chairman.

## THE SHORT LINE.—A FATAL DELAY.

Within a few weeks the bitter frost and drifting snow of winter will be upon us, and it will then be almost impossible to successfully survey the missing link in the Combination Line. While this gap remains unsurveyed, the eligibility of the route is open to question. Its survey is therefore a paramount necessity; without it our agitation is but vain; without it we appear before Parliament with a flaw in our brief. The cost of this survey to be borne by Halifax, could not exceed \$7,500, and yet our merchants, our politicians, and our patriots, all of whom recognize the importance of securing direct communication with Quebec, Montreal, and the West, all of whom express the deepest concern in the welfare of Halifax and Nova Scotia, allow a matter of \$2,500 to stand between them and their convictions. More definite information is required by them, and yet they had the assurance of the mayor of the city that with the survey made there was every probability that the Combination Line would be made the Eastern Extension of the C. P. Railway. Delay, delay, fatal delay. Let twelve of our patriotic citizens club together, subscribe the money, and have the survey made. This would prove that Halifax was in earnest in the matter, and had resolved upon having her rights, come what would.

## AN EXPLANATION.

Messrs. Daly and Stairs have explained the position they took in the House of Commons with respect to the Short Line Railway. The explanation in brief is to the effect that as the C. P. Company had resolved upon supporting the Pope route, it was useless for them to offer a factious opposition. This is good as far as it goes, and we believe our representatives were acting conscientiously in supporting the line which in their judgment would be the only one likely to be constructed. But we are of the opinion that a careful examination into the relative merits of the rival routes would have convinced our representatives, first, that the gradients and curves on the Pope route would have the effect of diverting the trade of the West to Portland, or some other port in New England; second, that the Combination Line with its easy grades and directness could not fail to be advantageous to the trade of Halifax. As the question may again be brought up in Parliament, we trust our representatives will use their influence in furthering the movement to secure a survey of the missing link in the Combination Line.

## THE SCHOOL YEAR.

The many teachers throughout Nova Scotia are now in a position to realize fully some of the pernicious effects of our absurd division of the school year. The summer term, the "bi-lobed" one, as Mr. McKay of Pictou botanically terms it, has just closed; many schools have changed teachers; examinations for entrance to the various Academies have been held; in graded schools promotion examinations and a general re-organization of classes have taken place. Even this matter of promotion is sufficient to shew the folly of the present system. After the long mid-summer vacation there naturally follows a general review of work previously done, before pupils are in a position to advance. Just when the work of the school is beautifully under way, along comes an iceberg in the form of a promotion examination, and all is confusion again. Having classified the pupils anew, the teacher finds that in each class he has two sets of pupils,—those who have just been promoted into it, and those who were not fit to go on with the next higher class. The work of the class is new to the former set; to the latter it is a review of work which has just been gone over, and of which no review is yet required. Hence there is bad classification, an evil which every practical educationist can appreciate, and which would have been largely averted had the re-organization taken effect immediately after a long vacation, when every pupil is more or less in need of review. What applies to the promotion examinations in the Common Schools, applies with equal force to the examinations for entrance to the County Academies; and thus our whole school system suffers terribly from our adherence to a practice whose usefulness, if it ever had any, is quite as much "gone" as Othello's occupation.

Since THE CRITIC first called attention to this defect in our school law, many of our leading educationists have written and spoken strongly in favor of a school year of one term. In fact we are convinced that if

the present system were now proposed for the first time, it would meet with a universal and emphatic protest from every teacher throughout the Province. It is a case of "rocks by custom turned to beds of down."

A one-term year would do away with the labor of half-yearly returns; it would diminish the itinerancy of teachers, thereby greatly benefitting the schools; it would simplify classification; thereby rendering a teacher's work more effective. We hope these reasons will induce our Superintendent of Education to take steps towards bringing about a reform, which is so urgently called for by those engaged in the work of education in this Province.

## THE INDEPENDANT HOVAS.

For months the French fleet have been blockading the ports of Madagascar in the vain attempt to starve out the brave Hovas, and obtain a permanent foothold in the Island. But the Hovas appear to be quite capable of preserving intact the liberty which they value so dearly, and trained as they have been from their early youth to the use of fire-arms, the French find in them, "foemen worthy of their steel" 1,500,000 of these brave people, with an equal number forming tributary and independent tribes, form the population of an island, the area of which is but little less than double that of the British Isles. In Madagascar, separated as it is from the African continent, France beholds a land that would in every way satisfy the land hunger of her statesmen. Its soil is productive, its products varied, and its climate in the interior most delightful, moreover its isolated position would prevent those international complications which frequently follow colonial extension on the main land. The coast fevered drove away the French in the 17th century, and the same deadly influence has again told upon the present expedition, which, in conjunction with the reverses the French land forces have recently met with at the hands of the Hovas, will probably have the effect of bringing the campaign to a speedy close. The Hovas are a christian people, ruled by a brave and christian sovereign, and the attempt made by France to interfere with their independence is, under the circumstances, most unwarrantable. Imagine the burning eloquence of the young Queen Ranavalona, as when addressing her people upon the day of her coronation, she cried, "Should any one dare to claim a hair's breadth of my country, I will show myself to be a man and go along with you to protect our fatherland." And then placing her hand upon the Bible, she continued, "We now ask you, O people, to defend our just cause, for God gave this island of Madagascar to my ancestors and to yours. It was left as an inheritance to us Malagasy, but the French will take it away by force, they say; therefore I declare unto you: 'I shall fulfil, my people, the share in the defence of the land which belongs to me as Queen. Though I am a woman, I have the heart of a man, and I stand up to lead you forth to prevent and oppose those who seek to take our land. For God forbid, my people, that we should become the servants of foreigners.'"

## MODERN RUSSIA.

One of the most interesting publications which has appeared during the present year is a book entitled "Modern Russia," the author of which, Mr. Hare, spent many years in St. Petersburg, Moscow, and other cities, familiarizing himself with the customs, habits, laws and institutions of the Russian people. The interior of Russia, says Mr. Hare, has been seldom visited by foreigners; the means of travelling are at least a century behind the age. The dead level of the vast steppes make the scenery of the country unattractive, especially in the rural districts. The cities and towns being generally built upon the more favored spots. According to Mr. Hare, Nihilism has assumed none of the formidable proportions with which we are wont to regard it. Through the telegraphic spectacles, the movement has been magnified a thousand fold, and its growth in Russia can never be rapid, so long as the people continue their idolatrous worship of the Czar; indeed it would appear that this Potentate is regarded by them with superstitious awe, and it will need a century of civilization to destroy his influence over the minds of the people. The freed serfs appear to look back with regret to the day of their liberation. Freedom for them has no charms, and the taxes formerly borne by the landlord, but which now fall directly upon themselves, are looked upon as an affliction far greater than that of serfdom. The religion of the people is somewhat idolatrous in its character. In every household may be found the images of a score or more of saints, and a visitor failing to first recognize these household gods, is deemed guilty of discourtesy to the family. The frightful punishments which Russian convicts undergo in Siberia are far from appalling to the mind of the Russian peasant. The weary monotony of his life makes him long for change, and the prospects of a Siberian home at the expiration of his term of servitude has for him peculiar attractions, there being more life, energy and activity in the towns and cities of Siberia. From the Minister of State down to the meanest official in the Russian Empire, bribery and corruption are considered fair and honourable methods, and their practice has now become so prevalent that it would seem almost impossible to decide just where reform should commence. According to the canons of the Greek Church, Wednesday and Friday in each week are set apart as fast days, and labor, excepting in cases of necessity, is absolutely prohibited. In addition to these, many saints' days are observed, so that exclusive of the Sunday, the Russians observe as days of fast, saints' days, and holidays, 183 days in each year, leaving but 130 days in which to transact the ordinary business of life. Drunkenness is the natural outcome of such a state of affairs, and the Russian peasants may be reckoned as among the most intemperate of all peoples resident in rural districts. "Modern Russia" should be read to be appreciated.