

PROMINENT TOPICS.

The public expenditure and increase of debt questions have been prominent subjects before the House of Commons this week. The increase of the former from \$41,702,383 in 1896 to \$57,982,868 in 1901 and the growth of the debt from \$258,479,432 in 1896 to \$274,480,000 in 1902 are certainly changes well worthy of the serious consideration of the country, more especially of the business men of both political parties. The coincidence of expanding revenue and expanding debt on an equal scale is much too serious a condition to be judged to any extent as a party question. However, it is now so regarded in the House of Commons it will not be so throughout the country should a check be given to the present run of prosperity. Happily, there is no cloud on the horizon indicative of such a reverse, and if the general law holds good that good and bad times run in cycles of about ten years, we have several "fat" years ahead before the "lean" ones are due, so that while there is nothing in the present situation to justify anxiety, there is at all times an urgent, an imperative need for prudence and preparations for a rainy day.

The point needful to be kept ever in mind is the vital difference between expenditures of a capital nature that are dictated by mere local ambitions and party considerations which have no promise in them of serving the general trade interests of the country, and those expenditures which are needed for the development of national interests, such as transportation facilities by which the commerce of the Dominion is certain to be benefitted. Building all manner of public works all over the country may be very useful in keeping constituencies in line or winning them over to the party in power without enlarging in the least degree the trade facilities and accommodations of the country. Were the broad, essential distinction between the above two classes of expenditure strictly recognized and outlays governed thereby, there would be little or no opening for criticism of public expenditures. But, when the principle involved in this distinction is ignored there is a rift in the Government armour through which fatal arrows may pierce, as they did in 1878.

The Board of Trade of this city on the 13th inst. passed two resolutions of great importance. One resolution, which was prefaced by an argumentative preamble, reads:

"Resolved, that the Dominion Government is hereby respectfully urged to make such alterations in the tariff upon importations from foreign countries not having reciprocal relations with this country as

will serve to protect the natural products and manufactures of Canada against the present discrimination under which they suffer, and thereby bring about, in the near future, fairer trade relations between Canada and said foreign countries."

The second one is as follows:

"That, in the opinion of the Montreal Board of Trade, it is the duty of this Dominion, as an important division of the Empire, to share in the cost of the general defence of said Empire, and, therefore, that an annual appropriation shall be provided in the Dominion budget for this purpose, to be expended as the Dominion Government may direct."

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In regard to the defence of the Empire question this inconsistency is notable in those who desire, as we said last week, that Canada should continue to play the scandalous role of "poor relation" by accepting the protection of Great Britain without making any recompense. Those who object to Canada sharing in the cost of her own protection and in the defence of the Empire are those whose whole trend of desire is towards greater independence for this country. Now, it is quite clear that the more this country becomes politically independent of Great Britain and its ties to the Empire, therefore, looser, the more will it be necessary to have some protection to her territory and shipping. It is mere childishness to suppose that the mother country will, at her own cost, strengthen and maintain the material protection she now accords to Canada when this country is making every possible effort to shake off the bonds of allegiance to Great Britain. Were Canada, as some desire, wholly separated from Great Britain, it would then be absolutely necessary for this country to have a defensive fleet, a standing army and fortified places always manned. So that those who are objecting to Canada sharing in its own defence as a part of the Empire are actually, at the same time, desirous of seeing such conditions established as would put Canada under the incomparably greater burden of maintaining alone the cost of defences by sea and land to guard our shipping and our territory!

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Canada needs more independence, no doubt, more of the spirit expressed by Burns:

"The blessed privilege of being independent."

And by Smollett:

"Thy spirit, Independence, let me share.
Lord of the lion heart and eagle eye!"

The spirit of a man who disdains to take shelter any longer under his mother's apron, but is prepared to defend himself, and, if needs be, to lift his fist against any foe that threatens her peace and safety