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THE SITUATION.

What has happened during the first session of Parliament, under the Laurier regime, cannot perhaps be taken as a sample of what may be expected under the same management in future. No general policy was or could be developed. But as far as indications go, the change of policy will be less thorough than individual members of the Government, when in opposition, indicated. The collective aims of a party can only be seen in its formal declaration of principles, as a whole, and of such declaration nothing which the leaders would admit to be binding can be found outside the four corners of the Ottawa platform erected three years ago. If a revenue tariff, enshrined in that platform, implied a considerable reduction of customs duties, as was generally understood, the attainment of that object as made more difficult by passing total estimates that must outstrip the revenue. Whether the excuse given for these estimates, namely, the obligations assumed by the late Government, be valid or not, does not alter the fact that when the requirement is so high and the revenue will be inadequate to cover the expenditure, the difficulty of decreasing duties becomes insuperable, unless it can be shown that some duties are above the revenue point, too high to produce the largest possible revenue, or that new taxes can be substituted or old ones restored. A reduction on cotton goods is not entirely out of the question. A possible resource could be found in a revival of the sugar duties; but that has not been held out as a possible outcome of the policy of the new regime.

During the recess a review of the tariff, with a view to its modification, is on the programme. Information on which to base the changes will be sought from parties interested, directly and indirectly. The method is not different from that of the late Government; but the result may be different. New facts may be elicited or old facts placed in a new light. The enquiry may be conducted from a new point of view, with the object of ascertaining what duties, not beyond the revenue limit, each article will bear. If indications thrown out during the session may be trusted, the Combines will be called upon to justify their existence. The objection to a Combine is that by force of the monopoly which it creates, it is enabled to substitute an arbitrary price for its products for the natural price, which,

where competition is active, is regulated by the cost of production. This, apparently, is the point around which the battle of the tariff will be mainly waged. The tariff and nothing but the tariff can enable a combination to put up monopoly prices. As far as it is possible to draw any conclusion from the avowed intention of the Government, one aim of tariff reform will be to substitute the natural price of an article for the arbitrary price as the regulator between producer and consumer. It remains to be seen how far this aim will be realized.

Some doubt surrounds the intention of the Government on two questions of great importance, on which the debates and interrogations of the session threw no effective light. What are the intentions of the Government with regard to the Pacific cable and a swift line of Atlantic steamers? It is not unreasonable that time should be given to supply the answer. Mr. Dobell's position on the steamship question is unintelligible. If he is new to public administration, navigation is to him, in a special degree, familiar; on the public question he does not appear to entertain any persistent view, though the question of the character of the new line specially concerns his department. What shall be the future winter port of the Canadian-Atlantic line, which is to carry the mails, there is less doubt. It is settled that Portland is not to have that privilege after the end of next winter. The change would have been made sooner if the Government had not thought, reasonably enough, that the Allans were entitled to a year's notice, which they now have in an irregular, and will get in a regular, form. When the change takes place, the question of the winter port will be fought out between Halifax and Quebec. The ground taken by the Colonial Minister, Mr. Chamberlain, that in connection with a new Atlantic line of steamers, the overland communication between the Atlantic and the Pacific ocean ought to be accelerated, raises the question how could this be done? That the building of the Crow's Nest branch, to Vancouver, would abridge the distance hundreds of miles, seems to supply the answer. Besides, for local purposes, this improvement is urgently needed, especially in connection with mineral development.

The session did little to settle the conditions on which civil servants, as voters, are to purchase security for the independent exercise of the franchise in elections. Active interference between parties, it is admitted, is to be forbidden to civil servants; but within this limit is the right of franchise to be independent? If Sir John Macdonald said that civil servants ought to vote only for the Government, his theory took away their independence. That but few of them would think of voting against the Government is conceivable, and even natural. Few dismissals have in the past been made of civil servants for taking an active part in elections, and when one was made Mr. Laurier protested. He is at liberty now to accept the policy which he then opposed, but it is not a sufficient reason for doing so that he was unable to get his own way when he was in a minority. The responsibility of the Minister stands in the gap. A somewhat similar plea was suggested, rather than made in terms, by a colleague, when he coupled the fact that he had proposed to abolish the duty on agricultural implements with the fact that he had been beaten in the attempt. The time to say yes or no to that question has not come. Even a strong sympathy with the abolitionists might fail to bring abolition. But this point is clear: ministers could not seriously think of resting their defence for a particular line of conduct on the plea that, on a matter of policy, they are only doing what their predecessors did.