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TORONTO, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 22, 1899.

THE SITUATION.

Canada is to send a second contingent of over 1,000 to South Africa, where the condition of the military operations is becoming critical. General Buller's check at Tugela river, where he lost 1,150 men, of whom 137 were killed, and 11 guns, postpones the relief of Ladysmith, where the invested force has been on short rations a fortnight. The relief of Kimberley has been delayed by the check in the advance of Lord Methuen. There the little garrison has rations to last till the end of the first week or possibly the middle of January. In parts of Cape Colony, disloyalty is showing itself, which the Africander Bond publicly excuses and encourages. These sympathizers have threatened the railway communication between De Aar and Capetown. The natives near Sterkstroom have taken to looting, and some of them favor the Boers. The British call for more troops is being responded to by a marvellous burst of national enthusiasm; a number quite sufficient to overwhelm the Boers can and will be got; but if the force on the ground should fail to relieve either Ladysmith or Kimberley, it is possible that one or both these places may not be able to hold out till relief comes. In front of Buller the Boers have entrenched themselves on a line of twelve miles, and Lord Methuen finds before him a half circle of entrenched Boers, which, if attacked in front, would be able to enfilade if not to envelop him. This is the hour of gloom for British arms; but courage is undaunted and confidence of success is as strong and as absolute as ever.

The report came on Tuesday that the Conners syndicate had submitted to vary in detail some of the stipulations with the Harbor Commissioners; the contract still requires the sanction of the Government. The men with their backs to the wall and their faces against improvement will now address themselves to the Government. It has become quite plain that no private parties in Montreal or Canada ever had the intention to build elevators sufficient to do the business of the port. The parties chiefly concerned have in this, as in everything else, been looking to the public treasury to supply the elevators. From some points of view the proposition to build Government elevators would deserve consideration, but not from the

point of view of those who regard only the profit they could make out of the elevators when built with public money. If the forwarders had come forward and offered to bind themselves to a rate on produce that would yield interest on the investment, they would have done their best to insure the fulfillment of their wish that public elevators should be built. But they did nothing of the kind, apparently had no such intention, had probably no thought of anything but how they could profit by the public expenditure. The Conners syndicate, for good or evil, comes to offer to do what Canadians in the forwarding business ought long ago to have done; and now instead of this aid to the St. Lawrence route being welcomed, it is met by obstruction of almost every form.

It is for the Government to consider whether, all things taken into account, including our past difference with Americans about the use by them of our canals and the possibility of some new form of difficulty arising, the agreement with the Conners syndicate can properly be ratified. Their duty is political and economic; and as in all such questions the political, in its broadest meaning, outweighs every other consideration, they will doubtless take care to guard against the possibility of international complications. About the major question, strange as it may seem, not one of the opponents of the Conners syndicate contract has had a word to say.

On the occasion of the Fielding banquet, the Minister of Railways predicted that before long the Canadian Pacific will cease to be our only trans-continental line, and that "it will not be long before there are five or six or seven lines from east to west, besides numerous intersecting lines." This recalls the prediction of the late Hamilton Merritt that we should soon see a daily line of Atlantic steamers, and is about as likely to be fulfilled. It may be allowed that there is this much truth in the present prediction, that we shall, in a few years, have more than one trans-continental railway; how many will follow, at a distance of time which at present forbids calculation, is a puzzle which we may leave for a future day. When we get a second trans-continental railway, it is essential that along with it we shall get competition. What guarantees are being taken to secure this boon? Knowing that the C.P.R. will do what it can to maintain its monopoly, suspicion sees its hand in several new ventures. Disclaimers follow, but they do not produce conviction, and the suspicion continues to be repeated. The next question is how trans-continental roads are to be built; are they to be built largely out of the public resources, as the C.P.R. was, in land and money, to be afterwards owned by private persons? In this respect has the result of the elections in Manitoba no lesson for us? It certainly is a pronouncement against the system of subsidies, though it is exceedingly doubtful if the means taken to get rid of them will prove efficient. The solicitor of the C.P.R., if he continues that position and becomes Provincial Premier, might be shy of bonusing companies offering opposition to his patrons; but professions of opposition are easily made, and might conceivably co-exist with an understanding which looked to a different end.

We have one Government railway, the history of which, as recited by Mr. Blair, is not inspiring. But Mr. Blair being at the helm tells us that he has better aims, in the interest of the public. Of winter freights for Europe, he says that "hitherto they had either been compelled to await the re-opening of navigation or they had gone by way of Portland, Boston, New York or some other Ameri-