

The Much Abused Politicians

THE Winnipeg Grain Growers' Guide reports a question concerning the management of the Manitoba Agricultural College which illustrates one of the difficulties that seem to be incidental to democratic government. The college has an advisory board which is the governing body of the institution. The board engaged the services of a professor of animal husbandry who, it is claimed, has rendered very satisfactory service. "The president of the college," we are told, "the board and the student body are all of one mind on the satisfactory character of the administration of his department." The advisory board is the only body which can formally dismiss the official, but a practical dismissal has been accomplished by the Minister of Agriculture in the Manitoba Government, Mr. Winkler, who has cut the professor's name from the salary list. "Most educational institutions in all English speaking countries," says the Guide, "are controlled and conducted by governing boards. This system of management was devised expressly to save such institutions from political mismanagement and interference and the system has proven to be an admirable one. Mr. Winkler has deliberately overthrown the system and violated the spirit of the Act under which the college was established." The only information given as to the cause of the Minister's action is that he has "a personal prejudice against the professor." On this statement of the case public opinion must, of course, be with the professor rather than with the Minister. It may be assumed, however, that the Minister would put his reasons in a different form; it is not to be conceived that a Minister responsible to the people would put his action in the dismissal of a prominent official on mere personal grounds. Whether his reasons be good or bad, it is safe to say that the Minister will claim that his action is governed by regard for the public interests.

The incident illustrates the difficulty there must always be in any system of public affairs which is designed to withdraw any public institution from the control of the representatives of the people. The intervention of commissioners, advisory boards, etc., designed to remove such institutions from political control may to a certain extent serve a good purpose. It will do so where the boards are wise and where the politicians are sensible enough to make the best use of services thus placed at their disposal. But wherever difference arises between the board and the Minister responsible to the people, the system fails. The board is usually an entirely irresponsible body. If it happens to adopt some policy that is not popular there will be public clamor against it. Who, it will be asked, are these people who presume to govern an institution maintained by the people's money? If the unpopularity of their action is marked, there will be an appeal to the Government, Council or other representative body concerned, and a plea that the latter are not responsible will be laughed out of court.

Democracy has its peril. It will be well if those who are so prone to censuring the politicians can remember that these are the chosen representatives of the people, and that the setting up of an authority independent of them is the creating of a Prussian system which is not much honored in the present day. When the politicians misgovern, as sometimes they will, the only remedy is to turn them out when the opportunity occurs, in which case you merely get rid of one set of politicians to replace them by another.

Committed for Contempt

THE power of the Imperial Parliament and each House of it to send to prison persons who offend it has long been recognized. Similar power, it has generally been acknowledged, is possessed by both Houses of the Canadian Parliament. A year or two ago a witness, who had refused to answer certain questions before a committee of the Commons, was taken into custody and remained a prisoner until Parliament was prorogued. There was at one time a question as to whether similar power was possessed by Provincial Legislatures. Whatever doubt existed was settled by a judicial decision, and last week the power to imprison was exercised by the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, which has imprisoned a witness named Thomas, for refusal to answer certain questions.

The power of the Provincial Legislatures to imprison under such circumstances was pretty clearly settled in a case that arose in Nova Scotia a few years ago. It is a co-incidence that the offender in that case was of the same name as the British Columbian prisoner. Mr. Thomas, who was mayor of the town of Truro, published a letter containing some expressions which were regarded as offensive by a member of the House of Assembly, who appealed to the House for protection. Mr. Thomas was summoned to appear at the bar of the House and did so, accompanied by counsel. After answering one or two questions he was told to remain in the custody of the Sergeant-at-Arms while the House took the matter into further consideration. The House decided upon a mild censure of Mr. Thomas, and supposed the matter would end there. But while the House was deliberating, Mr. Thomas, under advice of his counsel, absconded. The House, on being informed of this action, took a more serious view of the matter, and placed a Speaker's warrant in the hands of officers, who pursued the missing man into the country. Ultimately the offender was arrested and brought to the bar of the House. The House, dropping the mild censure it had intended, resolved that he had been guilty of contempt and sent him to jail for forty-eight hours. Before the expiry of that period Mr. Thomas was, under the Habeas Corpus Act, taken before a judge of the Supreme Court, who held that the House had not the power to imprison, and therefore discharged him. The matter came into the courts again in the form of an action for damages brought by Mr. Thomas against the members who had voted for his imprisonment. Mr. Thomas succeeded in the lower courts, but the case was appealed to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in England, which, in a very important judgment, maintained the right of the House to imprison for contempt.

In view of this famous Nova Scotia case there will hardly be a doubt now as to the power which the Legislature of British Columbia has just exercised in the case of another Mr. Thomas, who has been imprisoned. This Mr. Thomas is the secretary of a railway company which had large contracts with the late Government of British Columbia and received large provincial guarantees on bonds. The transactions of the company are under investigation by a committee of the British Columbia House of Assembly. It seems to be admitted that the company, or its officials or contractors, made large contributions to the campaign funds of the late Government party, and questions put by Conservative members of the committee suggest that the campaign funds of the Liberal party, now in power, were similarly favored.

The case as it now stands has an ugly look as respects both political parties, and the need for impartial and thorough investigation is urgent. Investigation, however, is likely to be difficult, for several witnesses have suddenly left the country. Mr. Thomas has remained, but refused to answer questions leading to the subject of the political contributions, and for this refusal the House has ordered that he be taken into custody.

Profiting by Example

MR. LLOYD GEORGE, in a speech the other day, said one of the advantages of the Americans in coming into the war now would be that they could profit by the mistakes the British had made in the early days of the conflict. He might have added that the Americans could profit also by that which had happened in England and which was not a mistake. From the first days of the war there was a large measure of consultation and co-operation between the Liberal Government and the Conservative Opposition in the consideration of war measures. The leaders of the Government invited and received the cordial assistance of the leaders on the other side. There was thus almost a coalition from the beginning, and this soon ripened into an actual coalition, which has continued up to the present time. The American system of government is different from the British. The members of the Cabinet at Washington have no seats in Congress and consequently they have less direct influence on legislation than the Cabinet in London or in Ottawa. It is worthy of note, however, that the Washington Cabinet have followed the British example in inviting the Republicans as well as the Democrats to assist in the framing of war policies. Mr. McAdoo, the Secretary of the Treasury, issued an invitation to the leaders of both Republican and Democratic parties in both Houses of Congress to meet him in consultation concerning the financial measures required for the carrying on of the war. It was a wise step and one which must tend to the unification of the nation in the adoption of war measures.

Interest on Loans

OUR Canadian loans have been well taken by our own people and there has been much satisfaction concerning their success. Perhaps we should all be a little more modest in our claims in this matter. Our recent issues of bonds have carried five per cent. interest and have been issued at a discount which made the cost to the country approach 5½ per cent. Doubtless the Minister of Finance was glad to get the money on these terms and politely thankful to all the subscribers. The investors did a good thing for the country, but, it must be admitted, not one that involved sacrifice, for the rate of interest agreed to by the Government was a generous one. Perhaps if we compare action in Canada with what is taking place across the border we may find that our American neighbors can set up a stronger claim to patriotism in finance. When the big issues of United States war bonds are made the terms allowed to the investor will be of much interest here. Meanwhile, it may be noted that while we are paying our citizens 5½ per cent for money, the State of New York is borrowing at less than 3¾ per cent. An issue of \$25,000,000 New York State fifty year bonds bearing 4 per cent. interest has just been made at 104.817, the yield being a little less than 3¾ per cent.