

## TOPICS OF THE DAY

THE DIGNITY OF LABOUR: HERE AND THERE WITH THE LIBERALS:  
CENSORSHIP OR REVENUE: A PULPWOOD EMBARGO.

MR. Ramsay Macdonald, having endeavoured to endow Labour with dignity and responsibility, has naturally been repudiated by his party. It is doubtful if, for some years past, he has felt entirely at home; but he has lent his mental and moral force where they have been most useful, both as a steadying influence to Labour and as a driving force in the government of the nation. Like most men who have preferred constructive compromise to a vague intermediary benevolence, he has been accused, at one time or another, of going to every extreme and of going nowhere at all. He has been denounced as a red revolutionary and as a parlour socialist, as a Russian spy and as a flunkey to the British aristocracy. His nearest colleagues have accused him, with some truth, of having more than once vacillated in a crisis. But in the greatest crisis that has faced him—one of the greatest that has ever faced the nation—his worst enemy could not accuse him of failing to stand fast. That remained for his friends.

Their objections to Mr. Macdonald's policy are easy to see, but difficult to justify. The reduction of the so-called "dole"—or rather of just that part of it that deserves the opprobrious and inaccurate title—is part of a general policy to provide cheap goods rather than cheap money. The accrued benefits of unemployment insurance are as intact as money in the savings bank, and equally secure from a raid by the Treasury. But Labour appears to believe that unemployment payrolls should be exempted from a general cut, and that the difference should be made up by the old expedient of printing bank-notes. The working-man has neither the experience of personal saving nor the knowledge of even the most simply organized finances to understand that a reduction from his weekly envelope may result in an increase to his larder. He is unable to distinguish between a high standard of living and a high cost of living. Talk about confiscation might much more fittingly be applied to the increased taxation of larger incomes, on many of which the incidence is so heavy as to amount to a capital levy. Nor should it be forgotten that labourers' wages have traditionally been relatively free from the burden of direct taxation that is so

easily imposed on incomes that are permanent and definable, but often by no means larger. When the humblest junior clerk has not only suffered a reduction of his former pittance, but has contributed a proportion of the remainder to the discharge of his country's obligations, it might seem reasonable to suggest that those who contribute nothing to the national purse might at least reduce their demands upon it. The doctrines of Socialism, however, do not appear to extend the general principle of profit-sharing to transactions on the debit side of the ledger, or to recognition of the increased value of a stabilized currency. An effect of leaving intact the capital subsidy to unemployment relief would have been to make unemployment profitable, and to make the "dole" in fact as well as in name a sedative to ambition. The actual reduction, however, has apparently occasioned less rancour than the knowledge that it was a necessary preliminary step to the granting of a loan. With naive astonishment at the discovery that the finances of a country are maintained by money, and that in default of its own money it is as necessary for a Government to borrow as for an individual, the strident voice of Labour proclaims that Mr. Macdonald has sold Great Britain to Wall Street. At worst, the financiers have merely taken a mortgage as security against a loan; and their interest in the affairs of the nation merely reflects the usual practice of investors to safeguard themselves against the reversion of a hopelessly bankrupt institution. Since they already have certain South American properties in process of liquidation, they may be at once excused for their caution and exonerated from any immediate desire for further foreclosures. Bankers may control the destinies of nations, but they prefer their creditors to remain solvent and attend as profitably as possible to the details of their own administration. If the conditions that determined the recent loan are satisfactory to Wall Street, the country may rest assured that the fiscal policy of her Government has been approved by the highest authority

The greater part of the immediate danger has already been averted, and there seems to be no doubt that Mr. Macdonald, supported by the brilliant courage of Mr. Snowden and the robust and cheerful common-sense of Mr. Thomas, will ensure that the fortunes of Great Britain are re-established in safety if not in comfort. How long the present Coalition will last, and the subsequent political fate of its Labour ministers, provide matter for conjecture, though when these lines appear in print, the issue may in part at least have been determined. Meanwhile it is perhaps too soon to lament that Britain's greatest statesman and least

astute of politicians has necessarily saved his country's political future at the expense of his own. Already several "locals" of Mr. Thomas's union have expressed their disagreement with the resolutions reading him out of his affiliations, and have expressed their confidence in at least the sincerity of his actions. What will eventually happen to him and to Mr. Macdonald will depend upon the intelligence of their present opponents. The current threats of expulsion and demands for resignation reveal chiefly stupidity and selfishness. If stupidity can be convinced that Mr. Macdonald's success has been of more advantage to Labour than to any other section of the commonwealth, selfishness will undoubtedly prompt his re-acceptance in the hope of sharing in the glories of even a rejected leader, and with the prospect of greater gains to follow. The parsimonious son will be permitted to return home and fatten the golden calf.

Mr. Macdonald, being quite disillusioned, may permit himself to be accepted. He can hardly place himself with the Conservatives, happily as they have composed their present differences, valiantly as they have met each other in honest opposition. Nor does it seem probable that a man of his courage and honesty will join the procession of opportunists to which the Liberal party seems ever ready to offer at least a temporary resting place. It is indeed remarkable that in a coalition cabinet, for which their intermediate position would seem to offer a peculiar fitness, the Liberals are little conspicuous for their strength, least of all in constructive policy. Mr. Macdonald, unless he returns to his former waverings, is likely to have none of them. A patient attempt to fix Liberalism as something similarly identifiable at two consecutive moments has elicited nothing else so apt as the following definition, from which Mr. Wickham Steed attempts to deduce that his political credo implies every virtue possessed by all others and no faults except perhaps undue modesty: "The ideal of Liberalism is a dynamic equipoise between well-defined relativities." This is more flattering and less succinct than a certain homely phrase about sitting on a fence; but that is what is meant, except that there is a connotation of breadth and a suggestion of reposeful confidence about sitting on a fence, whereas "dynamic equipoise" suggests the breathless uncertainty of a tight-rope walker, and the dubious perpendicularity of those amazing equilibrists, Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Winston Churchill. One recalls the summary comment on a speaker who attempted by amiable generalities to reconcile the contestants in a strenuously contentious debate: "Mr. So-and-so was neither here nor there, but with the Liberal Party." Persons neither here nor

there are usually nowhere; but Mr. Churchill and Mr. Lloyd George possess the more spectacular faculty of being everywhere. Both of these gentlemen, so far as can be ascertained at the moment of writing, are giving the honour of their present attachment rather ambiguously. Poised in serene contemplation of opposed relativities, Mr. Churchill is waiting for something to turn up; Mr. Lloyd George, happily convalescing, is exciting the envy of his equally versatile but less fortunate rival by the enjoyment of a private moratorium of political obligations.

It is to be hoped that the Coalition may endure for some considerable time. The present difficulty is not one that can be resolved by a single act of legislation; nor will there be any immediate opportunity or excuse for a return to the traditional methods and arguments of party politics. Urgent necessity has reconciled the best political brains of the country in a common effort for the common good; theoretical consistency and the justification of principles have given place to unselfish practical wisdom. Even Labour leaders like Mr. Henderson, who have turned away from the Coalition, are urging the implicitly conservative policy of a protective tariff. Their careful explanations that they are supporting protection "with a difference" and only as a temporary expedient do not absolve them from the necessity of working and voting with their former opponents. There is a fusion of parties and creeds, which—may we hope—will produce later a more clear-cut distribution of forces. A Coalition is a corporate dictatorship; and lacking both the internal harmony and the undivided external attractions of a single ego, it cannot last indefinitely. All that we can ask is that it will hold together long enough to do some real work, and that, before public business is again used as a football in the old game of party politics, the sides will be more clearly determined, and their goals set plainly before them. Definite opposition is a good thing, and between honest men the dispute will be, at bottom, concerned with methods rather than with final objectives. The present crisis has shown that there is much in common between Mr. Macdonald and Mr. Baldwin, between Mr. Snowden and Mr. Neville Chamberlain. There is a natural temperamental opposition of those whose chief desire is to gain new territory and those who aim first to confirm and establish the old. The conflicting pressure of the two gives shape to conditions, and direction to events; but any dispute about merits is as idle as an attempt to determine the superiority of a hammer to an anvil or a cartridge to a rifle. Nor are party names of much importance. A Conservative from Australia, a South African Liberal, and a member of the British

Labour party might very easily find themselves pledged to support precisely the same kind of measure. On the other hand, a Queensland Socialist and an Anglo-Indian Tory can hardly be said to inhabit the same political world, and would naturally seek their own kind in Soviet Russia and Fascist Italy respectively; for it would be too much to ask the Socialist to recognize that Russia provides the greater autocracy of the two, or that one of the most Socialist of modern states is so-called conservative England, with frequent Tory Governments, but with permanent state insurance, panel doctors, and Government control of public services. In both Queensland and Great Britain, however, except when a common danger calls to a concerted effort to meet a general obligation—or to repudiate it, if national sentiment turns that way—there must usually be a dichotomy of professed allegiance, a sharp political cleavage. And the sharper it is, the better. The summary dismissal of the Laodiceans suggests the proper attitude towards those balancing chameleons who present a new complexion to every new environment, and contrive to straddle the political see-saw by playing both ends against the middle. When the party tug-of-war no longer provides a tight-rope, these elusive acrobats are no longer able to promise or threaten the definite taking of sides, and will usually find themselves of small importance. When opposition is again established, they are embarrassed by the necessity of placing themselves somewhere. One of the chief permanent values of a Coalition is to fuse these loose particles back into the mass, and compel them to be on one side or the other of a subsequent split. The present national Government, like the party Governments of the last few years, suggests that the immediate political future of Great Britain will be determined by a conflict of moderate extremes, with Liberalism (of the kind that represents not so much the possession of principles as the absence of convictions) supplying clouds of dust and smoke above the din of battle. Outer extremes there must be. Die-hard Toryism, true-blue in loyalty to its ancestral woad, will ask what the country is coming to, and voices from the extreme left will supply the indecorum that has become *de rigueur* in modern parliaments. But the policies that guide the nation will best be wrought between the more enlightened Conservatives and the more sane and solid adherents of a reconstructed Labour party.

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AMONG many interesting details emerging from the new protective tariff, few if any can puzzle the gentle reader so much as the embargo on foreign literature. Not even the encouragement

offered to Hudson Bay orange-growers or the import duties intended to assist the export trade in potatoes can compare with efforts to prevent the product of Canadian forests from returning to grace the literary departments of our cigar-stands and shoe-shine parlours. Granted that much of our imported "literature" is vulgar and inept beyond description, and that any effective prohibitory measure is defensible, there should nevertheless surely be some distinction drawn between censorship and revenue. Are we approaching the state when the less desirable picture shows will be met, not with prohibition, but with an additional tax? As an aid to the exchequer, such a measure would be effective, for so long as there are vapidly suggestive books and plays, there will be people to read and see them. One is left doubtful whether the true patriot is expected to add *True Confessions* to his regular order for *Dream World of Love and Romance* for the sake of the national income, or in the interests of educational uplift to abandon both in favour of *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The Yale Review*. So far there have been so many changes and postponements that the effect of the Act can be gauged only with difficulty. Enquiry at the bookstalls reveals that there has been a diminution in the number of respectable journals available for general purchase, but no marked change in the supply or purchase of works from the presses of Mr. Bernarr (*sic*) MacFadden and his competitors. The great reading public is not so easily deprived of its rights. Nor, even if all bound copies of sentimental rubbish could be stopped at the border, should we be free from the mental and moral opiates that confront us daily from more effective positions than those on the counters of a drug store. The syndicated article and its companion the comic strip have made literature and art international. Mr. Edgar Guest, "the greatest of living poets," will continue to touch the heart strings of tens of thousands of Canadians to the tune of a commensurate number of dollars without hindrance from the department of Customs and Excise. Advice to the love-lorn and half-baked psychology for embryonic intellects will continue to separate the Press Association dispatches from standardized advertising. And however much Canadian readers may be sheltered from the subtle influences of Mutt and Jeff as they disport themselves across the back page of American sheets, not the most drastic form of protection seems likely to remove their delicate innuendoes from confronting us with the morning's news. Many of the staunchest journalistic supporters of the present Government have felt constrained to take Mr. Bennett to task for his valiant but hopeless attack upon one of the most firmly established institutions of the

modern Press. While few people would go so far as the premier in denouncing the "daily batch of smiles", it is not difficult to agree that life might very well go on without even the best of them, and that the worst must do much positive harm. But according to what measurable standards can anyone draw the line between the last series that may pass and the first one to be rejected? If we assume even that all comic strips were to become contraband, on what grounds could a dividing line be drawn between this form of pictorial art and that of the topical sketch and the daily cartoon?

And what of the people's rights? Recently, when a certain newspaper proposed to drop what seemed to be the most pointless of its "comics", the deluge of protests appears to have been equalled only by those resisting a proposal to silence the broadcast inanities of a pair of half-witted adolescents. In each "feature", the chief virtue discovered by its defenders was human interest, but for the drawings—which happened to reveal neither aptitude nor training in draughtsmanship—this merit appeared to be only slightly inferior to those of moral teaching and educational value. Educational value has been emphasized as one of the criteria for discriminating between rival publications competing for preferential treatment on the tariff schedule. But it is difficult to see, from the latest available list of imposts, just how the examination and grading of certain periodicals has been conducted. Magazines that are commonly regarded as having strong family affinities are widely separated, and others that bear no obvious relationship according to literary, moral, or educational standards are placed cheek by jowl in the same tax-group. Advertising was—and possibly still is—set up as one of the measures of taxation, the proportion of advertising to other "literature" determining the amount of tax. This policy fails to take account of other and greater effects of a protective tariff; the advertising of heavily-taxed foreign goods, when identical products are made at home, must result in free advertising for the native merchant. It requires no very great knowledge of familiar products to recognize that the American press carries a great deal of free propaganda on behalf of goods made in Canada. The latest tariff bill has produced further subsidiaries of vast American corporations, but we are carefully informed that the product will be the same. An appeal to buy an automobile manufactured in Detroit may produce the impulse to acquire an identical model from Oshawa, with no loss to anyone. Even the Canadian advertising managers and sales-promotion efficiency-experts will claim credit for another unit of production. Safeguarding Canadian goods from gratuitous American publicity may, of course, be

intended to protect the Canadian advertising industry and develop a local enterprise of the lay-out and bill-board that will be as unproductive, as wasteful and as inefficient as that of the U. S. A. But the more genuinely patriotic method would be to allow America to do the talking and Canada to sell the goods and pocket the proceeds.

Patriotism appears to be all-important in the establishment of Canadian branches by American firms; pure philanthropy and a spirit of adventurous exploration were the principal reasons offered for the recent off-shoots from the parent stem, and the same benevolent spirit can be detected in such subtly flattering changes of nomenclature as "Dominion" for "U. S.," and "All-Canadian" for "All-American." Occasionally there is a minor slip, as when recently a series of globe-trotting advertisements—syndicated in "boiler-plate" like the feature-article and the comic-strip—moved in the ordinary course of travel to a scene "in far-away Canada." But usually the home office, while assuring its patrons of an identical product from the sunny shores of California to the rock-bound coast of Maine, is careful in its Canadian propaganda to supply some local colour and a touch of local pride. The genuinely Canadian firms have some reason for this nationalistic exploitation, but the recent protective tariff appears to have reduced their one claim to distinction. "Better because Canadian" as a slogan for soup has been matched by a great American rival with "Now made in Canada—costs you less per can." In case of either purchase the Canadian workman gets the benefit and the soups taste exactly the same. But with books and periodicals, to return to the original thesis of our present investigation, a local product can not be so readily justified on the grounds of supporting home industries. A Canadian publishing house, with some excellent works to its credit, asks its readers if they are among those Canadians who will sing "O Canada" with enthusiasm and then go out and buy a foreign book. Literature, like science, might have been supposed to be international; but books, like bacon and soup, are apparently "better because Canadian" rather than because of any intrinsic appeal to the taste of the individual reader. If sufficient restrictions are placed on the works of "foreign" authors, we shall in time, no doubt, produce a local talent to meet the local demand. The present effect, however, is that the Canadian literary output remains constant, while the protective tariff has encouraged a flood of mass production magazines to inundate the country along with mass production soup. The present writer had expected that Mr. Bernarr MacFadden would have appealed for special rates for his



magazines on the ground of their moral and educational force. And it would be hard to dispute this claim without imputing to his honesty a deficiency that belongs to his sense of didactic and aesthetic values though not to his instinct for finance. When such publications as Mr. MacFadden's can be continued not only without successful interference, but actually with the commendation of hundreds of clergymen and educators—though of precisely what sort of dominions and divines we are left to guess from the literacy of their testimonials—he is not going to be stopped by trifles of legislation. Nor do his readers, who number the largest bookstall clientele in the world, intend to be robbed of their literary birth-right by selfish opposition to the interests of truth. Mr. MacFadden has dealt with opposition in the past usually before it came to a head. He knows how to line up his readers with a clarion call to their elected representatives to save the morals of the nation. There is some specious show of truth in his sentimental prating about morality—the lessons being enforced according to a standard formula comprised of ten parts of alleged sin, two parts of horrible retribution, and one part of maudlin repentance. An attack upon his magazines is made to appear like an attempt to rob honest simplicity of health, happiness and religion. With the rugged vigour of a man who boasts of walking each morning bare-footed through the dewy grass, and the vibrant personality appropriate to the ringing double-r of his given name, Mr. MacFadden has himself been an active member of a national commission and an adviser to the rulers of his land. But with that direct simplicity that has made him a millionaire, he made no appeal for special consideration for his magazines by reason of their lofty tone and deep spiritual appeal. He applied to no Canadian clergyman for endorsement, to no lobbyist at Ottawa for concessions. He did not even ask for a reduction on the grounds of enormous quantity, but, according to present information, he made a simple, manly, and dignified gesture. He became Canadian. His works, like those of Messrs. Street and Smith, pioneers of the dime novel and foremost of adventurers in pulpwood, will now be entirely Canadian productions. Patriotic readers will doubtless prefer these indigenous works of art to scurrilous foreign importations, and encourage the youth of the nation to form an early acquaintance with our national literature. Canadian authors may find in these periodicals the market for their writings that it was feared they might lose from American publishers as a result of the tariff, though it is possible that the manuscripts will be imported from the land of their origin with merely a change

in the location of the true stories from A—in the state of X—to B—in the province of Y—. Mr. MacFadden, naturally, will reap the just reward of his vision and enterprise. For the vision that resulted in his coming to stay with us, there seems to be no more appropriate remark than one from Mr. MacFadden's own *Physical Culture*, in which an advertiser explained for the benefit of expectant humanity that to the initiated, far-sightedness is identical with astigmatism.

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THE presence of Mahatma Gandhi in England has directed fresh attention to Indian affairs, and the proceedings of the Round Table Conference are being watched with as much concern as the public can reasonably be expected to spare from the financial crisis. We learn from the cables that Gandhi, though strictly ascetic in his habits, and refusing whatever has the least appearance of a proposal to lionize him, is by no means averse from being interviewed for the press. Self-abnegation may be his creed, but somehow he has not contrived to escape all publicity, and it is perhaps not improper to express the hope that he will not be allowed—either deliberately or unintentionally—to exploit its possibilities too far.

He is a romantic figure, and especially when he is so far from home, he offers attractive possibilities to sentiment. Recalling the psychology of such processes, one becomes a little uneasy at hearing him so often called "the little brown man", and at reading of intensely serious young ladies who abandon western garb and their family names the more soulfully to worship at his shrine. Sir Arthur Currie, according to newspaper reports, has been endeavoring to stem this subtle romantic influence by what psychologists call counter-suggestion. Gandhi's methods, said Sir Arthur, might be all right for a crowd of Hindus and Moslems, "but they wouldn't work with me". Nor in the hour of triumph should they be allowed to work unrestrained upon British parliamentarians. In these circumstances even a Philistine like Mr. Winston Churchill may be not without his use, and in reading one of Mr. Churchill's more savage outbursts it is possible both to disapprove of it and to feel glad that it happened. The latest news is of the Mahatma's eagerness for a personal talk with his imperialist critic. One awaits with impatience the "tabloid" photographs of this interview: it would provide more piquant material than any since the famous meeting between John Wesley and the Emperor Frederick the Great.

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