

# The Question of Colonial Preference is the Subject of a Long Debate in British House of Commons

## Mr. Asquith Propounds a Series of "Skeptical Questions" to The Tariff Reformers, to Which He Could Get no Categorical Reply--Germany's Attitude Towards Canada and the Matter of the Surtax Comes Up For Consideration.

London, Aug. 6.—The recent debate in the British House of Commons on the question of Colonial Preference was raised by Mr. A. J. Balfour leader of the Opposition on the motion for the second reading of the Appropriation Bill.

Mr. Balfour asked the House to consider the whole problem of Colonial preference in view of the next Conference. So far back as 1843 Canada made the first appeal in favor of some fiscal arrangement between the Dominion and the Mother Country. That expression of policy had been consistently repeated by every Colonial statesman of mark during sixty-seven years. With one voice Colonial statesmen pressed upon the Mother Country the policy, and it was the Mother Country alone which now stood in the way of that policy being carried out. (Opposition cheers.) The Colonies had not indulged in platform rhetoric; they had been practical. In the decade 1890 to 1900 they pressed upon her Majesty's Government the denunciation of certain treaties which prevented us from allowing preference.

The moment Lord Salisbury accepted their view, the Dominion, without any effort on our part to give them preference immediately so arranged their tariff that a preference was given to our manufacturers in their markets. (Opposition cheers.) The views of these great Colonial statesmen were not purely commercial. They had in view the idea of an Empire—(Opposition cheers)—of which one of its bonds was mutual good offices in the matter of tariffs. (Cheers.) Actually at this moment they had a free list of goods within the Empire not unimportant in itself but all important as a precedent which might and would be followed if we gave them the chance in the future.

"PREFERENCE" CABINET IN 1903

In the Conference of 1902 the Colonial Premiers again pressed the matter orally on the Government. It was a matter of common knowledge that the majority of the Cabinet in 1903 would have established preference with Canada and the other Colonies, but for the fact that at that time public opinion was not sufficiently matured for a divide Cabinet to take so great and so novel a step and although the dissentients from that policy were a minority in the Cabinet that policy could not be carried out.

Col. Seely: In what month in 1903?

Mr. Balfour believed it arose on the Budget. It was well known that the then Chancellor of the Exchequer the late Lord Ritchie, was entirely opposed to it. (Ironical Ministerial cheers.) At the conference of 1906 the Colonial Ministers with eloquent insistence, gave renewed expression to the invariable policy which animated all our Colonies. The Government refused to take any action, while acknowledging the great advantages which our manufacturers had received even from the preference as it then existed. (Opposition cheers.)

Canada, unsupported by any preferential policy on the part of this country, had to deal, as an isolated unit, with all the great commercial countries—France, Germany, and the United States in particular. The result of her negotiations was that every one of them had been accompanied by a diminution in the preferential advantages to this country which was inevitable. (Opposition cheers.) The Government and their supporters appeared to think that they could remain outside this network of treaties, and that we would get all the advantages of international negotiations by the operation of the most-favored-nation clause. They did nothing of the kind. (Opposition cheers.)

It was certain that the great Dominions who had entered upon the course of independent fiscal negotiation would not stop where they were. The process must expand from one Dominion to another. In these circumstances he looked forward with

absolute certainty to seeing the advantages of preference we now enjoyed whittled away, faster or slower as the case might be, until that arrangement which was so loudly applauded by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer four years ago became the shadow of a shade, and finally vanished together. (Opposition cheers.)

Nobody could contemplate such a possibility with equanimity. He had never denied that when the time came for us to deal with other nations by negotiations over respective imports, and exports an immense amount of labor would be thrown upon the British Departments. He had never regarded these perpetual negotiations in commercial relations as very agreeable for the Governments concerned. They were extremely disagreeable. They were extremely disagreeable, and they had a bad side, but they were quite inevitable. (Opposition cheers.) It was impossible that we should go on as we were, and as we could go on with impunity in the days when we had an easy supremacy in all matters of trade, and see one market after another taken away or diminished without being able to strike a diplomatic blow in our own defence. (Opposition cheers.)

For instance, how were the Government dealing with the Japanese difficulty? He understood Japan had just passed a commercial treaty which was absolutely destructive of the trade of Lancashire and Yorkshire with Japan. A British Foreign Secretary dealing with a nation like Japan in a matter of commercial bargaining had the prospect of a very poor time before him if he had nothing to give. (Opposition cheers.) He did not look forward with any satisfaction to the issue of negotiations that failed to leave the new tariff of Japan unmodified, which might inflict a great blow on one of our most staple industries. (Opposition cheers.)

A PROPHECY OF SEPARATION

There were two lines of historical development which had been going on in the last few years. One was that the great dominions, whether they liked it or not, must negotiate for their own trade and commercial interests as independent fiscal Powers. That tended towards separation and towards driving apart the units of what he hoped was an inseparable Empire. There was another tendency which would far more than counteract that tendency if they gave it free play—namely, that it was the business of the separate parts of the Empire to consider not merely their separate interests, but their interests as part of the Empire as a great whole.

His complaint against the Government was that they had omitted to encourage the policy which more than anything else kept the various parts of the Empire together—that great policy of preference which he grieved to think was at present advocated only by one great party in the State, and which ought to and must become the common property of all British statesmen. By the position of stolid isolation which we insisted upon he believed we were risking great interests; that more and more we were seeing exterior markets on which we more than any other country in the world depended gradually drift from us, or seeing ourselves compelled to buy that market at a higher and higher price.

They would find a growing feeling among colonial statesmen that appeals to the Mother Country for this closer commercial union, made generation after generation, falling as they did, on unheeding ears, were something it was no longer worth their while to persist in. If we compelled our Colonies to accept that view we should find that their future treaties were made without any reference to either the interests of this country or the Empire as a whole, but we should have compelled them to frame their domestic policy as isolated units, and not as parts of the Empire. (Opposition cheers.)

THE PREMIER'S REPLY

Mr. Asquith, the Prime Minister, who was received with loud Ministerial cheers, hailed with satisfaction the fact that Mr. Balfour had raised

once more a question which had been too long allowed to slumber in the walls of that House. (Ministerial cheers.) The Government had not been insensible or unresponsive to the wishes expressed by the Colonies at the Conference. In 1907 the Conference passed twenty resolutions in all, dealing with most diverse matters. In regard to all except three, which concerned preferential tariffs, the Government had taken effective action. (Ministerial cheers.) The three resolutions were dissented from by the Government and carried against the opposition of their representatives. He asked them to consider how the matter of Colonial Preference stood. There was only one of our dominions in respect to which it might be said to have reached a developed stage—namely, Canada. Both he and the Chancellor of the Exchequer acknowledged at the Conference that the preference granted by Canada to British goods had been beneficial to British trade, and he made that admission in exactly the same sense in which he had always admitted that Protectionist tariffs imposed by foreign countries were injurious to British trade. Every artificial restriction on the free influx and efflux of capital, labor, and products of the different countries was pro tanto a diminution and impoverishment of the productive and consumptive power.

TRADE WITH CANADA

How did the matter stand in regard to Canada? During the last nine or ten years the respective shares of the United Kingdom and the United States as importing countries into the Canadian market had been practically constant—the British share being about one-fourth of the whole. During the last year for which the figures were complete—1908-9—of the import trade into Canada 52 per cent. came from the United States, 30 per cent. from the United Kingdom, and 6 per cent. from the British Colonies and Possessions, leaving only 12 per cent. to be divided between France, Germany, and all other countries of the world. (Ministerial cheers.)

As to the question of negotiating power, Canada had three tariffs—the general tariff, applicable to imports of all kinds, the intermediate tariff, granted by way of concession in return for reciprocal duties; and the preferential tariff granted to ourselves. The rates of the preferential tariff were approximately 20 per cent lower than that of the intermediate tariff and 30 per cent. lower than the general tariff.

CANADA VS. GERMANY.

What had been done in regard to our two principal industrial competitors in the Canadian market—Germany and the United States? In consequence of the hostile tariff action of Germany, Canada imposed a surtax of 33 per cent. in addition to the duties leviable under the general tariff. In consequence of an arrangement come to between Germany and Canada in the present year, Germany had now come under the general or the highest tariff imposed by Canada, and the surtax had been got rid of.

As regarded the United States the list of articles for which Canada conceded tariff reductions to the United States was very limited in extent, and did not include any articles of first class importance in British trade. Therefore, they had this state of things: That the general tariff applied to Germany, and the intermediate tariff was allowed with some modifications to France, Italy, Spain Switzerland and Austria, and on certain specified articles to the United States. The preferential tariff was enjoyed by the United Kingdom and the Colonies alone.

The result of the exercise by Canada of the fiscal freedom in regard to the making of treaties, which he agreed she ought to enjoy, had not been in any degree prejudicial to the trade of the United Kingdom, but on the contrary, Germany, which had the biggest revolver in her armament, and which she flourished with the greatest assurance and persistence against Canada, was now in the highest scale and came under the general tariff. (Ministerial cheers.)

WHAT HAPPENED TO GERMANY.

Mr. Bonar Law: Canada had a revolver too. (Opposition cheers.)

The Prime Minister: She had and she put on 33 per cent. surtax and what is the result. Germany is now in no better position than the worst treated competing nation. (Ministerial cheers.)

Several opposition members: The surtax has gone.

The Prime Minister said that was true, but what had been the loss to both countries during the seven years the surtax existed, what the impediments to trade and what the diminution of profit to both capital and labor? (Loud Ministerial cheers.) In the whole history of fiscal warfare they could not have a better example of the folly of protection. (Ministerial cheers.)

Continuing, Mr. Asquith said: Our main concern now is with what we ought to give the Colonies. So far as I know, Canada, Australia, and the other dominions of the Crown would be glad to receive preferential treatment, but I am not aware that any demand has been put forward for a change in our fiscal system. I listened to the whole of the debates at the Colonial conference in 1907. With the exception of Mr. Deakin, who represented Australia, every one of the eminent Colonial statesmen who appeared there was most careful to make it clear that they did not desire even to suggest to the people of this country any change in the fiscal system not in accordance with their interests.

Mr. Lyttleton:—Did not ask for reciprocity? (Opposition cheers.)

STRAIGHT QUESTIONS.

The Prime Minister: Yes. Reciprocity is a fine, high-sounding, rhetorical phrase. (Ministerial cheers and laughter.) What does it mean? How are you going to give it? (Ministerial cheers.) Upon what commodities? (Renewed Ministerial cheers.) I have asked that question before, and I want to get an answer. (An hon. member, "Corn.") I hear somebody say corn. (Ministerial laughter.) Here there is a rift in the Protectionist lute. (Renewed Ministerial laughter.) Is Colonial corn coming in free? (Ministerial laughter and several Opposition Members, "Wait and see.") Wait and see! In other words, you dare not answer. (Loud Ministerial cheers.) Is Colonial corn to come in free, which I understand to be the proposal of the Leader of the Opposition—it was certainly the original proposal of Mr. J. Chamberlain.

I see opposite Mr. Chaplain—one of the pundits of the Tariff Reform Commission—(laughter)—the high priest, the grand Lama. (Loud laughter.) I ask him is there to be a small duty but still a duty, on Colonial corn, as compared with foreign corn? (Ministerial cheers.) If you are not going to impose any duty on Colonial corn at all where does the British farmer come in? (Loud Ministerial cheers and laughter.) Perhaps you will leave him out of your account, but let us have it clearly stated. You cannot have it both ways. Either you are going to impose a duty or you are not upon the first necessity of life—that is to say, on the food of the people. (Opposition cries of "Oh" and Ministerial cheers!)

(Continued on page three.)

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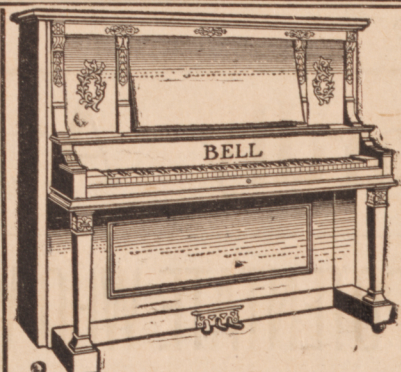
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COUNTY OF SUNBURY  
Wednesday, the Sixth Day of July, A. D. 1910.  
In the matter of the Estate of Henry Nevers, late of the Parish of Lincoln, in the County of Sunbury, Farmer, Deceased.  
Let the heirs, next of kin, creditors, and all others interested in the Estate of the said late Henry Nevers, deceased, be cited to appear before me at my Court of Probate to be held at my office in Oromocto, in the County of Sunbury, within and for the said County of Sunbury, on Wednesday, the fourteenth day of September next, at eleven o'clock, in the forenoon, to show cause, if any they have, why license should not be granted to Martha True, Administratrix of the Estate of the said late Henry Nevers, deceased, to sell such of the real estate of the said deceased as may be necessary for the payment of the debts of the said Estate.  
Given under my hand and seal of the said Probate Court, this sixth day of July, A. D. 1910.  
(Sd.) JOHN W. GILMOR, Judge of Probates  
(Sd.) EMMA E. ESTABROOK, Registrar of Probates in and for the County of Sunbury.  
GREGORY & WINSLOW, Proctors for Petitioner.