

PROGRESSIVISM IN ONTARIO.

Toronto, Nov. 7.

The unexpected has happened. When I last wrote you,* we were in the slough of despond to a degree, and that a somewhat severe degree; for the rejection of Reciprocity by so large a majority was so unexpected and at the same time so insensate, that it was discouraging in the extreme. But hardly was the contest concluded, than Sir James Whitney, the premier of Ontario, announced a new election for that Province. The belief of every one is that the reason for calling a new election at the present time is simply to catch a snap vote on a flowing tide. Because the Conservatives had such an overwhelming vote at the late election, and because their organizations are in such good working condition, they imagine that the momentum will win them another election hands down.

In the States the dates for the elections are fixed by law and must take place at the specified time; but in Canada, the time for calling an election is left in the hands of the administration. This is supposed to give an opportunity to refer some important question to the people when the occasion seems to warrant it; but at the present juncture, with an overwhelming Conservative majority, 90 against 18, and without any particular question causing a deadlock or other difficulty, the election is sprung on the people most unexpectedly.

But now comes one of the most important events in the history of this Province.

A few days ago the Reform or Liberal party held their annual meeting. The last meeting of that kind which I attended some years ago was formal in the extreme; but the recent meeting assumed something of the form of a conference, with the opportunity not merely for the regular members to take part, but also their friends, so that it was somewhat of "a free and easy" for any man to make suggestions as to a platform.

Among the first speakers to address the meeting was one of the earliest Singletaxers of the Dominion, M. Peltier, late Mayor of Fort William, and among the things he proposed was that one clause in the program be local option in taxation.

I had to leave shortly after, but I was informed that several of the subsequent speakers strongly endorsed that proposal and that none objected. When it was discussed afterwards in the committee, it passed without a dissenting voice.

Consequently, we can announce to the world that one of our great political parties has declared in favor of allowing municipalities the power to reduce the rate of taxation on improvements.

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That many will hail this as the first step in a mighty reform, I have no doubt. Many others may favor it simply because they believe it will be a good thing in itself, while others will regard it as "that obnoxious scheme of confiscation advocated by Henry George."

Now that it has gained admission to the platform of one of our parties, it will be discussed as it has never been discussed before. What course the Tories will pursue I cannot tell. Some of the best

friends of the movement have been strong supporters of Sir James Whitney and have been urging him to this measure; but he has been most obdurate. Mr. Fripp, the member of the Provincial Parliament from Ottawa, introduced a bill to grant local option; but Sir James condemned it as being the scheme of Henry George and said that he was not going to be led by any newspaper editor.

The editor thus alluded to in a manner which the reports in the press would indicate to be somewhat contemptuous, was Mr. W. M. Southam, who with his brother owns and conducts the Ottawa Citizen, which during the last two years has been doing heroic service, publishing articles in favor of the non-taxation of improvements. These two brothers have contributed liberally to the funds of the Association for the Abolition of Taxation on Industry. At the same time at their own expense they have sent petitions to all the municipalities for their approval of this measure. By their influence they induced a number of other papers to support this petition, both Reform and Conservative. Of course our Association here was active in co-operating in the good work and the munificence of Mr. Fels has had no small share in aiding us to push the propaganda.

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The Ottawa Citizen, a Conservative paper which has been a supporter of Sir James Whitney, has just published the following: "It is rather disappointing to find that the government of the day has thus far failed to recognize the growth in sentiment in favor of tax reform; but now that the issue is fairly before the people, the opportunity to impress the administration with the trend of public thought along these lines should not be neglected."

It is exceedingly interesting to note the change that has come about in public opinion. Some years ago the Hamilton Spectator made a personal attack on myself in which I was described as the legitimate descendant of Captain Kidd because I wished to rob people of the land which they had honestly acquired. A day or two ago that same paper, though hitherto a strong supporter of Sir James Whitney, published the following: "While this journal has supported Sir James Whitney and his administration, it is not difficult to imagine that there is even a greater need for the spur of an active and intelligent opposition to impress on the strong personality, that in a multitude of counsel there is to be found more wisdom than can ever hope to be located under any individual hat. And in this connection we note with considerable pleasure that the committee appointed to formulate a policy for the rejuvenated party (the Reform party), has already decided on one very important advance movement by calling for a revision of the Assessment Act, under which municipalities will be accorded the right to exempt improvements and tax land values. He (the Premier) is ill advised, when he ignores the request of nearly half the municipalities of the Province." Verily, tempora mutantur.

W. A. DOUGLASS.

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A mugwump is a person educated beyond his intellect.—Horace Porter, in the Cleveland-Blaine Campaign of 1884.

*See Public of September 29, page 999.