

## Current Topics

### The Government and the Nelson System

It looks as if the Government were prepared to take not only a definite, but also a determined stand on the education question. Last week the Prime Minister intimated that the Government did not intend to introduce legislation this session enabling a referendum to be taken on the Bible in State Schools League's proposals; and now we find the Cabinet taking a similar position in regard to a suggestion that the facilities for adopting what is known as the 'Nelson system' should be extended. The Minister of Education, as we learn from the daily papers, replying to Mr. McCallum, on Thursday last, said that 'it was not intended to introduce legislation empowering school committees to adopt the Nelson school scheme of Bible-reading in schools.' At present the final power of granting or withholding permission to re-arrange the school hours so as to allow the adoption of the Nelson system rests with the Education Boards, who are, of course, elected by the members of the school committees.

### Dr. Gibb and the Nelson Presbytery

'Shall I come to you with a rod?' wrote the Apostle long ago to the Corinthians; and in much the same strain writes the Rev. Dr. Gibb to the Nelson Presbytery, though he is not an Apostle, and happens to have no jurisdiction whatever over the body which he chastises. The offence of the Nelson Presbytery—and, in particular, of the Rev. J. H. Mackenzie, Presbyterian minister of Nelson—is that they have stood firm in opposition to the Bible in State Schools League's proposals, and this notwithstanding that the Presbyterian Assembly has, to a greater or less degree, given in its formal adhesion to the proposed scheme. The Rev. Isaac Jolly, in the columns of the *Outlook*, has had a heart to heart talk with Mr. Mackenzie over his deplorable lapse, but the Nelson minister has remained obdurate; whereupon the Rev. Dr. Gibb comes along to denounce the offender for flouting the authority of his Church. The nature of his philippic may be gathered from the reply which it has evoked from the Kirk Session of Mr. Mackenzie's church, in which, in the current issue of the *Outlook*, they 'protest against the unchristian attack of the Rev. Dr. Gibb.' We quote a portion of the Kirk Session's letter: 'In this week's *Outlook* Dr. Gibb says:—"I relate what I know when I say that there is a widespread feeling of indignation at the action of the Rev. J. H. MacKenzie, of Nelson." What is this but attempt at intimidation, with promise of persecution? Why are the other members of the Nelson Presbytery left out of the "indignation," and also Mr. Caughley, elder and Sunday school teacher, and Mr. J. Aitken, elder and Sunday school teacher? Doubtless, because Mr. MacKenzie is Clerk of Assembly, and draws a salary. For the salary he is expected to do the work of the clerkship, and, according to Dr. Gibb, and those who agree with him, he is also to sell his conscience and his convictions. If he thinks the Assembly is making a blunder, he must not say so; if he believes that another form of Bible in Schools is better than the League's scheme, he must keep his opinions to himself, or he will discover what "indignation" means. . . . Our worthy and respected minister is quite able to defend his loyalty to the Assembly, both in what it has done, and what it has not done. We write to appeal to all in our Church who believe in religious liberty to let Dr. Gibb and his admirers understand that if there is to be persecution, they will know the reason why.'

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Dr. Gibb as a stickler for Church authority is essaying a new and entirely unaccustomed rôle. It is not so very many years ago since this same reverend gentleman declared from a Dunedin pulpit that 'the doctrine of predestination, as set forth in the Westminster *Confession of Faith*, was revolting to his very soul'—thus defying, not only the New Zealand Assen-

bly, but the historical standards of the whole Presbyterian Church. Most people will sympathise with the reverend doctor in this outspoken utterance; but one would hardly expect, from the same source, a homily on the duty of obedience to church authority.

### The 'Unity' Congress Fiasco

The Labor 'Unity' Congress which opened at Wellington on July 1, has at last concluded its sittings. Four hundred delegates attended; and in point of numbers it was, beyond question, the largest Labor conference ever held in the Dominion. The gathering was supposed to be representative of practically all sections of the Labor world; and its object was to endorse, with such modifications of detail as might be deemed necessary, a 'basis of unity' which had been circulated amongst the various unions, and to consolidate all the Labor bodies in the Dominion into one grand united organisation which should, in the near future, carry all before it. Broadly speaking, there were two sections contending for supremacy in the world of Labor organisation in this country—the Federation of Labor, representing the extreme, syndicalist, revolutionary element, and the United Labor Party, representing the moderate, law-abiding, evolutionary section of the Labor movement. Both parties had pitched their expectations high in regard to the 'Unity' Congress. The organ of the Federation of Labor—the *Maoriland Worker*—thus rhapsodised over the possibilities opened up by the adoption—at a preliminary conference held in January—of the 'basis of unity' before referred to: 'The signal triumph represented in the acceptance of Industrial Unionism, not only in form of organisation, but in principles, can only be acclaimed as the gift of the gods. . . . In other words, there is One Big Union—what we have preached, what we have wished, what we were ready to fight and die for.' The members of the United Labor Party were almost equally elated at the sure prospect—as they considered—of accomplishing the long-desired consummation of unity in the ranks of Labor. 'The solidarity of Labor,' wrote Mr. W. T. Mills, the National Organiser of the Party, 'demands the consolidation of the Labor organisations. To expect unity among the workers and to maintain at the same time opposing organisations composed of workers is absurd. There is substantial agreement among the workers of New Zealand in a large number of matters which sorely need to be undertaken. Those who are thus united in their convictions, if united in action would be absolutely resistless both in the field of industrial and of political activity. The one thing essential to the triumph of Labor is the unity of Labor. . . . This conference will mark the end of factional controversy in the Labor movement, and will be the beginning of the speedy triumph of Labor in this country.'

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The actual outcome of the Congress furnished a strange commentary on these predictions. It is all that the 'Red Feds'—as the members of the Federation of Labor are called—packed the Congress and stifled discussion by persistently and unscrupulously 'closing' important resolutions. Whatever were the means employed, the fact is unmistakable—that the Federation dominated the Congress, and succeeded in getting their characteristic principles—industrial unionism, the general strike, etc.—definitely endorsed. The result—considering that this was a 'Unity' Congress—was somewhat surprising. The delegates of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants—representing 8000 members—at a very early stage of the proceedings withdrew from the gathering. More or less representative Labor leaders—such as the Hon. G. Fowlds, Mr. D. McLaren, M.P., and others—wrote intimating that they could have no connection with the new party. Fifty-five of the delegates—led by the Hon. J. T. Paul—met at the close of the Congress and decided to withdraw their adhesion to the new organisation and to continue the old 'United Labor Party.' The net result of the Congress was thus to make confusion worse confounded. The Congress had met to achieve unity, and it achieved—chaos. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the

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