

CURRENT TOPICS

IN a talk with the newspaper men at the White House, President Wilson explained his reasons for insisting on a 25 per cent reduction in the tariff on sugar for three years and then free sugar. Chief of these reasons was the benefit that would accrue to the consumer. President Wilson said he did not believe there would be an immediate benefit from the reductions in the tariff on the other articles in the present bill. He called attention to the fact that in some of his speeches made during the campaign he said that he did not expect tariff revision to bring about an immediate reduction of the cost of living, but that he did expect it to bring about a competitive situation that would make it impossible by combination to sustain the present artificial level of prices. The president expects a reduction of the cost of living sooner or later to follow the reduction of the tariff—a lowering of prices as a result of reawakened competition. It is competition, the president said, that the democrats are seeking. Mr. Wilson took issue with those Ohio representatives in congress who assert that free wool would ruin the industry in that state and elsewhere in the United States. He said he had learned that the price of wool recently was the same on both sides of the water; American farmers, he concluded, would not be hurt so long as the price remained the same at home and abroad. President Wilson said that if the reciprocity feature of the tariff bill should be enacted he would attempt to negotiate certain reciprocity treaties as soon as possible. Confidence was expressed by Mr. Wilson that the tariff bill as now before congress meets the approval of the people. He alluded to the interests which disapproved it as probably quite numerous, but said he felt sure the great disinterested public, the public with no axes to grind, would regard it as a fair bill. Business depression will not follow the enactment of the Underwood bill is the belief of the president. He said he saw no reason why there should be any business depression; that he was confident business would go on without interruption. He added the opinion that if any sugar mills closed down, it would be for the effect and that the factories would reopen for business later on.

A PECULIAR "strike" took place in Belgium Monday, April 14th. Referring to this, a writer in the Philadelphia Public Ledger says: Never was there a strike more picturesque than that which will be precipitated in Belgium today. It is in no sense economic in its origin, many employers having agreed to assist materially their striking workmen. Nor is it a holiday affair, although elaborate arrangements have been made for the amusement of the idle, on the ground that thus they can best be kept out of mischief. The strike is simply a complete and practical expression, in an exaggerated form, of the right of petition. It is also, to some extent, an application of the principles of the initiative, the referendum and the recall rolled into one. The Belgium system of voting has much to commend it. It is founded on the theory that taxpayers, fathers of families and educated men have a more immediate interest in and a more sober understanding of national questions than others. It is intended, also, to offer an incentive to single voters to ameliorate their social and industrial condition. There is no man in Belgium, perhaps, who could not by his own efforts become eligible to cast three votes, the maximum allowed. The plural votes do not form a close corporation; the swelling of their ranks is, on the contrary, the national public policy. The prosperity of the country speaks eloquently of the wisdom of its electoral policies. The era, however, is one of social democratic progress, sometimes seeming to have as its purpose the apotheosis of proletarianism. Opposition to differentiation of political privilege for any reason is as deep-seated, if not so spectacular, as it was in the period of ochlocratic ascendancy that followed the achievement of freedom by the American colonies, the theory of which liberty was largely misinterpreted in France. Russia has partially compromised with this political spirit, which has submerged ancient China and is the crucial issue in Japan. There is scarcely a spot in the world to which civiliza-

tion has penetrated that the American idea, generally in a perverted form, has not become the goal, consciously or unconsciously, of the people. That the socialists and liberals will eventually win their fight in Belgium, if they presently fail, seems to be the logical deduction, for no government in modern times has been able permanently to resist a purely popular demand, and "stand-pattism," as it is called, has been no more successful in other countries than it has been in America. There is as yet no sign that the flood tide is ready to ebb.

AN Associated Press report of the Belgium "walkout" is given in a Brussels cablegram as follows: The great strike of workmen in Belgium to force the government to grant manhood suffrage began quietly April 14th and at nightfall it was estimated that 200,000 men throughout the country had quit work. This number is at least 100,000 short of the socialists' predictions, and the clerical press is beginning to call the movement a "pitiable fiasco." Nevertheless the strike has shown greater strength than was expected by impartial observers, and because of the fact that the numbers increased as the day advanced it is believed generally that the strikers will be reinforced by several thousand tomorrow. The strike thus far has been unmarked by disturbances or any special inconveniences to the general public. The only act of sabotage occurred in a suburb where three big machines in a leather factory were damaged. Brussels is not an industrial center. There are about 50,000 workmen here, of whom less than 20,000 are out. Twenty strikers were arrested at Charleroi, for interfering with workers. The total number on strike in this city is 60,000 out of 79,000 employed in the various trades. Premier M. de Brouckere, in an interview, admitted that if the strike dragged on it might prove dangerous by leading to disorders, but he said there was no present reason to fear disturbances. The premier added that while the electoral laws were not such that they could be changed for the better, the government could not allow itself to be coerced and must stand firm in the face of menace. To agree to the socialists' demands would be to place an eternal weapon in the hands of the socialist party, which they would brandish at the heads of all future governments. He pointed out that to delegate a commission to make a change in the constitution would make a revolution in the constitution which would open up great difficulties. In conclusion, he denied all rumors of cabinet dissolution on this question.

CONCERNING the Belgian "strike," Nikola Greeley Smith writes to the New York World to say: In an editorial in the World you refer to the general strike ordered in Belgium as a demonstration in favor of the one-man-vote suffrage bill as a test of the strike as a political weapon. It seems worth while, therefore, to call your attention to the fact that this is the second strike within my memory by which the Belgians have undertaken to coerce suffrage legislation. I think it was in 1893 that several measures relating to the extension of the suffrage were before the Belgian parliament, and that a general strike of all industries, ordered then as now by the socialist party, of which every member of a trade union was an enrolled member, compelled the passage of the Nansen bill granting universal suffrage to all men twenty-five years of age, but which gave as many as three votes to individuals possessing certain property or educational qualifications. As a little girl I lived in Belgium for several years, and I remember that I was very much impressed by the processions of strikers, and particularly by the fact that the women paraded in large numbers with their husbands. The processions were orderly, peaceable and impressive. I remember one very large woman who carried a gigantic banner with the hand-printed inscription, "Vivent les Socialistes," and I knew then that her sentiments were on the right side even if she did spell socialists with a "Z." I write this to show that Belgium has already tested the efficacy of the general strike and is merely about to test it again.

BY way of showing a growing public sentiment in favor of reform in the publication of news, two movements, one in the Illinois legislature and the other in the United States senate will be interesting. Following Associated Press dispatch from Chicago is self-explanatory: Lieutenant Governor Barratt O'Hara will introduce in the state senate a bill which he has just drafted providing for the creation of a state board of journalists and the rigid regulation of editorial work, both upon newspapers and magazines. The board would be composed of three members, whose duties it would be to hold examinations and issue licenses to newspaper men. The measure would not affect those already engaged in the work. Successful applicants would be compelled to serve four years' apprenticeship as "cubs" before they could qualify as full-fledged members of the profession. The bill is not intended to prevent owners and publishers of newspapers from writing for their own columns. Under the provisions of the bill no newspaper or magazine will be permitted to employ a reporter or an editor who has not taken out a license, and a fine of from \$25 to \$100 will be imposed upon those who violate the license provision. It is also provided that licenses may be suspended or revoked for the following causes: Blackmail, violation of confidence, willful misrepresentation and criminal libel. The object of the bill, according to the lieutenant governor, who once was a newspaper man, is to raise the standard of the newspaper profession by a strict supervision of those engaged in it and at the same time to give increased protection to the public. As a further effect it is believed that enhanced confidence will be instilled in the minds of newspaper readers and prevailing suspicions as to motive and accuracy dissipated.

IN the United States senate, Senator Works, of California, attacked present-day journalism. He spoke in support of his bill to make it unlawful for District of Columbia newspapers to publish details of crimes, accidents and tragedies. The senator introduced a similar bill during the last session, but it was not acted upon. "Whether people want this kind of news or not is one of the questions to be considered. Looking at journalism as nothing higher than means of making money," said the senator, "newspaper men maintain that they furnish this kind of news because the people want it and will have it, and therefore the only way of maintaining their publications on a paying basis is to furnish it. If this is true it is certainly a melancholy fact. If it is untrue it is a grave charge to make against the American people. Undoubtedly it is true of some people, but I am convinced the masses would prefer to have such news omitted and many people who read the newspapers exclude them from their homes because of objectionable matter." Aside from publication of crimes, accidents and tragedies the senator attacked the newspapers for discomfort and embarrassment caused the relatives and friends of persons involved. He cited the recent case of Henry Clay Beattie, who killed his wife near Richmond, Va., to show how relatives of the criminal suffered. "It is well for the liberty of the people" said the senator, "that censorship of the press is no longer allowed in this country. It was this that the constitution was intended to prevent. To say what shall and what shall not be published is one thing and to place responsibility another. I maintain that if a newspaper publishes matter that is deleterious and poisonous to the readers, thus violating the rules of good morals and decency it should be made criminally liable for this offense, an offense far more important and hurtful than the libel of the individual and upon precisely the same principles." The senator concluded by admitting that his bill was not likely to become law. "You have my purpose," he said, "to call the attention of the country to one of the greatest, most powerful influences of the press. It is an evil which, I admit, can not be overcome by law. It must be met by a better public sentiment that will demand cleaner and more exalted sentiment; that will demand cleaner and more reliable journalism. The man who helps to make the public mind impure, whether he be a journalist or not, is a dangerous man and an enemy to the best interest of his country."