

Public Opinion and the Navy

Wrong Premises

Montreal, March 15th, 1913.

Editor, CANADIAN COURIER:

Sir,—I have read with astonishment the article in your last issue by Mr. George Charleson on the "Historical Aspect of the Naval Contribution."

Mr. Charleson says:

"It is proposed that the Canadian Parliament, which represents us, shall vote sums of money to be spent by the British Government, which is responsible to a Parliament that does not represent us at all. If our Canadian Government does not spend wisely the money voted by the Canadian Parliament for Canadian purposes, Parliament has a means of redress. The Cabinet is responsible to it, and it may, if necessary, go to the length of forcing the Cabinet to resign. But the Canadian Parliament has no conceivable control over the British Cabinet, and will have no possible constitutional means of redress, if the money voted is not spent according to its wishes. To that extent the power of the Canadian Parliament will be restricted under any system of contribution."

This statement is absolutely inaccurate. The resolution moved by Mr. Borden in the House of Commons on the 10th day of December last read as follows:

"Resolved,—That it is expedient in connection with the Bill now before this House intitled An Act to Authorize Measures for Increasing the Effective Naval Forces of the Empire, to provide:

"(a) That from and out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund of Canada there may be paid and applied a sum not exceeding thirty-five million dollars for the purpose of immediately increasing the effective Naval forces of the Empire;

"(b) That the said sum shall be used and applied under the direction of the Governor-in-Council in the construction and equipment of battleships or armoured cruisers of the most modern and powerful type;

"(c) That the said ships, when constructed and equipped, shall be placed by the Governor-in-Council at the disposal of His Majesty for the common defence of the Empire; and

"(d) That the said sum shall be paid, used and applied, and the said ships shall be constructed and placed at the disposal of His Majesty, subject to such terms, conditions and arrangements as may be agreed upon between the Governor-in-Council and His Majesty's Government."

It is, therefore, quite plain that the money voted by the Canadian Parliament is not to be spent by the British Government, but by Canada, under the direction of the Governor in Council, in the construction and equipment of battleships, and the ships, when constructed and equipped, are to be placed by the Governor in Council at the disposal of His Majesty for the common defence of the Empire, subject to such terms, conditions and arrangements as may be agreed upon.

The premises upon which Mr. George Charleson founds his arguments being false, his conclusions fall to the ground. It is a pity that a writer who professes to review the historical aspect of this question should not make certain of his facts before he gives public expression to his views. Personally, I cannot see any analogy between the conditions existing in Canada between 1846 and 1850 and the conditions existing to-day. At that time complete autonomy to manage our own affairs had not been granted to Canada by the British Government, but Canada has enjoyed this right since confederation under the British North America Act. It is simply puerile to contend that the Borden resolution constitutes in any way an encroachment upon Canada's autonomy or right to manage her own affairs.

Yours faithfully,

VICTOR E. MITCHELL.

Mr. Charleson's Reply

The above letter was submitted to Mr. Charleson and he replies to it as follows:

"Mr. Mitchell fails to notice that I dealt in my article, not with the grant of \$35,000,000 for the building of three battleships, but with the probable effects of a system of regular contributions. In the very passage he quotes, I speak, not of "a sum," but of "sums of money to be spent by the British Government." Moreover, this interpretation of my words is fully corroborated by the first two paragraphs of the article. I freely admit that Mr. Borden has so worded his resolution that this first contribution will be spent by the Canadian executive, but it is very unlikely that future grants will be so spent, if a system of contribution becomes established. Indeed, we have very good reason to believe that there is a dangerous clique of wealthy men in Canada and aristocrats in England who are bent on

reducing Canada to the position of a province which would have to pay whatever navy tax was decided on by the central authority in England. If Mr. Borden does not sympathize with these men, if he really does not contemplate inaugurating a system of regular contributions, it is high time for him to say so.

"It is true that there are great differences between the conditions of 1846-50 and those of the present, but the very changes that have taken place in our relations with the Mother Country make it certain that we shall resent even more fiercely than our grandfathers any interference with our local affairs, and that such interference will result in the weakening of the ties that bind us to Great Britain. Even Mr. Mitchell will admit, I believe, that the experience of Canada, in the period of 1846-50, in connection with a preference in the English market, has a very direct and convincing lesson for Canadians and Englishmen of to-day.

"GEORGE CHARLESON."

The Contribution Bogey

Montreal, March 17th, 1913.

Editor, CANADIAN COURIER:

SIR,—Much that is foolish has been said and written about the Borden proposal to contribute three Dreadnoughts to the British Government, but of all that I have seen or heard, nothing is perhaps so absolutely foolish as the article written by Mr. George Charleson, in your last issue. He begins by setting up a straw man of his own making that he may have the satisfaction of knocking him down. He raises a bogey that he may have the pleasure of seeing the children frightened. It almost looks as if he had deliberately chosen a wrong path that he might be able to pad out an article with scraps of early colonial history at so much a line.

"Regular contributions, voted by the Canadian Parliament, but spent by the British Government in Britain."

"It is proposed that the Canadian Parliament which represents us shall vote sums of money to be spent by the British Government which is responsible to a Parliament that does not represent us at all."

These are the false premises from which he starts. Who has ever proposed that there should be regular contributions? Mr. Borden's proposal is a gift of three warships, now, for the first time, and, so far as any mortal knows, for the last time. Does that mean regular contributions? Neither in the bill, nor in any of his speeches has the Premier given the slightest hint of regular contributions. Indeed, he has not given any real indication of a permanent policy at all. He probably has no settled opinion on the subject. He wants time to fully study the question before he submits it to the electorate. Where Mr. Charleson is wrong, and where the petty obstructionists at Ottawa (with whom I fear Mr. Charleson must be classed) are wrong, is in trying to read a permanent policy into a free-will gift. True, Mr. Borden speaks of "one flag, one navy, one Empire," but surely that does not mean regular contributions. It may as easily mean a Canadian navy forming a unit of the imperial fleet. Of what use would it be otherwise? A son who has never given a present to the father, who has fostered and helped and cared for him, comes to manhood and a wealthy independence. Out of the goodness of his heart and as a token of gratitude for all that his father has done for him he sends him a gift. Does it follow that he has to keep it up? He is surely just as free to give or to withhold as he was before. Who ever heard of the absurd contention that because a man gives another a present once he must do it twice? Indeed, it is rather the other way. Having made the gift he feels that he has discharged an obligation, and needs give the past no further thought. If the father's care and protection are continued (indeed, have to be continued) it behooves the son (who it must be remembered is able to do so) to assist in his own defence and (if he is not unworthy of the name of son) in his father's defence as well. But there are other sons and it is a delicate as well as a difficult matter to determine what each should do and how he should do it. There must be consultations and pour parlers and much debate before a decision is reached. In the meantime the gift which he has made is sufficient for immediate needs. This is the present situation as between the British and Canadian Governments. The point, however, which I wish to make, is that the son is as free a man after the presentation as he was

before, and a more self-respecting man as well. How any person who has not a perverted vision or a warped judgment can see in a free-will gift any subsequent compulsion is more than I can understand, especially when coupled with the gift is the explicit statement that the future policy has yet to be determined. Besides, the money is not to be "spent by the British Government" as it pleases. It is given for a specific purpose and must be spent for that purpose. The British Government is simply the agent of the Canadian Government in so far as this work is concerned, just because they know better how to do it. In the same way I would trust an agent to expend my money (if I had any) according to general instructions, because he knows how to transact the business a great deal better than I do. Strange, isn't it, that some people are always reading into things what was never intended and trying to twist words and phrases into something they do not mean and never have meant? Stranger it is still that others will go even farther and assume that certain things are so, without having even twisted words and phrases to support the assumption. This, so far as I can see, is what your writer has done. He starts with false premises and of course reaches a false conclusion.

The main part of the article deals with the relations between the Mother Country and Canada, on the legislative side, from the founding of the colony to the present time, wherein he shows how, step by step, we gained practically absolute freedom. It is all very interesting, but "que diable allait-il faire dans cette galere," unless his object is to show the absurdity of his own position? Does he not see that it is sufficient to recite these facts to show how ridiculous it is for people to talk as if the state of affairs which existed in those earlier days could possibly be re-established. Is it conceivable that the Government which gave us this freedom could ever dream, in these days of democratic power, of taking it away again? The idea is so unthinkable that people look upon those who utter such sentiments as really irresponsible. The mother of Parliaments which gave us what we have in the way of autonomy will never deprive us of one right we possess. Why, if the people of Canada expressed a desire to become independent or to be annexed to the United States, does one suppose for a moment that Great Britain would attempt by force to prevent us? How much more unlikely is it that she would dream of interfering with our liberty in minor matters.

Even if the permanent policy should prove to be one of regular contributions, Britain would be the first to see to it that the money should be expended by an Imperial Council, composed of representatives from the contributing states and responsible to their respective Governments. One thing is certain, there could be no taxation without representation. But this is not a matter that is under discussion. The Government has given no sure intimation of what its permanent policy will be, undoubtedly, as I have already said, because it hasn't got one, and the person who construes a gift into a policy of regular contributions is going far afield to get something wherewith "to tickle the ears of the groundlings."

Yours truly,

J. A. NICHOLSON.

No Roots Struck

PERHAPS the Hon. G. E. Foster will pardon our quoting once again his magnificent plea for a Canadian navy. It is so much superior in tone and quality to anything else that has been said on the subject that our admiration is pardonable. On one occasion he spoke as follows:

"Suppose you contribute this year your sum, and next year your equal sum, and thereafter year after year. After ten or twelve, or twenty or thirty years, you will have paid out an immense amount of money. You will have been protected in the meantime; but in Canada itself there will be no roots struck; there will be no residue left, there will be no preparation of the soil, or beginning of the growth of the product of defence. Yet some time or other, no one can doubt that with resources and with a population constantly increasing we must and will have in this country a naval force of our own for our coast and home defence. "The interest that we take in a contribution spent by another is not the interest that I desire for Canada. I want to see something grafted on the soil of Canada's nationhood, which takes root and grows and develops until it incites the spirit of defence in this country, leads to a participation in the defence, leads to that quick interest in it, its glories, its duties and its accomplished work, which is after all the one great thing that compensates a people for great expenditures either on land or on sea in the way of defence and of the maintenance of the rights of the country."