

The Outlook for Democracy in Canada

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During the discussion in England of the munitions act and the act that quickly followed it thru parliament at Westminster providing for national registration, the London Morning Post, for more than a hundred years the organ of high Toryism, declared that democracy in the old country was now on its trial. Admittedly this was only giving expression to a truism; for should Germany succeed in this appallingly terrible war, there will be no democracy in England or in any of Britain's overseas dominions. As I read the Morning Post editorial, as it came over in the news-cablegrams from London, I wondered what the Post, with its openly-proclaimed lack of sympathy for democracy, and its long exaltation of the aristocratic conception of government, would say of Canada and its democracy in these trying and anxious days of the war, when everything pertaining to British political and social civilization hangs in the balance. I wondered what the Post's estimate of democracy in the Dominion would be if it were intimately acquainted with the 1914-1915 crop of political scandals in Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Quebec and Fredericton. I wondered also how the M.P., as we used to call it in my Fleet Street days, would express itself concerning democracy in Canada if it were also thoroughly familiar with the sickening details of the long series of scandals at Ottawa, from the downfall of Macdonald as a consequence of the C.P.R. deal of 1871, to the chapter of ineptitude, waste and corruption that marked the connection of the Laurier government with the inception, planning and construction of the railway from Moncton to Winnipeg.

A Sordid Story

The history of Dominion politics from 1870 to 1915 is a sordid story—almost a heart-breaking story to a believer in democracy; and it is particularly so from 1878 to the last guarantee by the Borden government of the bonds of the Mackenzie and Mann railway undertakings, and the increase in the protective duties of the tariff that was enacted in February last. This story when it is told—as it must be some day—must necessarily have Ottawa as its centre. But Halifax, Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg—especially Montreal and Toronto—must have their places in it. All these cities, at least since 1896, have been the headquarters of the exploiters of national treasure, national credit, national resources, and political immoralities. It is these exploiters—some of them ostentatious wearers of honors bestowed on them by the crown at the instance of Laurier or Borden—who, with the lawyers in their pay, are directly responsible for nine-tenths of the political squalor that for a hundred years to come will mar the years from 1870 to 1915 in the history of the Dominion.

A Brighter Passage

It is true that the story will brighten up a little in the years from 1874 to 1878. There was hope for Liberalism and democracy and for the common people of Canada during the four years in which Mackenzie and the old-time Liberals were in power. But to offset these four years as they glow in the political history of Canada, there is the chapter from 1896 to 1911, which is really the most dismal in the political life of the Dominion. As a life-long student of the political, economic and social history of the English-speaking people—in the Old Land and overseas—I regard this period from 1896 to 1911 as the most dismal in the political history of any country now or ever under British rule. Certainly I know of no period to compare with it in the history of England from the Reformation to the beginning of the Kaiser's war; and I defy any student of the history of the British overseas dominions to point to any period in the history of the Commonwealth of Australia, the

Union of South Africa, or New Zealand, that can be compared with the political history of Canada during the Liberal regime that lasted from the general election of 1896 to the defeat of Laurier at the general election of 1911. These years were more dismal politically than any period in the modern history of England or in the history of the overseas dominions other than Canada, for at least five obvious reasons:

1. Canada in these years was supposed to be a democracy; and as I shall presently show, as far as the electoral franchise and constitutional and governmental machinery are concerned, it was and is still a democracy, with more power inherent in it than is possessed by a democracy in any other part of the English-speaking world, not excepting either Great Britain or the United States.

2. In the modern history of the English-speaking peoples there never was a more callous political betrayal than was perpetrated over the national policy by Laurier and the official Liberals in the years from the first revision of the tariff in 1897 to the second revision in 1907.

3. From the years that immediately followed the Reformation in the reign of Henry VIII to the beginning of the reign of George V, there is no record in the history of countries under British rule of a wholesale dissipation and

4. Never in the history of any English-speaking country was the press—a press that had long professed to advocate Liberal and democratic principles—corrupted and converted into the subservient tool of a dominant political clique, as was, with three or four honorable exceptions, the so-called Liberal daily press of Canada in these dismal years from 1896 to 1911.

Liberalism Dead

5. The net result of these conditions and these sinister developments was that political life and thought in Canada—the higher political life, the spiritual life of the Dominion, if I may so describe it—was dead before the turn of the twentieth century. The great betrayal and all that was incidental to it—all the political indifference and demoralization that necessarily went with the betrayal of 1897 killed the real political life of the nation. After the so-called Liberal party had openly and cynically adopted the political ideas, policies, methods and ethics of the Conservative party, as these ideas and policies had been formulated and perfected from 1878 to 1896, it could no longer go on with the mission of popular political education in which it had been continuously engaged in the seventeen or eighteen years during which the party had been in opposition.

Once it had gained power and had



Harvesting with tractor power in Southern Alberta

squandering of the public domain which begins to compare with the squandering of the public domain of Canada in the years from 1896 to 1911.

An Historic Comparison

Church lands and abbeys in the years that followed the Reformation were bestowed in a prodigally reckless fashion by Tudor sovereigns on their favorites. There are many aristocratic and titled families in England today, each of which owes its place in the territorial and governing class and its landed and funded wealth, to the fact that its founder was near to the throne, and of use in various ways to the sovereign, when the crown had the manors and other landed possessions of the church of the old faith at its unrestricted pleasure, and could bestow them where it pleased. But the church lands at the disposition of the English sovereigns after the Reformation in the sixteenth century were not of a thousandth part the value of the prairie lands, the timber limits, the mining and water privileges of one kind and another—all of the public domain of the Dominion of Canada—that were bestowed on men who managed to get close to the Laurier government in the years from 1896 to 1911; and, moreover, it was never possible for Tudor sovereigns by a prodigal expenditure of public money on immigration to enhance enormously the value of the manors and other real property that in the Reformation period were bestowed on the favorites of the hour.

capitulated to the new feudalism—to the many interests of which the Conservative party was the political guardian from 1878 to 1896; once it had adopted political methods and ethics that it had been vehemently and continuously denouncing for nearly a score of years, the Liberal party perforce had no further use for political principles, political ideals, or popular political education.

Public meetings for the discussion and advocacy of the principles of Liberalism and democracy and of decency and honor in political life, coupled as this platform propaganda was with the loyal and enthusiastic aid of a Liberal press that was then in the main free from sinister control, put the Liberals into power at Ottawa in 1896. Thereafter the Liberal party—at any rate its leaders as distinct from its inactive rank and file—had no use for popular meetings in the constituencies for the discussion of Liberal and democratic principles. What the Liberal leaders wanted after 1896 was votes that would keep them in power; and the political mechanics and the docile and always hungry and often thirsty pie-counter politicians of all varieties of breed, religious persuasion, professions and trades, zealously, persistently and quite frequently daringly, attended to this urgent need of the Liberal leaders at Ottawa.

Ottawa Program Forgotten

One of the manifest desires of official Liberalism after 1896 was that it should be completely forgotten from

Cape Breton to Vancouver Island that there had ever been a Liberal national convention in 1893, and that there had been any such political manifesto as the Ottawa program.

Today there are in Canada more organs—more muzzled and subservient daily newspapers—than in any other country in the English-speaking world. The people of Canada, thru direct and indirect taxation, and thru favors and largesse in the bestowal of the government, pay for all of them; for none of the exploiters of the Canadian people and of the resources of the Dominion trouble themselves with the care of these organs merely for the joy and distinction of owning or controlling newspapers.

Newspaper Organs

There is joy in newspaper work when it is done under right conditions—when there is no anti-social aim behind it. I have had forty years of this joy; and I would like to live them all over again. But owning or controlling and manipulating a newspaper organ itself brings no joy. It brings none for the owner; nor is there any joy in such newspaper work for the unfortunate members of the staff. Conditions absolutely preclude such joy. In nearly every case ownership or control of daily newspaper organs in Canada—as distinct from legitimate journalism—is embarked upon as a business incidental to the exploitation of politics for material gain, for the graft which directly or indirectly can be made to accrue from the ownership of an organ.

Within six months after the Laurier government came into power in 1896 it had at least one daily newspaper organ in nearly every large city in the Dominion—a newspaper organ put at its service by men who were out for seats in the House or Senate, or in the cabinet, or for office, or more often by men who desired to exploit either legislation or the national financial and material resources. One of the most useful and conspicuous services rendered to the Liberal leaders in Dominion politics by their newspaper organs from 1896 to 1911 was the burial of the Ottawa program of 1893. This was indeed a great service to Laurierism as distinct from Liberalism; for it kept the new generation of electors—the one that came on the voters' lists after 1896—in ignorance of Liberal principles as they had once been professed and advocated by Cartwright and Laurier, and by such Liberal newspapers as the Globe of Toronto, the Herald of Montreal, and the Chronicle of Halifax.

Democracy Abandoned

Before the end of 1897 Liberal and democratic principles were completely abandoned, and there was no attempt to revive them until 1913-1914, when a poor and meager effort was made by Frank Oliver to groom the Ottawa program for another sham fight—an attempt that was marked by as much audacious cynicism as attended the jettisoning of the Liberal program in 1897. As regards general elections in this period, campaign funds to be disbursed by the more trusted and unscrupulous of the pie-counter politicians and votes, were about the only concern of official Liberalism; and from 1896 to 1911 it would have been impossible for the closest student of contemporary Canadian politics to point to any difference between the Conservative and Liberal parties.

To be Continued Next Week

St. Mary's county, the only one entirely wet up to now in Southern Maryland, went dry on August 3. The wets were defeated by 553 votes. Seven districts in the county gave the dries 591 majority, and two others, including the county seat, went wet by 38. There are now in Maryland fourteen counties wholly dry, seven partly so, and two remain entirely wet. Baltimore City is wet.