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National Unity Essential to Victory

I.

There is Union Government in Canada. It has come home, slowly but steadily, to all those Canadians whose hearts are in the war that the whole power of Canada can only be put into the struggle if the energies of the country are directed by an administration national in character.

The reasons why the continuation of the traditional system of a party government with a party opposition makes united national effort impossible in time of war lie in the very nature of party politics.

A political party is not a permanent and unchanging institution rooted in the nature of things. It is not a religion, nor a superstition. Men are not born into it as they are into nationality. They do not owe it unchanging fidelity as a man owes his country. All ideas of this kind arise from a misconception of what a political party is.

A party is a voluntary association of men for the furthering of policies which they hold in common and which they deem necessary for the welfare of the state. All party organization is directed to this end. Political leaders have no attributes of sovereignty or overlordship. They are chosen because of special fitness for purposes of advocacy; and continue in their position only so long as they can retain the confidence of their associates.

In normal times parties form around questions of economics, of internal development and of external relations. In the nature of things there is a tendency on the part of the people to divide into parties in nearly equal proportions. There is thus a state of political equilibrium which results in each party alternately holding office, the best features of both party programmes thus being gradually adopted by the state.

This arrangement, which ordinarily works on the whole to the advantage of the public, breaks down, of necessity, in time of war. All the issues which give life to political parties are suspended upon the outbreak of war. The safety and the continued existence of the state become the supreme concern. The attitude of the patriotic citizen is then fixed by war considerations alone. It follows that in time of war political parties upon conventional lines have no reason for their existence. When a nation's life is threatened by an armed foe a new and imperative basis for the co-operation of the citizens appears. Those who are of like kind in their resolution to defend the commonwealth must get together. The common danger imposes upon them a common duty.

II.

In a nation a war the division among the people—if unfortunately there is division—must be upon the war and upon no other issue. Each man is for the vigorous prosecution of the war to the end that victory may result in a just peace; or, for any one of a number of varied reasons—pacifism, lack of understanding, cowardice, treasonable sympathy with the enemy—he is against any real national effort being put forward to win the war. A nation, even when it fights for its life, usually has its faint-hearts, its indifferents, its traitors and its quitters; and when they are not held in check by the vigorous assertion of the national will by the patriotic elements the result is disunion, threatening defeat. The situation in Russia during the past few months is an illustration of the disastrous effect of division upon the national will.

In order to make possible the full co-operation of all who are concerned to see full national strength exerted in the waging of war, a government representative of every patriotic element is necessary. Every British nation began the war with a party government in charge of its affairs; and at first trusted to them to direct the directions of national defence. As the stresses of the war developed they each found, in turn, that no party government could act efficiently for the nation in the momentous decisions that had to be made. Great Britain, New Zealand, Australia and Canada in succession replaced party administrations by national governments. In South Africa the government, though its membership is drawn exclusively from one source, is maintained in office by the fusion of the South African and Unionist parties.

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