

Canada and the League

Full Text of Mr. Mackenzie King's Important Speech at Geneva on September 29

THE Government of Canada shares the view that the present is a very critical time in the affairs of the world, but, particularly and immediately, in the affairs of Europe. More than one delegate with intimate knowledge of the situation has already spoken of the growing tension throughout this Continent. With a less intimate knowledge, Canada has refrained from putting forward, in advance of this meeting, any comments or proposals.

The means of solving immediate European problems are, we believe, best known to the nations of Europe themselves, and likely, at this juncture, to be most effective if applied by direct negotiation. Having said this, may I add that we believe the present is a time when no country should be satisfied with appearances or professions? It is a time when the reality and effectiveness of whatever is being considered should as completely as possible be known and disclosed. Undertakings are meaningless apart from the will, the intent, and the capacity to meet obligations assumed.

Contrast Between the Old World and the New

Canadians, viewing conditions in Europe from their own country, are struck by the violent nature of the propaganda and recriminations hurled incessantly across the frontiers, the endeavours to draw all countries into one or other extremist camp, the feverish race for rearmament, the hurrying to and fro of diplomats, the ceaseless weaving and unravelling of understandings and alliances, and the consequent fear and uncertainty of the peoples. It is a complete contrast to the friendly relations with our neighbours to which we are accustomed.

I mention this not to suggest that Europe at the moment can be expected to follow a similar course, but rather to explain a difference in national outlook, which has its bearing upon policies which some may feel the League should adopt. We approach the consideration of the existing situation with the fullest sympathy for the difficulties and the policies of other members of the League. We recognise the special conditions that face a great part of Europe, the crowded populations, the scores of dividing frontiers, the bitter memories which zealots of nationalism will not let die, the heritage of ancient privilege and of class division, the unrest resulting from the redrawing of political boundaries, and the upheaval in the social structure which the Great War brought in its train. We recognise that we in Canada are particularly fortunate both in our neighbours, and in our lack of neighbours, and we agree that we cannot reasonably expect our relations and our attitude to be wholly duplicated elsewhere.

The representative of the United Kingdom declared that one country cannot impose its social system or political faith upon another country with different backgrounds. That is equally true of the relations between one continent and another. It is a truth, however, which works both ways. It would be equally unreasonable to expect a North American State to have the same international outlook, the same conception of interest, or of duty, as a European State facing widely different conditions. Perhaps it would be helpful all round if we would recognise that differences in policy where they exist do not represent a superior or inferior outlook, but in the main correspond to differences in the circumstances that we face.

Canada's Autonomy

There is another factor which inevitably influences Canadian opinion on many League policies, and particularly on the question of automatic obligations to the use of force in international disputes. I have in mind our experience as a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations. The nations of the British Commonwealth are held together by ties of friendship,

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by similar political institutions, and by common attachment to democratic ideals, rather than by commitments to join together in war. The Canadian Parliament reserves to itself the right to declare, in the light of the circumstances existing at the time, to what extent, if at all, Canada will participate in conflicts in which other members of the Commonwealth may be engaged. It is true there are special factors in this relationship which make it impossible to draw a complete parallel between League and Commonwealth relations. But these factors also work in both directions. Certainly this experience has had an effect in convincing Canadians of the possibility of preserving close and friendly co-operation without the existence of a central authority or of military commitments.

This respect for the full autonomy of each of the self-governing members of the British Commonwealth, I may add, is not confined to questions of participation in war. It applies to all relationships. It is for each part to decide what political or economic policies it may wish to adopt. Recognition of the same principle, we believe, should govern the actions of all the members of the League of Nations.

A Tradition of Freedom

The Canadian tradition is one of inherited and developed freedom. The repression of criticism is alien to that tradition. Our political institutions are founded upon democratic principle and are subject to modification by democratic methods. We have a profound faith that the way of freedom is also the path to peace. Holding that conviction ourselves, we do not assume that we have a mission to impose our beliefs and institutions on other States. We concur in the faith expressed by the United Kingdom representative in the soundness and the indispensable value of democratic institutions and individual freedom, but we concur also in his view that it is for each country, whether a member of the League or not, to decide for itself what form of government or economic organisation is best suited to its own needs and conditions. The freedom of maintaining our own form of government which we demand for ourselves requires as its corollary a policy of non-interference in the domestic arrangements of other nations. The doctrine of "live and let live" in respect of social philosophies and forms of government is, we believe, an indispensable condition of international comity and co-operation.

I have referred to the influence of geographical situation and of the experience of co-operation between the nations of the British Commonwealth in determining our attitude to League policies. But there is, of course, a third factor, the experience we have shared in common with other members of the League.

It is, I am certain, the belief of peoples of the great majority of the States here represented, that the League has served a world-wide need by affording a rallying point for the world's hopes of peace, a permanent and insistent reminder of the necessity of adjusting political ideas and institutions to the new conditions of world industry and scientific progress, an apprecia-