

# Party Subserviency in Canada

## II.—A comparison of the governing class of Canada with the governing classes of the United Kingdom and United States

By Edward Porritt

At Ottawa the political party that is in power, and the party that is in opposition, are both controlled and used by the governing class. It controls the Opposition of today as it controlled the Opposition of 1896-1911, because the Opposition of today was thirled to the governing class, and served it whenever it was called upon to do so from 1896 to 1911. There can be few people in Canada today who believe that the Liberals at Ottawa dare offer sincere or effective opposition in the House of Commons to schemes and measures of the governing class which are promoted and carried thru parliament, or thru the state department, such as the customs department, which is charged with the administration of the tariff.

The Opposition cannot fulfil its normal extra-constitutional function either in parliament or in the constituencies, because of its fifteen years of close and interested connection with the governing class when it was in power. It then did the bidding of the governing class, in spite of the many clear and specific pledges of a diametrically opposite policy that it had given to the electorate of Canada in the Ottawa Liberal program of 1893, and in spite of the pledges of its leaders, given at the Ottawa convention, and from the platform in the constituencies.

Today the Opposition cannot put itself into antagonism to the governing class, or oppose its schemes for exploiting the people of Canada, because its leaders and many of its members in the House of Commons, as well as the patronage men and the heelers and political mechanics in the constituencies from coast to coast, are living in the hope that the Liberal party will again be taken into the confidence and service of the governing class.

The Liberal party will again wear the livery of the governing class just as soon as that class deems it expedient that there should be a change in the political complexion and nomenclature of the government. Since 1896 the Opposition at Ottawa, whether Conservative or Liberal, has been a mere moving picture show; and the Opposition must continue of the "movie" variety so long as the governing class can—as it has done for twenty years—control both political parties in all matters that are in its opinion of significance or value.

Most Canadian political institutions—federal, provincial and municipal, constitutional and extra-constitutional—are much more akin to British than to American political institutions. This is natural in view of the origin of these institutions, and of the extent to which Canada is interwoven in the Empire. Most Canadians of British origin take pride in this fact—in the kinship and similarity of British and Canadian political institutions; and also in the fact that Canadian institutions have been developed under what may be described as modern British influences—influences that have been at work since the American Revolution, and since a new political England was created as a result of the Reform Act of 1832.

### Canadian Political Institutions British

The British origin is especially true as regards the machinery of government—parliament, the cabinet and the departments of state. It is, however obvious to anyone who can compare political parties and their organization and spirit at Westminster, Washington and Ottawa, that the party system in Canada is more akin to the party system in the United States than to that in Great Britain. It is more akin to the American system because in Canada, as in the United States, there has never been any effective or enduring inroad on the system of two parties; and the result is that one or other of the two parties must be in control, without any of the impelling or retarding influence that is exercised at Westminster over the two historic parties of Great Britain by the political groups—Radical, Nationalist, Labor men and Socialists—that established themselves in the House of Commons between 1832 and the beginning of the war.

At Ottawa, as at Washington, there have never been any strong and well-organized political groups acting independently of the two old-line parties, as there have been at Westminster almost continuously since the days of the Napoleonic wars, when there came a division between the old and the new Whigs; and quite independent of this division in the aristocratic party of the eighteenth century, the radical party came into existence. The caucus is American in its origin. Canadian political parties long ago adopted it as an extra-constitutional institution. The caucus is not now, and never has been, part of the political machinery at Westminster—certainly not of English or Scotch political

parties, altho the Nationalists at Westminster organized a caucus at least as long ago as 1885.

The governing class of Canada—a class numerically so small that all its individual members of any influence or potency could be hauled from Montreal to Toronto in a single, not very long train of Pullman cars—is also obviously more akin to the governing class of the United States than to the governing class of the United Kingdom. The British governing class is cultivated, aristocratic and territorial. It is to be found in castles, old baronial halls and mansions on great estates dotted all over England, Scotland and Ireland. The governing class of Canada is to be found in the banking houses and sky-scrapers of Montreal and Toronto. In England the governing class is represented in the world of journalism by the aristocratic and Tory Morning Post. In Canada it would be difficult to say how many newspapers serve the



HON. GEORGE BROWN.

who with his father established and edited the Toronto Globe from 1844 to 1892. Canada has had no man more brilliant or versatile in his knowledge of public questions or more constant in his advocacy of true democratic principles.

governing class. It may be said, however, that its point of view, as expressed in journalism, is well represented by the Montreal Gazette and the Toronto News.

In Canada the governing class is neither aristocratic nor territorial. It is new, as new as are great fortunes in Canada. It can scarcely be said to have any traditions as traditions are understood in England and old world countries. Like the governing class of the United States it is wealthy, but it is aggressively individualistic in its outlook on life and in its social atmosphere and ambitions, when its members are off duty and are seeking luxurious ease.

An English historian—P. S. Oliver—has recently written a book on Alexander Hamilton, the American statesman of the era of the Revolution, in which he incidentally points out how little the wealthy class in the United States has in common with the territorial and governing class of Great Britain. Much the same comparison, with the same conclusion, might be drawn between the governing class of Canada, as it has been developed since 1879, and the governing class of the old country, as this class developed and perfected itself from the reign of William III. and Queen Anne to that of Queen Victoria.

The governing class of Canada has few characteristics or qualities in common with the class that so long exercised so much control at Westminster. It was the aim of the governing class in England, in the days of its greatest power, to retain as much as possible of its feudal privileges, especially as concerned primogeniture, imperial and local taxation of land, inheritance to landed estates, the game laws, and protective tariffs that would enhance the selling price of grain, cattle, wool and hides and timber produced on the estates of the territorial class, and to obtain possession, by means of the enclosure of commons, of as much as possible of the land.

From the revolution of 1688 to the repeal of the corn laws and of all protective duties in 1846, the governing class in England was continuously on the aggressive as well as on the defensive. Since 1846 it has never been on the aggressive, except in the support that it so generously gave to the propaganda for a return to protection that Chamberlain began in 1903. It is now only on the defensive; for with the establishment of free trade in 1846, and the increasing power of democracy after the extensions of the franchise in 1832, 1867 and 1884, the territorial class abandoned the aggressive. For seventy years it has obtained no new statutory powers for the exploitation of the common people. From 1846 to 1903 it dare not ask for, or even suggest, the enactment of such laws at Westminster.

### British Governing Class Ready To Serve

In the twentieth century, as in the eighteenth and nineteenth, the territorial governing class in England is always ready to render public service in the House of Commons and the House of Lords; in the administration of the central government; in the diplomatic service; in the navy and the army; to some extent in the church; and in county and municipal government, and the local administration of justice. Its political life—national as well as local—is in public. Its members propound no political schemes that they will not champion on the floor of the House of Commons or the House of Lords, or on the platform in London and the constituencies. Representatives of the governing class, in these modern days, never go on deputations to the Premier or the Chancellor of the Exchequer at Whitehall from which reporters are excluded. The political life of the governing class in England is in the open. Its members, whether of the House of Commons or the House of Lords, have no dread of the publication of the division lists.

The governing class in Canada is not a land owning class in the sense that the governing class in England is territorial. It has not been possible, so far in the history of Canada to develop a municipal or territorial aristocracy because a territorial aristocracy is dependent for its revenues on the renting of farms, and there can be no large number of tenant farmers as long as Canada is still a new and developing country, and the Dominion government has millions of acres for free settlement in the provinces between the Great Lakes and the Rocky Mountains.

### Dollar Conservatism

In Canada the governing class has been developed by the exploitation of the public funds, of public utilities of all kinds, of the tariff, the bounty and bonus laws—the national policy enactments of the Dominion and provincial governments from 1879 to 1916. In one respect there is some similarity between the governing class of Canada and that of Great Britain. The governing class in Canada is always and, as a matter of course, on the defensive.

It is always ready to resist any attack on the laws and politico-economic conditions under which it has developed and grown rich and politically powerful. It embodies and stands for what may be described as dollar conservatism. It is as much opposed to an income tax as the governing class in England was opposed to the legislation of Gladstone in 1854, of Harcourt in 1893, and of Lloyd-George in 1909-11, for the taxation of land. It prefers indirect taxation—especially the indirect taxation of the tariff; for under this form of taxation it pays little more than the salary earning class, and any increase in the tariff turns an increasing stream of wealth into the pockets of at least one powerful group of its members—the manufacturers, who were the first contingent of the governing class to obtain special privileges at Ottawa.

### Washington Mild Compared to Ottawa

Were it not for the support that the territorial governing class gave to Chamberlain's propaganda, and the fact that the war has revived that propaganda, and that the governing class is again identifying itself with the protectionist movement, it might be said that the governing class in England nowadays is never on the aggressive. On the other hand the governing class in Canada is always on the aggressive; and it is more audacious than the governing class in England ever was after the Napoleonic wars. It is even more openly audacious than the governing class in the United States. In congresses in which the Republican party is in control tariff jobs go thru at Washington, much on a par with those perpetrated at Ottawa by act of parliament and orders-in-council affecting the free list and the

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