

Party Subserviency in Canada

I.—Where the existing party system has landed the Dominion

By EDWARD PORRITT

In discussing party conditions in Canada one fact must always be kept in mind. To use a much hackneyed phrase that was coined by Cleveland at a crisis during his first term as president at Washington, it is a condition and not a theory that confronts the Canadian people. It is a condition that has continuously confronted Canada since the beginning of the Liberal regime at Ottawa in 1896. Again and again this condition has been stated on the platform and in the press, but no Canadian has stated it in fewer words or to better effect than Dr. Andrew Macphail, of Montreal, in the *Essays on Politics* which he published in 1909.

"We in Canada," Dr. Macphail then wrote, "pretend that we are living under British institutions. In reality we are not. We are living under the government of an interested class, who find a party in power and keep it there until it becomes too corrupt to be kept there any longer, when it seizes upon the other party and proceeds to corrupt it."

In 1909, when Dr. Macphail wrote this description of governmental and party conditions, he obviously had in mind Canadian experience only from 1878 to 1909, for it has never been suggested that the Macenzie government of 1873-78 was subservient to the governing class. It went to its downfall at the general election of 1878. It well knew that it was going to its downfall, because it would not swerve from its democratic principles to obey the manufacturing interests of Ontario and Quebec. But since Dr. Macphail wrote this indictment Canada has had seven more years of these party conditions. It has seen one party for which the governing class had for the time being no further use dislodged from power after it had subserviently done the bidding of the governing class for fifteen years, and another party, quite as subservient, put in its place at Ottawa.

In particular Canada has, since Dr. Macphail wrote, had the spectacle of the organization of the Borden government in 1911. Then, it will be recalled, the governing class dictated to the incoming Premier, on whom he must bestow the important portfolio of Minister of Finance; and in the exercise of its power the governing class nominated to this office a man who was not even in the House of Commons, who had not gone thru a kindergarten stage of political service, who had never faced a constituency at an election, and who was quite without experience in parliamentary or public administrative work.

Moreover, since 1909, when Dr. Macphail wrote his epitome of party and governmental conditions, Canada has had an opportunity of realizing that in war time as well as in peace time, in years of the gravest stress as well as in years of prosperity, when all is well with the Dominion, with the Empire and with civilization, the party that is in power must never forget the class at whose hands it received power, and war or no war it must forward the interests of this class. The higher tariff of 1915 and the several railway deals since August, 1914, are proof that no matter how grave may be the crisis that confronts the Dominion and the Empire, the governing class must be permitted and helped to levy its increasing toll on the Canadian people.

The task that will confront Canada at the end of the war will be to restore, or to give real democratic effectiveness to the Canadian system of responsible and representative government, and thereby to effect the dislodgement at Ottawa of a governing class which uses the party system, the representative system, and government generally, to the ends described by Dr. Macphail.

The Party System Strongly Intact

It cannot with accuracy be said that the party system in Canada has broken down. Every party leader and every political mechanic in every riding and constituency in the Dominion knows that it has not broken down. So do the merchants who are on the patronage lists, and so does every claimant for a position in the civil service at Ottawa. It is only necessary to look on for a session at Ottawa to realize that the party system in Canada is intact. Every caucus and every division is proof of this. The Hansards are full of such proof, and the same fact is emphasized by the subserviency of the daily press, with the exception of here and there an independent newspaper, from Halifax to Victoria.

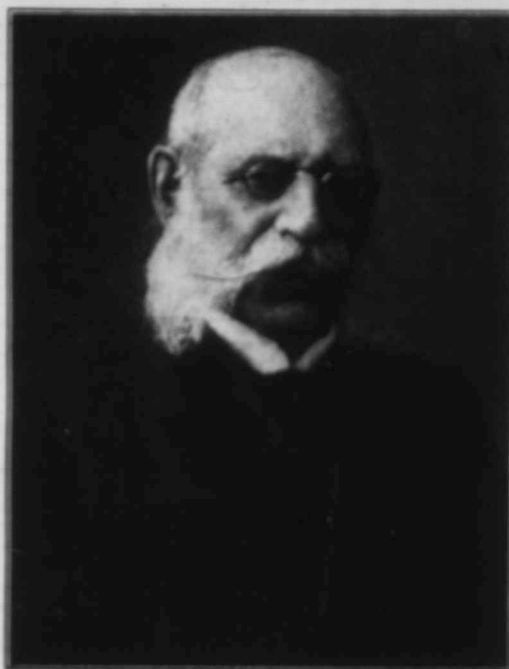
It is no exaggeration to say that the party system in Canada has a greater hold on the people than the party system has in England or even in the United States, for in the United States there is always a tremendously large unattached vote that at each recurring election is a source of much anxiety to the bosses, and also to the political mechanics who run the local machines and round up voters to the polls.

The party system is still intact and in good working. It is in as good running order as ever it was. The recent Liberal conference at Ottawa, to which *The Grain Growers' Guide* called attention on its editorial pages in the issue of August 30, 1916, is proof that the system is still in first class working order. That conference is proof that in or out of power the party leaders are careful to keep the machine going, and that they rely on the leaders in the constituencies to work

to the same end. The Ottawa conference of July last, and the platform that was then framed, are in fact proof, as was pointed out in *The Guide* editorial, that the leaders of the Liberal party are moving to get their organization and their party into such shape as to be ready to serve the governing class again, as from 1896 to 1911. That will be when the governing class concludes that it has used the Conservative party as long as it is desirable or politic, and that continuity of the stream of advantages and privileges will be best ensured by once more giving the Liberals a turn of power at Ottawa.

The Party System not at Fault

Nobody will venture the assertion that the party system in Canada has broken down, because there is absolutely no basis for such an assertion. What has happened is that since 1896 the party system in Canada has been warped from its original intent and purpose. A party system, whether of two parties, such as exists in Canada and the United States, or



SIR RICHARD CARTWRIGHT, the most uncompromising foe of the "governing class" that Canada has ever had. He told a story to it when Laurier was returned in 1896. He should have been Minister of Finance but the "Class" would not tolerate him and his great power for good was very largely lost to the people of Canada.

of groups of parties, such as have existed at Westminster since the dawn of radicalism in England and Scotland towards the end of the eighteenth century, must exist in every country with parliamentary institutions. Just as soon as the English people made an end to the arbitrary rule of the Stuarts, just as soon as the last of the Stuarts had been exported to France, and England began to import kings, first from Holland and next from Germany, to rule under the limits of constitutional monarchy, a party system came into existence. Out of it at once began the development of government by party, parliament and cabinet with which we are familiar today. It is inconceivable to me to think of England without a party system, just as it would be inconceivable to think of England without the House of Commons and popular elections.

Between 1841 and 1849, exactly the same system—representative institutions, political parties and a cabinet holding its tenure by virtue of its ability to command a majority in the House of Commons—was developed and firmly established in Canada. There had been political parties in Canada long before responsible government was established in 1841-49, and between 1841 and 1866 some of the best results ever accruing from the existence of a radical or forward party had been achieved in the legislature of the united provinces, by the radicals or liberals of Upper Canada.

It is exhilarating to read the history and appraise the beneficent social results of the radical movement in Upper Canada from 1828 to 1866. It would be well if the history of these years were written in popular form. In spite of enormous handicaps and obstacles, democracy went forward with a firm stride in the epoch-making years from 1841 to 1866. These were the years when the political civilization of Upper and Lower Canada was being developed, when old world laws and usages adopted from English law, and imported in bulk in the first decade of Upper Canada, were being thrust aside, and more democratic political and social conditions were being established; when, in a word, a nation, with even more political freedom than was then enjoyed in any other country

of the world, was being created out of what not many years before had been two backwoods provinces under crown colony rule.

The history of these years, and the part that the radicals of Upper Canada had in the creation of the democratic political civilization of Upper and Lower Canada that existed on the eve of Confederation, would be stimulating reading in these days when party conditions in Canada are so disheartening, when a governing class is firmly in the saddle, when so much political work in the interest of the farmers and wage and salary earners of the Dominion is so obviously needing to be done, and when neither of the political parties can be depended on to undertake this work and carry the Dominion forward on democratic lines.

Canada's Radicalism Led the World

In those years of amazing political growth and development, when political civilization in the old united provinces, democratic in character and eminently beneficent in its social results, was made more quickly than ever before or since in any part of the English speaking world, responsible government was secured for all the British North American provinces. Incidentally as the direct and immediate result of the work of Canadian radicals, responsible government was conferred by parliament at Westminster on the other British colonies in Australia and South Africa.

Responsible government was secured for Canada by a political party. It was secured by the party of which Baldwin and LaFontaine and Howe were the leaders. They were helped by great colonial statesmen like Sydenham and Elgin, and by such British statesmen as Durham, Russell, Peel and Newcastle. Whatever political conditions might have been before 1841, a party system became inevitable, and essential, when on the representative system as it had been developed and worked in Canada from 1791 to 1841 there was grafted the democratic and beneficent system of responsible government.

Political conditions in Canada today, with all the power that accrues from them to the governing class, are not due to any organic or inherent weakness in the system of political parties. They are due to the fact that the people of Canada, for the most part closely occupied with earning their living, have permitted the leaders of both the Conservative and the Liberal parties to divert the parties to the service of the governing class, and the governing class in thus capturing and hamstringing first the Conservative party—1878-1896—and then the Liberal party—1896-1911—and again in 1911 the Conservative party, used its victory to achieve its goal. That goal, it need not be said, was the control, as far as was necessary for its purpose, of parliament and the cabinet.

From its own point of view, the policies and tactics of the governing class in Dominion politics since 1878 have been completely successful. The governing class in Canada has succeeded far more completely than the governing class in the United States, for it is only when the Republican party is in power at Washington that the governing class in the United States—similarly composed and with similar aims to the governing class in Canada—can now-a-days carry its schemes. Cleveland had no use for the governing class that had been in control at Washington from the end of the civil war to the presidential election of 1884, at which Blaine and the Republican party were defeated. Had Cleveland been subservient to the governing class he would never have accepted the Wilson tariff bill of 1894, nor would he have written his famous letter to Catchings—August 27, 1894—in which he denounced the "communism of pelf" that held the tariff politicians and the tariff barons together.

Had the governing class of the United States controlled both parties at Washington as the governing class controls both parties at Ottawa, there would never have been during Wilson's presidency the general lowering of the tariff in 1913, the rural credits legislation or the child labor law by which national protection is extended to the children of the most backward states. The governing class in the United States has for sixty years controlled, or partly controlled, the Republican party. Since the end of the seventies the Republican party has existed thru its subserviency to the governing class, especially to the high tariff division of the governing class, for since that time it has had no policy but that of high protection. But unlike the governing class in Canada, the governing class in the United States has never controlled both political parties in federal politics, and the day seems now remote when it will be able to control the Democratic as well as the Republican party.

There has always been at Washington a strong opposition to the governing class, and since 1901-1909 the governing class of the United States has had to realize and concede that it cannot always control the Republican party. During Roosevelt's presidency there was a decided revolt against its control, and while President Wilson and the Democratic Congress have been in power the governing class has lost control at Washington. The control of the governing class in the United States is thus not a continuing control like that exercised by the similar class in Canada.