



# REFLECTIONS

BY STAFF WRITERS

## SCHOOL-BOOKS AND POLITICIANS

THERE has been much talk about school-books in nearly every province in Canada during the past two years. New Brunswick has been trying to find out whether its books are up-to-date and whether the cost is excessive. Alberta and Saskatchewan have been introducing a new system somewhat similar to that which Manitoba inaugurated some years ago. Ontario held an investigation and a Commission reported that prices were high, the quality poor and the system of distribution in need of reform.

It is regrettable that in all these cases, the school-book question has been more or less a foot-ball of the politicians. One side makes charges, and the other denies them. Mis-statements are common. No one seems to realise that the question is mainly for experts and not for politicians. For example, there is little reason to believe that either the Premier or the Leader of the Opposition in Ontario understands the present situation or would know a good school-book if he met it. They are lawyers, excellent lawyers too, and why should they be expected to know either the publishing or educational value of a text-book by merely glancing at it?

A Government may decide whether or not school-books should be supplied free—that is a question of policy. As to the character of the contents, educationists must decide, and as to the mechanical qualities and printing cost of the books, publishers must decide; since these are questions for experts, not for politicians or statesmen.

If our parliamentarians would stop talking about details which they are not expected to understand and confine themselves to questions of public policy they would stand higher in public estimation. They do not decide what kind of treatment a doctor will give a patient in an insane asylum, nor decide the hour at which prisoners in county jails shall go to bed, and why should they decide whether one Second Reader is better than another? Let the Educational Council decide such points. The question as to whether these books should be supplied free, or whether the present system of selling them through the booksellers should be retained, is one which lies within the purview of the legislator, as do all other principles of general policy in every department of administration.

In truth, it would seem that the politicians are trying to confuse the public rather than enlighten them. Unfortunately too, so far as the school-book question in Ontario is concerned, the politicians have been fairly successful in this direction.

## MAJORITY RULE

MAJORITY rule is a principle which has long been recognised as workable and satisfactory in both business and government. No other rule seems possible in democratic countries. The directors of large concerns are elected by the majority vote of the shareholders; the executive is elected by a majority vote of the directors, and the manager is selected by a majority vote of the executive. Our councillors or aldermen are elected by a majority vote of the electors; so are the members of our legislatures and the members of the House of Commons. When judges sit together, the majority vote makes the decision as to what is good law or which litigant is entitled to succeed. In fraternal societies, church organisations and educational bodies, the same rule holds good. Yet we are now having a discussion of two cases where seemingly the rule is brought into question.

The first case is that of the present local option law in Ontario which requires a three-fifths vote in any municipality to put it in operation and a similar vote to effect a repeal. This principle was introduced into the Act by the present Whitney administration, the reason given being the necessity for a strong public opinion to provide an efficient enforcement of the law. The Liberal Opposition are opposing the clause, claiming that it is unfair to the temperance interests. Mr. MacKay points out that the clause is ridiculous because 59 per cent. may vote for repeal and yet the law may remain

in force with only 41 per cent. of the voters in favour of it. There are arguments on both sides, but as the question is in politics, it would be improper as well as unwise for an independent journal to say where the stronger arguments lie.

The second case is that of the House of Commons at Ottawa where a minority of the members are preventing the majority from voting the supplies necessary to carry on the administration of public affairs. So little money has been voted that the Civil Service salaries are to some extent unpaid and many public works are not being proceeded with. The minority justify their conduct on the ground that the present administration has committed so many blunders and has so fallen from grace that it no longer represents the majority of the electors which its support in the House would indicate. The Opposition refuses to respect the Government because it feels, rightly or wrongly, that the public will ultimately justify such conduct. The situation is dramatic and it remains to be seen what the effect will be. If the obstruction continues much longer, the Administration will be forced either to follow Mr. Gladstone's precedent and adopt the "closure," or dissolve the House and appeal to the electorate.

A close examination of these two cases, however, reveals that they are exceptions which do not affect the general majority rule. In the end in Ontario, the voice of the majority of the people will decide as to the three-fifths clause in the Local Option Act, and in the end the majority of the electorate will decide as to whether the Conservative Opposition at Ottawa is justified in adopting obstruction methods. It would therefore seem that this great democratic principle is not really in the slightest danger.

## THE PLETHORA OF LABOUR

NO one will deny that there are a number of idle but willing labourers in Canada at the present time. It would perhaps be near the mark to say that there are 50,000 unemployed at the present moment. Yet in view of the general labour and market conditions in this and other countries, the situation is not exceptional, nor is it so very serious. Last year 300,000 new settlers came into Canada. If five-sixths of these have found adequate and suitable employment, the country has shown a tremendous power of absorption.

When we consider that the Western wheat crop of last year was only about one-half as large as it should have been and that the total amount realised for it was twenty million dollars less than in 1906, the number of unemployed is not startling. The poor crop and the general tightness of money have greatly restricted manufacturing and industrial development. If this year's harvest is normal or if it is exceptionally good, there will be work for nearly everybody by September. The present condition is only temporary.

In some places, notably the House of Commons and the city of Brantford, there have been public discussions as to whether the Liberals or the Conservatives are responsible for the present plethora of labour. The Conservative Opposition have been foolishly trying to prove that the Government has been too lavish in its encouragement of immigration; with equal foolishness, some Liberal politicians have been trying to prove that the Conservative manufacturers have been unduly encouraging mechanics to come from Great Britain and elsewhere. Certainly, the Liberal Government has accomplished a great deal along this line and the manufacturers have also encouraged people to come here. Both are entitled to credit, not blame. If conditions had been normal, there would have been no unemployed. Neither party is responsible for present conditions.

Such petty and senseless bickering as is going on in regard to this question is detrimental to the best interests of the country and can be based only upon a lack of patriotic faith. If Canada is to develop, as we all hope it will, at an ever increasing rate, immigration must continue. It will be necessary and it will no doubt be wise to see that undesirables, criminals, paupers and other unsuitable persons are