

Canada and the British West Indies

A strong plea for political as well as commercial union

By HARRY J. CROWE.

The article, "Relations Between Canada and the British West Indies," appearing in your Journal some time ago, I have only recently had the opportunity of reading, and would beg leave now to refer to the interesting points it developed with respect to possible confederation of the British West Indies with Canada.

The consolidation of all the British possessions in North America into a Greater Canada should appeal not only to the imagination, the practical minds, and the national spirit of Canadians, but also to the people of the West Indies and the Mother Country. I shall endeavour to briefly give some of the reasons why, in my opinion, a Commercial and Political Union would be in the interests of each of the countries.

1st. CANADA.

Canada, at present, has no tropical territory, and if she is to approach an equal footing with the United States, with respect to variety of climate and products, she will need to include within her Dominion these rich tropical islands, because, lying as they do at the crossing of the trade routes between Europe and Panama, and North and South America, and the fact that through their zone there must in future pass much of the world's trade, they are of great strategical importance.

In view of the growth of the purchasing power of these 2,000,000 consumers resulting from the future increased value of tropical products, it would be difficult to fully appreciate now the importance to Canadian producers of a free entry into the markets of these islands, which import and consume what Canada produces.

2nd. BRITISH WEST INDIES.

As to the British West Indies, they would then be part of a young Northern nation, whose energy and capital would develop their productive soil, increase their transportation, give them free entry into the ever growing market of Canada, and enable them to hold their present markets, and participate on an equal footing in all tariff concessions Canada can secure in foreign markets. They would, therefore, have a freer and more profitable market in foreign countries than they at present enjoy. Under this consolidation, they would retain their old traditions and what they hold dear of their history and achievements, through a system of local governments, similar to their present administration.

3rd. ENGLAND.

It is generally admitted by statesmen in all these countries, that because of her burden of local, colonial and foreign affairs in the past, the Mother Country has been obliged to neglect the British West Indies. After peace is declared there will be added to these burdens an enormous war debt, and the reconstruction of home affairs, but if the British West Indies became a part of the Dominion of Canada, the Mother Country would be relieved of the responsibility of giving the attention to these islands to which they are entitled, if they are to "come into their own."

As to the fear expressed that she would suffer commercial loss by Canada having the free entry into the market of the British West Indies, I believe the reverse would be the case. This Confederation should rather increase the trade that the Mother Country is now enjoying in these islands, because of their greater purchasing power, due to development resulting from Canadian enterprise and the investment of Canadian capital.

As this Confederation would establish the Canadian tariff in the British West Indies, Great Britain's producers would then have a preference over foreign countries which is not granted to them by the present governments of the British West Indies.

With respect to the political importance of this consolidation of British possessions in North America into one Dominion, the Great War has made it clear that the Mother Country can be strengthened only as her Dominions and scattered possessions are strengthened and become consolidated.

In your article, I observe you emphasized certain difficulties that would be in the way of this Confederation, to a few of which I shall venture to refer.

First.—You point out, "Whether after full discussion, either side would really desire the union (political as well as commercial), is by no means clear."

History has proved the instability and changeableness of purely commercial treaties between these countries; therefore, there should be not only a commercial union, but a political as well, so that the ma-

ing together their commercial ties and mutual aspirations. While the union into a separate Dominion of the British West Indies, and a commercial or reciprocity treaty between some or all of the islands, have been attempted in the past, I do not think a political and commercial union of all the islands with Canada has ever been officially submitted to any government of these countries. It would, therefore, be difficult at this time to accurately estimate what the public sentiment would be, when the facts and advantages are clearly placed before the people; but judging from what has been said by representative men of these countries, and the interest expressed in the Canadian and West India press, I believe we may safely infer that the subject of this union would receive the serious consideration of the Canadian and West Indian people. Permit me to draw your attention to what some of the leaders of public opinion have said in favour of this union.

When this question of Confederation was brought up in the House of Commons at Ottawa, in the winter of 1917, Sir George Foster, the acting Premier, said: "The Dominion Government would look favourably on the proposal, but any movement in this direction must emanate from the West India Islands themselves," adding, "The string of the latch is always on the outside, and the light is always burning in the window."

The Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Sir Robert Borden, I have reason to believe, takes even a stronger position with respect to the consolidation of these British possessions.

The London "Times" of March 14th, 1917, in an editorial endorsing an article by the writer, advocating Confederation of the British West Indies, Newfoundland and Canada, summed up the attitude of the Mother Country in their opinion, as follows:—"The British Sovereign, Parliament and the opinion of Great Britain would entirely welcome such a political union. The tide is setting strongly toward a closer union of the Empire. The amalgamation under a single Federal Government of Canada, Newfoundland and the West Indies would be a long step forward in the same direction."

Earl Grey, not long before his death, in a letter to the writer said, "A commercial and political union of these countries, would appear to me to be in the interests of Canada, the West Indies, and the Empire."

I would mention also the able, statesmanlike speech of Judge Rowan-Hamilton of the Supreme Court of the Leeward Islands, delivered before the Canadian Club of Halifax. I quote the Judge's closing remarks from the Toronto Globe, as follows: "If Canada does not take in the British West Indies, if she does not absorb them into her Dominion, the United States will eventually do so. Don't forget that."

I do not believe there is any sentiment among the people of the British West Indies for a political union with the United States. There are no more loyal British subjects in the Empire, but if the British West Indies and the United States are more closely knitted together, through commercial ties, development of the resources of these islands by American capital, and their larger control of transportation, the interests of the islands will naturally become more and more identified with those of the United States, rather than with the Mother Country and Canada.

While in Jamaica, three years ago, I found that a sentiment could be aroused there in favour of a political and commercial union with Canada, rather than one of commerce only. They were quick to see that the danger of being penalized by the United States, because of any preference they might grant Canada, would be removed if they became part of her Dominion, for aside from the greater consideration that the United States and Canada are destined to be the closest of friends, the United States would not want to punish any part of Canada, which is one of their chinery would be provided for adjusting and binding largest customers, and on whose raw material they place a high value. An editorial appeared at that time in the Jamaica "Gleaner," the most influential and the most widely circulated journal of the British West Indies, which, in commenting upon this proposed confederation, closed with the following true imperial sentiment: "The war has brought a spirit of oneness—especially that feeling of solidarity of Im-

perial sentiment—a oneness of outlook. If the West Indies stood with Canada as one political and economic unit, their position would be generally strengthened, they would be a part of a larger Canada, a greater Canada, a Canada that has proved her worth in the battlefield, as well as on the peaceful plains of trade and commerce. Confederation is the political and economic watchword of the future."

Second.—Referring to the change of Government for the British West Indies under Confederation, I note the doubt and fears you express with respect to the Government of the Islands being improved, by Canada having federal control of same, and the difficulties of the West Indians having a common citizenship with Canadians. But, as I have stated in other articles, there need be no change in the present system of Government for their local affairs. Their international questions, tariffs, post office, marine and fisheries departments and foreign relations would become centralized in the Federal Government at Ottawa, where they would have certain representation.

As to the difficulties of citizenship, the difference in colour and race should not make it so very much harder for Canada to govern under these suggested terms of union than it is for England now. Their present limited franchise which is working satisfactorily in these islands, because of their geographical position and climatic conditions, which do not produce agitators like the stimulating zone of the north, need not necessarily be enlarged. I do not think the supposition that a large number of West Indians would leave their homes and emigrate to Canada after Confederation is well founded, because they would then have no greater inducement to invade our Dominion than they have at present. On the contrary, the extra demand for labour resulting from Confederation would in addition to climatic conditions, be a sufficient inducement to keep these natives in their own more congenial surroundings.

In the ranks of the representative coloured men in the British West Indies, are found graduates of universities of Great Britain and the United States, editors, doctors, lawyers, who are a credit to their professions, and who would grace the floor of any parliament. The interchange of ideas between such men and Canadian statesmen would be mutually beneficial. I have found the coloured people of the British West Indies gentle, kindly of feeling, sensitive and receptive to enlightenment, and I am sure it would do much to broaden Canadians if they assumed the responsibility of adding these Islands to their Dominion.

Third.—Another question you raised, is the doubt as to whether the Islanders would find more satisfaction in governors sent from Ottawa, than in those sent out from London. They may have some preference for governors sent from Downing Street, although I think eventually the Islanders would find that Canadians could be selected who would have wider knowledge of the practical requirements for their development and commercial prosperity than some of the governors sent from the Mother Country, who are frequently selected from the ranks of retired British officers, whose military training does not fit them for directing the development of the resources of the Islands, or for the practical responsibilities of their office. But the Islanders could, if they wished, continue to have their governors sent out from Downing Street, a precedent for which has been established in the Commonwealth of Australia.

Fourth.—The failure to bring about successful commercial treaties between Canada and the British West Indies has been used as an argument to show the difficulty of accomplishing political union. In my judgment, this failure has been due to the lack of machinery and support for making the commercial interests mutual, workable and permanent, which conditions would be established by a political union. As an illustration of the above objection, the case of Trinidad has been mentioned. That Island, when about closing a reciprocity treaty with Canada in 1900, withdrew, and from their own point of view, I think they were perfectly justified. Why should an Island selling the major portion of its products to the United States, lay itself open to discrimination through a hostile tariff, by giving preference to Canada, which because of having no political interest in the Island, would be unable to protect it from same?

The present reciprocity treaty between Canada, and some of the islands, I understand, is not satisfactory to the latter, because those islands not granting Canada any preference are receiving the

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