The Land Titles System

Should it be centralized in the Prairie Provinces

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I READ with some interest and with much disapprobation, the article on the Land Titles System, in a recent number of The Guide, by J. B. Coyne of the Winnipeg Bar. The reason is not far to seek. Mr. Coyne is an Interests-lawyer—young, capable and pushful, while I am a Farmer-lawyer, grown gray in the service of the common people. He looks at the matter at issue from the standpoint of the interests, the corporations, the financial concerns, the creditor class, while I look at it from the point of view of the people and particularly of the farmers. His question is "Why not uniformity in the Prairie Provinces," in the land titles system. My answer is because uniformity spells centralization, class control and stagnation, while non-conformity means change, people's control and progress.

Let me discuss the matter shortly. If there is anything that makes me hot under the collar, it is when a representative of the special interests seeks to bolster up an argument in support of his class by telling the farmer that what the interests want is good for the farmer. I admit most freely that the "trader" and the "investor" know what is good for them and what they want. But I do protest, here as everywhere, against the camouflage of trying to make the farmer believe that what the creditor class want is just the identical thing that is good for the farmer, and that the advocate of the interests is a disinterested friend of the farmer. That is the kind of argument that is used to bolster up protection, high freight rates, centralized credits and all the other cinches that the creditor class pull on the farmer. I admit that the interests know what is good for themselves and that they are on the job of looking after themselves 365 days in the year. And I can only regret that the farmer lends such a ready ear to the blandishments of the interests. Every farmer should read, every week, that old fable of Aesop, about the wolves advising the sheep to dismiss the dogs, that watched over them.

The Selfishly Wise Interests

Mr. Coyne's general argument is that we should have uniformity in the laws of the various provinces. He commends our laws made by the Dominion parliament as being good, e.g., laws in regard to promissory notes, cheques, banking, shipping, patents and Dominion railways. He condemns our provincial laws, e.g., laws in regard to sales of goods, titles to lands, mortgages, partnerships, wills, suits, judgments, insurance, companies. He admits that this question was decided at Confederation and decided against his view, when the proposals in favor of a legislative union were turned down in favor of our present federal union. The issue was raised at that time in a clear-cut way between the same parties that raise it now, viz., the interests on the side of centralization the people on the side of decentralization. That was one instance in which the people won out against the privileged interests, the financial classes, the large property owners, the social magnates, and it was a God-send that the people did win out. Heaven knows that the interests have ridden the Canadian people hard and fast enough for the last 50 years, but if the interests, that centre at Toronto had, during these 50 years, reins and a whip that reached to Victoria on the west and to Halifax on the east, the common people would have had sorer mouths and rawer backs, even, than they have now.

There is no doubt that the privileged interests are selfishly wise when they seek uniform laws. It is a great advantage to the members of the creditor class that they can sit in their corporation offices at Toronto or Winnipeg and with the aid of their stenographers and their lawyers, that they can jerk the farmer on the Saskatchewan on his haunches and rifle his pockets just as readily as they can man-handle the farmer within 20 miles of their den. I have no doubt that his clients, the privileged property owners of Canada, would give Mr. Coyne $100,000,000 in cold cash tomorrow, if he could get them now what they wanted 50 years ago, a legislative union in Canada, and I frankly admit it would be dirt cheap for them at the price. If they could get that, then a few big corporations could rule Canada and do it more effectively and more cheaply even than they do it now. And some day they will try to get the British North America Act amended, but not today.

A Canadian legislative union, with uniform laws, made by the big corporations for their own benefit, would be an ideal condition for the corporations but it would be hell for the people. In the meantime, since they cannot get a legislative union, they are scheming to get the same results without the legislative union. They want to get the provincial legislatures to appoint commissioners on uniform laws who will prepare the laws and the legislatures will do the rest, that is pass the Bills prepared by these commissioners. Some of the advocates of this scheme say it is better than a legislative union, because the commissioners will pull the strings in the background and get passed what laws they wish while the representatives in the legislature will have to take the responsibility.

Parliament Loaded Against the People

Let me turn aside a moment here to note those laws which Mr. Coyne commends so highly, viz., banking laws, shipping laws, patent laws and railway laws, as this will give us an idea of the kind of law he and his clients think is a good law. These are all laws that are made by the Dominion Parliament, under the direction of the big corporations. And I say without hesitation that these laws are the most favorable of their kind, to the corporations, and the most unfair to the people of the laws of any civilized country on earth. The people have but small control over our local legislatures but they have enough control to prevent the provincial laws all being framed against them and in favor of the interests. But the Dominion Parliament is loaded against the people, the interests control it absolutely. If there is any cinch that the interests haven't got on the government of Canada, I can't name it; if such there be, they haven't it because they haven't thought of it. We might as well have mummies in the place of most of our rural members at Ottawa.

A Word of Admiration

And I want to say right here that I admire the gall of the corporation lawyer, that comes into a farmers' paper and attempts to lime the farmers with smooth arguments, and Delilah-like, coaxes them to get their locks shorn so that the Philistines can punch their eyes out and set them grinding in their mills. The arguments of Mr. Coyne are the barest assertions that uniform laws are beneficial to the people and, as they appear to me, they are practically all contrary to the facts. Let us examine some of these arguments shortly.

He says that uniform laws save money. They do for the creditor class but not for the people. Do the uniform banking laws that he commends, make bank interest on deposits high, and the interest on notes low? Or is it the opposite? Do the uniform railway laws save money for the man whose stock is killed on the railway or for the railway company that does the killing?

He says uniformity gives better and more certain law. I admit the certainty. The laws made by the interests, e.g., the customs laws and the excise laws are as certain as death, and they