

## Exploitation of the People's Heritage

Some years ago an unsuccessful attempt was made by the Aluminum Company of America, which originated from the Pittsburg Reduction Co., to dam the St. Lawrence River at the Long Sault Rapids. The scheme was frustrated by the strong protest of the Canadian people which caused the government of this country to take action, in concert with the International Waterways Commission and the government of the State of New York, to disallow the franchise, though not before a large sum had been spent by the promoters in land adjacent to the rapids; so sure were they that the scheme would go through. . . . At the present moment a second attempt is being made to attain the same object. But while the object is the same and the men backing the scheme the same, the plan of working is somewhat different. The present idea is to secure a Canadian charter through a Canadian corporation. Under this charter the promoters would be empowered to dam the St. Lawrence starting from the Canadian side, instead of from the American side as originally planned. Should such a charter be granted, the citizens of Canada, through their government, will be selling their birthright for a mess of pottage, for that is exactly what the granting of the franchise would mean. They would be giving away to American promoters, for export to establish American industries in place of Canadian ones, a perpetual power ultimately worth at least \$1,000,000,000 to us directly and indirectly. Happily for the country, Mayor Church of Toronto, in a telegram to the Premier, has drawn the attention of the citizens to the danger in time, though let it be understood that the application for the charter has not been withdrawn by any means. The promoters are right on the job, quietly but steadily steering their piratical bark through the shallows that all such charters have to sail, until it passes into the comparatively safe waters of public forgetfulness; there to be repainted to look like something else so that it may more easily be allowed to go through the locks of official inspectorship into the harbor of submarine franchises. . . . And then, the dear public be damned. . . .

We know of more than one charter that has been obtained this way at the expense of the citizens of Canada, and we shudder to think of how this country would have been exploited by the charter sharks if the vigilance of the Union of Canadian Municipalities had ceased for one moment during the last seventeen years. Surely then the time has come that all applications for Dominion charters and plans that affect public rights, should be passed on by a permanent body of experts, such as the Railway Commission, before being granted by Parliament or the Secretary of State. We would go further, and allow no permanent charter giving special privileges to be granted for private profit. There are in existence many charters of private

companies that are a standing menace to public rights. They are permanent, some even perpetual, and what is worse, negotiable; as instanced in the case of a charter that was granted for a certain purpose in British Columbia being bought up by an eastern corporation because that charter contained the words "and elsewhere" at the end of the clause giving special privileges in the district to which the charter was to apply; the said eastern corporation not being able to obtain a charter itself because of the strong opposition of a rival syndicate.

In the case of the damming of the St. Lawrence by a group of private interests, there is brought home to us a specific instance of an attempt being made to exploit the heritage of the people for private gain at the further expense of an undertaking now owned and operated successfully by the State for the direct benefit of the citizens. Sir Adam Beck has stated that should the St. Lawrence charter be granted, a blow will be given the hydro-electric development of Ontario. Such a statement from such a man should be sufficient to warrant the Federal authorities to dismiss the application, but added to Sir Adam's statement is a strong protest from the Commission of Conservation through its chairman (Sir Clifford Sifton), whose letter is well worth the study of every Canadian who has the future of the country at heart.

Canada's water powers are vast, but not inexhaustible, and must be conserved and developed by the state itself if the people are to enjoy the benefit of their heritage. That this can be done successfully has been demonstrated beyond the shadow of a doubt by the Ontario Hydro-Electric — a co-operative movement between the provincial and local authorities by which the great power of Niagara is brought to the home of every citizen in the province at a price so low that has never been reached by any other province in Canada, nor in any other part of the North American continent. And Sir Adam, the genius of this great movement, is emphatic in stating that the other provinces could be equally as well off as Ontario. The resources of this Dominion are almost illimitable, but that does not mean that the authorities have any right to allow them to be exploited for private gain; otherwise Canada will soon be in the same position as Mexico — a country, one of the richest in minerals, oil, etc., yet one of the poorest, because its many governments have granted from time to time so many franchises for practically nothing that it has nothing left to develop for its own people. The citizens look to the government of this country to protect them from the onslaughts of the exploiter, not only in the case of the St. Lawrence development, but in every instance. The very fact of their election makes them keepers of a trust which they dare not violate by giving away that which belongs to the state.