

# The Outlook for Democracy in Canada

By EDWARD PORRITT

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Concluded from Last Week

From 1878 to 1911 first one party and then the other was equally subservient to the many vested interests long entrenched in Dominion politics. The Liberal governments of 1896-1911 did much more for these interests than the Conservative governments of 1878-1896. But the difference was not due to any lack of zeal for these interests by the Conservative party, not to any shortcomings that the vested and privileged interests could charge against the Conservatives when they were in power at Ottawa. It was due to the fact that by the time the Liberal government had been in power for the duration of one parliament—certainly by the end of 1904—new privileged or predatory interests had barnacled themselves on the government; while as regards the older interests, those turned over to the Liberal government from the Conservative government in 1896—they were more ravenous than at any time up to the end of the Macdonald-Thompson-Tupper regime, because with the development of the western provinces and large immigration, new opportunities were offering that could be made to lend themselves to exploitation.

Canada was a country with a much larger population from 1896 to 1911 than it was from 1878 to 1896. Canada beyond the Great Lakes was being developed and exploited; and the Liberal government had consequently many more opportunities for accommodating and serving the vested interests than Conservative governments had had in the period from the incoming of the Macdonald government in 1878 to the downfall from sheer decay of the Tupper government in 1896.

Under the abnormal conditions of 1896-1911, with the Liberal party in these years acting on the policies and following the ethics and methods of the Conservative party of the Macdonald regime, political life in the constituencies became stagnant, except for the recurring stir of each general election. In spots it became worse than stagnant; and from every point of view politics were much more dreary and less characterized by popular enthusiasm and hopefulness than at any time since the days of Papineau and William Lyon Mackenzie.

## Worth Fighting For?

Just about the time that it was thought the most blackening of the exposures in connection with the Manitoba legislative building scandal had been made, and there was nothing more serious still to come, the Toronto World despairingly exclaimed that a Canada like that revealed at Winnipeg was scarcely worth fighting for in Flanders. If a Canadian journal would thus confess its loss of heart, it is not difficult to imagine what the Morning Post would say were it to undertake to survey democracy in the Dominion of Canada from confederation to the beginning of the war that has been devastating three continents since August, 1914, and on which hinges the future of Anglo-Saxon political ideals and Anglo-Saxon political and social civilization.

The oldest, the foremost and the ablest exponent in London of the aristocratic conception of government would no doubt affirm that democracy in Canada had proved itself a failure. It might even question whether the eight million people who live in the Dominion might not have had a better, a more efficient and more economical government had an end not been made to government by family compacts, which was the order in most of the old British North American provinces until it was upset by the rebellion of 1837.

## The New Feudalism

At first sight it would seem as if Canada had only exchanged the rule of family compacts for rule by the new feudalism, acting thru politicians who up to the outbreak of the great war seemed to live only for their salaries

and to serve their real masters. There was, it will be recalled, an interval of not more than eighteen years during which Canada was free from both family compacts and the new feudalism; for the new feudalism, as represented by the beneficiaries of protective tariffs, fastened itself on the united provinces of Ontario and Quebec as early as 1858-1859. Only for brief periods between 1858 and 1878 was the hold of this new feudalism loosened. There was a little relief from its exactions in the three or four years preceding confederation, and from confederation to the adoption of the full-fledged national policy by Macdonald and the Conservatives. But since 1879 it has continuously had a tight and all-embracing grip on the Dominion.

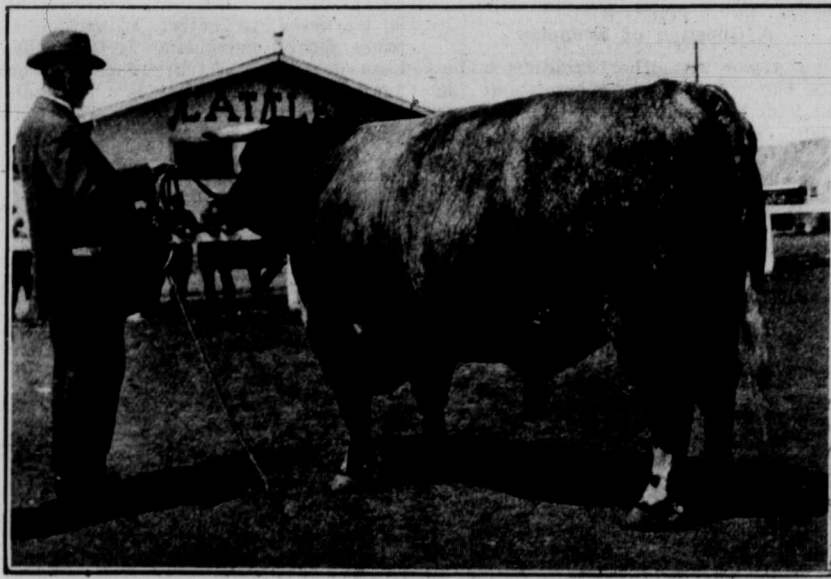
Every year from 1879 to the great war, no matter what government happened to be in power at Ottawa, the grip of the new feudalism of the tariff beneficiaries was increased, until today it would seem to have a stranglehold which nothing but an electoral uprising from Halifax to Vancouver could dislodge. Other interests besides the tariff beneficiaries have been for many years past of the new feudalism, and with the incoming of these newer interests the outlook for democracy in Canada, as democracy is today understood and practiced, has become much more discouraging than it was in the

that the struggles of Papineau and William Lyon Mackenzie, the work of Lord John Russell, Molesworth and Roebuck at Westminster, and of Durham and Sydenham in Canada, had all gone for nothing—that all the toilsome and costly agitation of 1820-1840 of the Liberal reformers of Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia had resulted only in the substitution of the new feudalism for the old family compacts, it must always be remembered that appearances here do not tell the whole story. Much was gained between the rebellion of 1837 and confederation; much was gained then and in later years that is of immense significance at this crisis in the history of the Dominion, when Canada must make a new political start if democracy is not to be a failure, and if Canada is not to perpetuate its present-day notoriety of being the most corrupt country in the English-speaking world.

Earlier in these articles—at the point when I was enumerating the reasons for my assertion that the years from 1896 to 1911 were the most dismal period in Canadian history—I made the statement that the Dominion "is still a democracy, with more power inherent in it than is possessed by a democracy in any other part of the English-speaking world, not excepting even Great Britain or the United States."

## A Democratic Constitution

Here are my proofs for what may



"Oakland Star," first prize aged Shorthorn bull at Brandon Exhibition. Shown and owned by J. G. Barron, Carberry, Man.

years from confederation to the incoming of the Macdonald government in 1878.

The new feudalism is so aggressive and audacious—it cares so little for independent expressions of opinion as long as it maintains its grip on government and on the daily newspapers which are the subservient tools of the new feudalism, and whose business it is to mislead or falsify public opinion, that a writer in the Queen's Quarterly, for July, asked with indignation, apropos of the Lash outrage—the burning of the tell-tale Winnipeg-Ottawa telegrams called for by the royal commission—"Who owns Canada, anyway?"

For many legislative and for some executive and administrative functions at Ottawa, Canada would seem to be owned by the new feudalism, political lawyers of the pie-counter order, favored contractors, and the comparatively few merchants and traders who thru political pull have succeeded in getting their names on the patronage list. No one will dare today to affirm that Canada is owned and controlled by the people of the Dominion, or that the electors thru the House of Commons control the fortunes of the Dominion as the people of the United Kingdom, in normal times thru parliament, control the political destinies of their country.

While at first sight it would seem

seem a sweeping claim. Canada has a really democratic parliamentary franchise. Its members of parliament are paid; and official election expenses are a public charge which unfortunately is not the case in the United Kingdom. It has a senate—a nominated chamber—which has never been of any continuous usefulness except from the point of view of the pie-counter politicians who are the curse of Canadian politics, and of those of every other country with representative institutions in which pie-counter politicians have established themselves.

But it is infinitely easier to amend the North America Act of 1867—the constitution of the Dominion—than it is to effect a reform in the written or unwritten divisions of the British constitution. It is infinitely easier also to amend the British North America Act than it is to amend the constitution of the United States; and when once the electorate of Canada has made up its mind that the senate must go, there will be no serious opposition at Westminster to the amendment which is intended to bring about this long-overdue reform.

For nearly three-quarters of a century, thanks to the new and splendid era in British colonial policy that directly resulted from the agitations and the fierce struggles of Papineau and Mackenzie and the other radical re-

formers of 1837—the popular will of Canada, constitutionally expressed thru parliamentary action at Ottawa, is law at Westminster. The senate can be abolished whenever the electorate of Canada intimates to the British parliament that it is weary of the second chamber at Ottawa, and convinced of its uselessness except to furnish life pensions from the Dominion treasury to political mechanics and pie-counter politicians.

Since 1858-1859 Canada has possessed the unquestioned right to make her own tariffs—tariffs for revenue or protective tariffs like those continuously on the statute books since 1858—without the least interference from Downing Street, and regardless of British manufacturing and commercial interests. As will be recalled, the preference for Great Britain in Dominion tariffs dates no farther back than 1897; and the existing preference is of much less value to exporters in the United Kingdom than was that of 1900-1904. Downing Street, it should always be remembered, never asked for any preference; and, moreover, Downing Street never complained when, at the instance of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, the whittling down of the preference, established by the tariff act of 1897, was begun in 1904 and continued on a large scale at the revision in 1907.

Canada today has the right to negotiate her own commercial conventions and treaties. She has the right to make her own immigration laws—as completely and as free from protest or question from Downing Street as the right is enjoyed by the United States since 1783. The right to make her own navigation laws was conceded to the Dominion by Great Britain within a year or so after confederation; and, as is well-known, Ottawa can veto the nomination of a man whom Canada would regard as undesirable in the high office of Governor-General.

## The People to Blame

No English-speaking country with whose constitution I am familiar is in possession of more democratic governmental machinery than the Dominion of Canada. If the new feudalism, the lawyer-politicians, the political mechanics, the pie-counter politicians, the contractors and the patronage list men are in control of the fortunes of Canada, it is obviously the fault of the Canadian people, who rather than act together outside existing party lines, have been willing that these privileged interests should rule over them and exploit them at will.

Under the best of conditions democracy must have hard sledding in a new and developing country. The most favorable field for democracy is an old and developed country like England or Scotland, where material gains as the prize of life do not obliterate all standards except the standard of wealth; and where the old-world idea that every man owes something to the political and social civilization into which he was born, can thrive and gain strength.

Much of the political depression and demoralization in Canada, and the despair in some places that these have seemingly engendered, are due to the fact that Canadians have come to believe that mere voting is all there is to democracy. This idea must have had its origin with political mechanics whose only concern is to deliver votes. It was Mr. Dooley who in the early stages of trouble in the Transvaal over the claim of the Outlanders for votes—the trouble that resulted in the South African war of 1899-1902—counselled the late lamented Kruger to give the clamorous Outlanders the vote and himself to do the counting at the elections. Canadians have too long concerned themselves only with voting, and too long have good-naturedly permitted the new feudalism and its nondescript allies to arrange legislative programs, and run up bills which in one way or another—

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