

REFLECTIONS BY A WINNIPEG CONSERVATIVE ON THE LIBERAL CONVENTION

Winnipeg, August 12, 1917.

PERMIT me to state at the very start that I am a bold, unrepentant Winnipeg Conservative; that I am not ashamed to confess to a considerable liking and admiration for Sir Rodmond Roblin in spite of all that has happened; that my contempt for Mr. Justice Galt might—were he aware of it—bring upon me the pains and penalties of a life sentence at Stoney Mountain; and that I have even a sneaking admiration for one "Bob" Rogers, in spite of his decoration of hoofs and horns. I am aware that such a confession puts me in wrong at the very start with Liberal readers of the Canadian Courier, but probably someone would guess the damning truth in any event and I might as well confess to it at the start.

This, by way of preliminary. I want to state a few opinions about the big Liberal Convention which was held in Winnipeg, August 7th, 8th and 9th.

Yes, I managed to get in. Never mind how. Perhaps by use of the magic word "press," perhaps through the kindly perjury of a Liberal delegate friend who vouched for me as being a Simon pure Grit. In any event, I managed to get past the doorkeeper in spite of drastic and unprecedented precautions which were taken to exclude any who might bear on their foreheads the mark of the beast of Toryism. And strange as it may seem, from the comments of those around me and from the applause which came from the carefully admitted and hand picked lot of spectators, it would seem that while I didn't agree with the Convention very often in what it was doing, I was not the only heretic there. The spectators sympathized with the delegates whole heartedly when they were engaged in damning the Government; they agreed with the spirit of most of the radical planks inserted in the platform, but when the two big questions, Conscription and Party Leadership, came up for discussion, delegates and spectators were about as far apart as the poles in their sympathies. The delegates booed Mr. Turriff while the onlookers applauded him.

I have a very high respect for the acumen of the editor of the Canadian Courier, although I often disagree with his conclusions. But when I read in the issue of August 11th his forecast of what was certain to happen, and what was likely to happen at this Liberal Convention in Winnipeg, I was confirmed in my opinion that political prophecy is a dangerous pastime. He told us, as you may remember, that the Convention would organize a separate western wing of the Liberal party and that in all probability a strong man would emerge as its leader. He reminded us that it had been predicted that the next Liberal leader must come from the West. "The Convention in Winnipeg," he said, "will be one very good way of demonstrating what the West has to offer as a successor to Sir Wilfrid when he decides to step out. The man who at the head of his group can capture the Convention independent of Ottawa should be a good prospect. We shall see. There never has been a Western Premier of Canada. If the Convention adopts the platform of any independent group and fuses Western Liberalism on a Progressive ticket coupled with an aggressive War Policy, that organization will be a power in the next election."

HE told us, moreover, that Premier Norris, of Manitoba, favours cutting the painter from Laurier and forming a non-party Government for winning the war. He told us of the busy brain of Hon. A. B. Hudson supporting Mr. Norris in this patriotic, nonpartisan stand. He stated that Hon. J. A. Calder, of Saskatchewan, was said to be a strong backer of Mr. Norris in the promotion of this programme. But I do not wish to be cruel, and hence I shall not recall any more of the editor's predictions which were falsified by the result.

There were many others who made the same mis-

THIS article was unsolicited. We publish it partly as a joke on the editor, and on all those of legionary number in the West or elsewhere who had similar expectations of how that convention cat would jump. The writer we do not personally know, except his name and address. For a Conservative he has succeeded in being remarkably interesting. Had it come sooner we should have printed the article along with the photographs on the two preceding pages.—The Editor.

takes. Before I proceed to deal with what the Convention really did, permit me to outline what Western Conservatives feared that it would do and what they were almost certain that it could not fail to do.

There were unregenerate Winnipeg Tories who, in conversation among themselves, feared the very worst. The sad experiences of the last two or three years have taught us to look for unpleasant things. Winnipeg Conservatives fully expected that this Convention would outbid the Government by coming out flat-footed in favour of not only conscription of men, but in favour of "Conscription of Wealth," as well. Very few people have any clear idea what the latter term means, but it has a popularity all its own among the great mass of us who have no wealth to be conscripted and hence would not object to the pleasing spectacle of "Mr. Gotrox" having to dig down to help win the war. They expected that the Convention would enthusiastically endorse the revolt of their insurgent representatives at Ottawa, that men like Turriff and Buchanan would be the white-haired boys of the gathering, that Hon. Frank Oliver would have a very sad time of it and that the ears of the venerable Liberal Chieftain would burn under his silver plumes if any echoes should reach him of the hard things that would be said about him by the Conscriptionist, win-the-war enthusiasts at that Liberal Convention. Having outbid the Government in win-the-war enthusiasm—an easy thing to do, when out of power and without responsibility—Winnipeg Conservatives feared that the Convention would endorse a peculiarly Western and radical platform which would have an almost irresistible appeal among the grain grower element.

With such a platform, Winnipeg Conservatives feared that the Western wing of the Liberal party would sweep all four of the Western provinces. What then? The Western group by an alliance with Sir Wilfrid's solid Quebec, and such odd supporters as he might succeed in getting from Ontario and the Maritime Provinces, would outnumber the Government members. What then? Ah! We feared a compromise, we feared the magic of the Laurier name. We feared that the two wings would unite to form a Government. The Western wing would get their way about the Tariff, they would secure a few radical changes in the banking system dear to the heart of the Grain Grower on the plains, and the price would be the repeal of the Military Service Act. Sir Wilfrid would assure the Western Win-the-War enthusiasts that the voluntary system had never had a fair chance under an incompetent Conservative administration, that his sunny smile and the magic of his white plumes would coax the required recruits from the reluctant Province of Quebec. One way, he would tell them, lies national disunion, perhaps even the danger of rebellion; the other way lies success by harmony and conciliation. Also the other way lie the spoils of office, the overthrow of the Borden Government and the political damnation of Bob Rogers.

Such were the fears of Winnipeg Conservatives. They went a little farther than the editor of the Canadian Courier and they were suspicious of the motives of some Liberal politicians, which the editor was not; but Winnipeg Conservatives were as far

wrong in their prophecies as was the editor of this paper.

What happened? Several things. One notable event was the Western visit of Sir Clifford Sifton. If it was designed to advance the cause of Union Government and endorsement of conscription among Western Liberals, it was a "bonehead" play. Sir Clifford is a man of great political acumen, but the greatest men sometimes make mistakes. He should not have come West. His bitterest enemies—and their name is legion—concede his great abilities; they admit that his genius for organization and his splendid executive powers would be of infinite value to the country were he given the chance to exercise them as a member of a real Win-the-War Government. They feared that he was looking for such an opportunity in a Union Government, and the plain truth is that even "Bob" Rogers has not one-tenth of the number of bitter enemies among Western Liberals as has Sir Clifford Sifton. He has not been forgiven yet for his opposition to Reciprocity, upon which Western Liberalism had set its heart six years ago. And there are other reasons why Western Liberals dislike him, which it is not necessary to enlarge upon in this connection. Suffice it to say, that the party managers who desired above all things to maintain at least a semblance of union with Sir Wilfrid were greatly assisted in their work by Sifton's visit to the West.

FOR two days the Resolutions Committee kept the Convention busy with non-essentials. Great violence was done to the Tariff, unholy hands were laid upon the ark of the financial covenant, the Canadian banking system. Some of the things that were said would give Sir Edmund Walker and Sir Vincent Meredith the cold shivers. The Radicals had a very enjoyable time. There was little or no restraint upon them, and for two days they revelled in the building up of a Canadian Utopia on paper.

But as time went on they grew tired of it. There wasn't enough opposition to make things interesting. To be sure there was a strong breeze from British Columbia when the Resolution was passed demanding the free admission of fruit and lumber, but that lasted only an hour or so. What was keeping back the big Resolution? Were the wires down between Winnipeg and Ottawa? Wouldn't the Old Chief at Ottawa give way a single inch? Was a split inevitable? Perish the thought!

On the evening of the second day Dr. Neely, M.P., introduced the big Resolution. I need not quote it, for all Canada has read it. It read well, it sounded well, it was a work of art from both a literary and a political standpoint—but it carefully failed to mention the word compulsion. Nor did Dr. Neely mention the word in the course of his forceful and eloquent speech. No one could find any particular fault with the resolution, but no one could be quite sure what it really meant. Was the Military Service Act to be supported or opposed? Did the resolution favour the immediate enforcement of Conscription, or a last attempt to get recruits on the voluntary plan? Could one be certain that the Resolution favoured Conscription under any circumstances?

While the hall was still ringing with the applause that rewarded the oratory of the mover and seconder, J. G. Turriff, M.P., made his way to the platform. And he spilled the beans! He agreed with everything that Dr. Neely had said, he outdid him in damning the Borden Government and all its works—but he presumed that the Convention favoured Conscription and, that being so, why not say so in plain English? He moved that four words be added to the resolution—"By compulsion if necessary."

Then the storm broke in all its fury. No one mentioned the matter, but the fact that Mr. Turriff is said to be a relative of Sir Clifford Sifton (etc.), had a lot to do with the opposition. The Hon. Arthur

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