

The C. C. F. — A Third Political Party

By F. R. Scott

It is a happy sign of the development of progressive political thinking in Canada that the only political club at McGill is the Labour Club, and that at the moment when it ventures to produce a paper of its own there has come into existence a new political party professing the ideas which the Club has been proclaiming for the past six years. Formerly the undergraduate who belonged to the Labour Club learnt to face social and political realities, but there was little prospect of a political career for him unless he threw overboard his principles and joined blindly in the Liberal-Conservative merry-go-round. Today the same member, if he is interested in public life, has a chance of entering a party devoted to the welfare of the mass of the people instead of to the "interests", and pledged to set up a democratic co-operative state in Canada in lieu of the present thinly-veiled plutocracy. The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation has arrived.

The new party was created at a conference of the delegates of western labour and farmer parties, held at Calgary on August 1st, 1932. At that meeting the organisations represented agreed to a programme for united political action and decided to federate themselves into a single party which all farmer, labour and socialist bodies in Canada would be asked to join. The name Co-operative Commonwealth Federation — usually abbreviated to the initials C.C.F.—was adopted, and Mr. J. S. Woodsworth, M.P., the man who more than any other has given post-war Canada a political philosophy, was chosen as President. An energetic campaign was immediately launched, and after only six months activity the C.C.F. has obtained the affiliation of the United Farmers of Alberta, of Saskatchewan and of Ontario, and the Labour parties in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Toronto and Montreal. In addition, the Party is busy organising what are called "C.C.F. Clubs", to take in individuals who are not members of farmer or labour groups. For the first time in the history of Canada farmers, industrial labourers and the dispossessed and dissatisfied of the white-collar class have united for independent political action on a nation-wide scale. In more Marxian terms, the class-struggle has sharpened.

The explanation of the growth of the C.C.F. movement is to be found in the educative effects of the world-crisis, and in the tradition of third-party action in Canadian politics. The world crisis has convinced many people, including those not normally given to radical thinking, that our present difficulties are due to structural defects in the system rather than to er-

rors of management. It does not require much insight or excessive morality to see that capitalism fails to measure up to reasonable standards either of ethics or of practical efficiency. Examples of its ethical defects are its emphasis on personal ambition and success, almost invariably measured in terms of acquisition of property; its callousness to human welfare; the gross injustice of its inevitable maldistribution of wealth; its preference for the motive of private profit rather than public service. Amongst its practical defects are its enormous wastage of human effort and productive capacity through lack of co-ordination and planning; its tendency to exploit natural resources for quick profit rather than to develop and conserve them; its over-diversion of money into investment, and under-diversion into channels of consumption, with all the consequent economic dislocations; its wave-like progress from boom to depression. Capitalism as a way of life is inferior, and as a system for supplying human needs is unfair and unreliable. It will have to be changed out of all recognition if a decent social order and permanent economic improvement are to be achieved.

To effect this change without violence will involve an intelligent audacity in political action. Where may this be found? In the Conservative or Liberal Parties? The notion is absurd for two reasons: first because the political creeds of both these parties assume the continued existence of the very bases of capitalism which must be eradicated, such as the profit motive and private ownership of industry — both parties being, on any thorough class analysis, essentially representative of the same interests in society and only being divided for the purpose of running what is humorously called the "two-party system"; and secondly because since both live upon and hence obey the wealthy companies and groups who will be most seriously affected by the necessary changes, neither is free to follow a policy of social reconstruction even if it were desirous of doing so. A different sort of party — different in philosophy, in personnel, and above all in the class from which it derives its support — is absolutely essential if we are to effect a transition to a new type of society.

The crisis, then, has made certain fundamental things about Canadian politics very clear. A new political instrument has to be built for the new job. Does this mean that existing left wing parties should be ignored? It would be stupid to do so, when they are so strongly entrenched, so nearly in agreement on programme and so obviously composed of the same exploited

classes, as are the various farmer and labour parties in different parts of Canada. The wiser, indeed the only possible course for the C.C.F. was to unite them on a common programme, allowing them to retain their identity and organisation. This was the policy actually followed at Calgary; and the new party is, as its name implies, a Federation of local groups. It does not destroy what it absorbs, but gives its constituent parts a machinery for effective co-operation. At some future time, as policies harden and the need for discipline grows, it may be desirable to disband the affiliated bodies, but the moment is not yet opportune. The present structure of the C.C.F. incorporates in the party the very considerable, if chequered, tradition of third-party action, which has done so much to introduce a note of realism into Canadian politics in the past 15 years. What is more, it gives the C.C.F. at the outset an extensive organisation; for the machinery of the parts is now at the disposal of the whole party. The rapid growth of the movement would have been impossible if the ground had not been largely prepared by the work which these independent groups had done.

The programme of the party has not yet been worked out in more than general terms. Its fundamental aim, however, and one which definitely marks it as an enemy of the capitalist system, is stated to be "the establishment in Canada of a Co-operative Commonwealth in which the basic principle regulating production, distribution and exchange will be the supplying of human needs instead of the making of profits." This purpose provides a criterion by which to test any proposed legislation. It sets an ultimate goal. In dealing with immediate problems, the programme of the party recommends—

1. The establishment of a planned system of social economy for the production, distribution and exchange of all goods and services.

2. Socialization of the banking, credit and financial system of the country, together with the social ownership, development, operation and control of public utilities and natural resources.

3. Security of tenure for the farmer in his use-land and for the worker in his home. (Use-land is land which is used for productive purposes as distinct from that held for speculation.)

4. The retention and extension of all existing social legislation and facilities, with adequate provision for insurance against crop failure, illness, accident, old age and unemployment during the transi-

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