

(December 3, 1919.)

Present Problems in Ontario

BY HONOURABLE E. C. DRURY.*

Your Honour and Gentlemen, I feel highly honoured being your guest at this meeting to-day because I recognize, not only the standing of the Canadian Club in this City of Toronto, but I recognize also the very useful work, the almost indispensable work, this organization is doing throughout this province and the Dominion. It is highly important that public opinion should be formed correctly, and in forming that opinion your organization has no mean part. That citizens should get together and hear with open minds all questions of public interest discussed is essential in order that we may have well-informed public opinion. Without it we cannot carry on the government of the country and cannot carry on our influence as we should.

Mr. President, it is not the first time I have been the guest of the Toronto Canadian Club. I recall that fourteen years ago you asked an unknown young farmer, who had made some statement before the Tariff Commission of the Laurier Government, to be your guest. I do not remember where you held your meeting. I do distinctly remember that the gathering was not more, I think I am safe in saying, than one third or one quarter the size of this gathering. I congratulate you on the progress you have made in numbers and in importance in the ensuing years.

Now you want to know something about this strange thing that has come to pass. It is a thing that was unlooked for and that came as a total surprise, and to no one was it a greater surprise than to the organized farmers themselves. With the organized farmers the political movement was a very secondary consideration. And of the political movement of the organized farmers the provincial movement was a secondary consideration; because, frankly, the organized farmers throughout the province were thinking most seriously of Dominion political matters, and of provincial matters as

*Mr Drury addressed the Club shortly after taking office as Premier of Ontario, at the head of a Farmer-Labor Government.

only of secondary importance. So I feel very humble to-day in coming to speak to you of something which might be described as only of secondary importance.

However, the fact of the matter was this, that a great organization had grown up throughout the country; that organization had taken as its watch word, "Service." It was organized along unselfish lines. It has never asked for anything in the line of legislation other than the square deal. No one can point his finger at a single resolution passed by the United Farmers of Ontario and say it asked for anything like class privilege. In fact, from the first we have been fighting class consideration in our defense. It was against our principles, and those principles have never been violated to ask for anything like class privileges for ourselves.

That organization entered the political field, not as an organization, but individually,—the counties, the ridings, entered the field. They had no thought, frankly, on entering other than to obtain adequate representation for their calling, which they thought inadequately represented in the past, they thought that there were not enough representatives in the Legislature to put forward properly the claims of the basic industry of the country. And you know how the basic industry, which is agriculture and which I think will remain agriculture,—had been declining. It had been declining largely because the viewpoint of that industry had not been put forward with sufficient force and clearness in the legislatures and parliament of the country.

With that decline we were greatly concerned. It does not matter what your occupation is, it is of great concern to all of you. This great City of Toronto, with its manufacturers, with its great commercial interests, with its universities, is, after all, dependent, as our national life is dependent, for its vitality on the land back of Toronto and back of all our other towns and cities. We cannot get away from that; and it is not stressing one phase of our national life too much if we face clearly the fact that without agriculture Canada would be a nonentity; and the public knows it, you know it; and we might as well face the fact.

The farmers realized that their only salvation lay in taking action; but in taking action they did not expect what they got. They found themselves—a political party with no head at all—the only party at all likely to be capable of carrying on the King's government. And so they carried on. In pre-

paration they held a convention; and, whether wisely or not, chose me as their leader. I did my best to form a Government. We have one or two samples here to-day; you can look them over and see whether they meet with your approval.

I have this to say, however, that I am not ashamed of my colleagues, and I am getting more proud every day of the colleagues I have been able to gather around me. They will do good work in the government of this province. We are faced with a very difficult situation; and, as I know your time is short, I mean to deal with just a few specific things we mean to take action on in the future—whether that future be long or short.

I want to tell you something of the political situation with which we are confronted. We are confronted with the fact that the two groups which have formed the coalition and are undertaking the government have a very very narrow majority, and that the followers themselves of these two groups are not of a servile frame of mind. But with all the difficulties I am glad that we cannot count a servile following in the House. It would be a great misfortune if we could count noses and know every man who would support us. We are placed in a position where we cannot count noses; and, while I do not know the Labor men as well as the U. F. O. men, I know these men will insist upon thinking for themselves and forming their own conclusions. We will have that condition in the house where the Government will have to appeal, on every question, on the merits of the proposal itself.

Caucus government, I think, will be a thing of the past. I think it will be impossible because I do not think that the majority party in the House is in any mood to sink individual views to the will of the majority in caucus. That means that every question will have to be discussed and tested in the House on its merits; it means that the Government must be very careful as to its measures, which will come before representatives of the people, and not representatives of a party, for decision. Each question will be decided on the merits of that question, and not on its merits from the party standpoint.

I know, Mr. President, that perhaps tradition has forced us into the form of party government in Ontario. Personally, I have not been able to see very much justification for it—for the idea that there must be two parties; one party which is known as His Majesty's Government, and the other party

as His Majesty's Loyal Opposition. It is rather a misnomer to begin with; and when it is the duty of one party on any and all occasions to oppose every measure, it does not appeal to me as being the best we can get out of our representative system. After all, important things performed by our municipal governments—cities, towns, counties, and townships—which do more governing than the central bodies, are performed by bodies not divided into opposition and government, but who meet together to give the best that is in them in considering all the matters that come before them.

Whether we wish it or not, we are going to face very much that condition in our parliament. I think it will be for the good of the whole province. We are going to be faced with a difficult proposition, or rather the Speaker will be, in deciding who is leader of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition. The Speaker may be put to the necessity of drawing straws for it, or cutting it out. I believe that name is a misnomer. I do not see why there is any such thing as a "Loyal Opposition" and a leader of that "Loyal Opposition." I have hopes that this new experiment will result in largely mitigating the evils of the party system as applied to our legislature.

Now, our tenure of life, a good many will say, is uncertain. It may be. I do not know that it is at all important that it should be certain. I do not know that it is at all important that we should fortify ourselves to last one year, or four years, or ten years. I do know that it is all-important that we should carry on our government clean and straight. And I wish to stand on record that it will do nothing, that I will do nothing, to make us more secure in office or to prolong our life as a government at the sacrifice of our honesty and straightforwardness. To me, personally, it is a matter of extreme indifference whether I shall carry on the work I am attempting now or whether I shall go back to my farm. That does not matter at all. It is a matter of vital interest to me that there should be good government, clean government, and strong government. The personal element will sink out of it so far as I am concerned, and so far, I think, as all the members of the Cabinet are concerned. The important thing is that we steer a straight course, and I shall leave nothing undone to steer that straight course.

As to the problems that confront us, there has been expressed the opinion that Ontario might look for class legislation from a government which has had its birth in a class movement.

We need not disguise matters. We need not cover them up. The farmers organized as a class organization, as a powerful, solid, homogeneous organization; and they elected what is at least the nucleus of the present Government. Need we fear class legislation? I think I speak not only for myself and my Cabinet, but for the representatives in the House; and I speak for more than that, I speak for the great population in the country. I had the pleasure of meeting a very representative gathering of them last night; and I put to them this one question, "Do you want or do you expect from the Government you put into power anything in the line of class legislation?" And the whole hall thundered, "NO." I believe that is the truth of the matter. There is no thought of class legislation.

But there is a deeper thing this country, this province, wants and that is progressive legislation. The tasks that confront us are largely of an administrative nature. We have got good laws, lots of them. The great trouble with them in the past was that they have not been enforced. Our problem will not be to introduce very many new laws. For the immediate future there is nothing very drastic or very revolutionary required in the matter of legislation. The matters that lie before us are largely administrative, and I believe an administration along right lines can do a great deal for the province.

Some questions are up. One is the great question of Education. I am frank to say that I think the biggest question at the present time is nursed by my friend Honourable Mr. Grant, the question of education. We have had in this province in the past a great educational system, we have had universities that have done magnificent work. We have had a great deal of attention paid to higher education, and it has given results; but perhaps we do neglect the education of the ninety per cent. of our people who do not get any farther than the common schools. It will not be for us, then, in any way to minimize the importance of the collegiate, nor will it be for us to restrict the Universities. We want that work to go on. But we must consider, and we must improve, the common school education.

It seems to me the educational condition of a people requires a good average and it does not altogether get us out of the difficulty if we have a comparatively few extra-well-learned men. I remember hearing of a man who described a fence—

and I may speak in agricultural terms. A visitor asked him whether it was a good fence. He said, "Well, it was a good average fence anyway, low in some spots and high in others." It didn't serve the purpose of a fence, because a fence is just about as high all over as it is in its lowest part. A similar situation exists in regard to education. The vital need of this country is education in the common schools which shall fit the ninety per cent for intelligent, thinking citizenship.

It is perhaps a little too soon to make any announcement of policy. We have, however, thought that this is our first and most serious consideration. Frankly, I believe a great deal can be done along the line of simplification of curriculum and along the line of freeing the teachers from too much regulation; because, after all, there is no reason in the world why Tom Smith and John Brown, two boys of different capabilities, although expected to go through school together, should be put through entirely the same mill and turned out in the same mould. If we could give our teachers a little freedom and get away from a condition of too much authority from the top, we could approach the condition of the schools of thirty and forty years ago, which did excellent work in turning out good citizens.

I have never had much faith in a man being able to direct another man how to plow from across a forty-rod field. And I have not very much faith in an official sitting in his office being able to direct the minute matters that come before the teachers in the country and the towns. I believe that along the line of freedom—and perhaps of a campaign which will arouse popular interest in that thing which is of the most public interest, that thing of education of the ninety per cent—lies the hope of revivification of the common schools which will enable the teachers to remain with their schools and take the permanent place which they should take in the rural district. It is our duty, and we will make an honest attempt to solve this question.

I do not believe it will be directed along technical or vocation lines. I do not care for that idea. It was the idea Germany carried through to perfection. After all, the main thing is not to make good carpenters or good farm hands; the main thing is to make good citizens. That is only one of the many questions, and I want to get along for your sake and for mine too.

Another big question we have to deal with immediately is the question of forests, the forest policy of this province. Twenty years ago I was one of a group of students who got together and began to take a great deal of interest in forests. You know, the old foresters of the Canadian forests did not care anything about the preservation of our forests, they just simply went in and cut down what they wanted. You probably remember old men speaking disparagingly of second-growth timber. Well, we all know that all timber is second-growth, or thousand-growth.

The effect of our forestry policy, or lack of policy has been that gradually our timber resources have been depleted. Now, seventy years will produce a pine forest that is of high mercantile value and growing more valuable every year. We have neglected that fact. Our great north country, where it already is cut over, could produce timber crops; but has been mistreated to the detriment of the whole of the province. Areas have been burnt over time and again, and nothing has been done in the way of reforestation. Nothing was done but appeal to the lumbermen to replace wastage. Lumbering regulations have been relaxed. Brush has been left on the ground; and fire dropped there causing conflagrations in future years, destroying settlers on the ground. We have got to remedy all that, and see to it that the great north country is made a source of revenue to the whole province, and a feeder to the great industrial communities of this country, as a regulator of occupation and employment.

We talk a great deal—and this is referring to an agricultural line again, of the difficulty of getting help on the farm, essential help. The great regulator in times past was the employment in the lumber woods; but, as those lumber woods receded farther north year by year and that industry got into the hands of foreigners and out of the hands of native-born Canadians, that essential employment disappeared. That is only one instance of the benefits of a properly carried on restorative forestry policy. We have got to take that policy, and in doing it we will have to use a good deal of foresight, and spend perhaps a little of the people's money. We will have to get a little more money for the people out of the operations that are going on in the north country, where it can be done without injury or hardship. You people in the city of Toronto are as interested as I, a farmer in North Simcoe, in the forestry policy of Ontario. It is in the interests of us all.

And, really, in the past our failure to conserve forest resources has been an act of criminal negligence. We have permitted destruction with never a thought of replacement. While we have been neglecting our timber areas timber has grown up on our farms here and there, a fact which seems to me to be a reminder of shame to the whole province in its neglect of reforestation.

A neighbor of mine near Barrie sold, a year ago last winter, a very little more than an acre of white pine. Later he told me it had grown up in sixty or seventy years without an axe being put to it. He teamed it a little more than four miles and got \$500 for the produce of little more than an acre. It opens in your mind the question of what might be done in the direction of wealth-production by reforestation. It is our task to establish a forestry policy which will perpetuate and reproduce our forestry resources.

Some people have wondered why there has been a division made in the Ministry of Lands, Forests, and Mines. I think the magnitude of that new task will answer the question. As I understand the work of government, the initiation of policies cannot come from deputy-ministers, cannot come from the clerks, but the Minister himself, with advise and counsel, must initiate his own policies and be responsible for them. We have had one man over what we have now made two separate departments, and we know there has not been the necessary steam propelling either. We have tried to get men at the head of each of the two departments who have given thought to the requirements of the north country and who will make those requirements the vital matters they should be. It is important; it is vital.

I hope to go north to-morrow with the Minister of Lands and Forests and the Minister of Mines, to see New Ontario, to hear the people and get their thoughts. I may say we are not troubling however with the question of secession to any degree. I had a letter the other day threatening all sorts of things, including secession, telling us that the people of the north would not stand for a great many things. I do not think the man was at all representative. He signed it as a member of the Executive of the Liberty League.

And that leads me to say something about the Government prohibition policy. As you know, the Farmers' Party made that a plank in their platform, and we will consider it our duty to enforce that law impartially, as strictly as need be.

and effectively. The people have pronounced on the question. There is no question of it being a trick ballot. It was not a trick ballot. The people answered the question fully. They gave their opinions on four separate and distinct questions. That opinion is crystallized in legislation; and we will see that it is carried through impartially and fearlessly, because we do not intend to make it possible for one class to do what the other class cannot do. Personally, I think it would be discriminating against the rich if we allowed them to drink and the poor not to drink. And I do not favor discrimination of that sort at all. I think that fair and equal enforcement is what we require.

Those are some of the problems that we have before us. and we have not an easy task by any means. We are lacking in political experience, and, therefore, it is quite possible we will make mistakes. But all we ask from the legislature, and all we ask from the people, is a square deal to see what we can do. If we do not make at least an honest attempt, and I think a little more than that—honesty of purpose is not all—if we do not accomplish something; then it will be the duty of the people of this province to see to it that we get out.

I am going to tell you one thing; we are not going to entrench ourselves in power by any patronage system—absolutely not. Patronage, as far as the inside civil service is concerned, has been abolished entirely. We have not as yet been able to work out any satisfactory uniform system for outside appointments. That remains to be worked out, and we believe it can be. That, in my opinion, is a big step in the right direction. The men who serve this province must get appointments solely on the question of merit. I see no reason for putting a man off the provincial pay list simply because he happened to be a supporter of another party. We are not doing it; we do not intend to do it if he is efficient, if he is a capable man. I believe in the main the civil service is manned by good honest men. If they have the assurance that their promotion will be based on merit and that outsiders will not be brought in and put over their heads because they are supporters of any party, I believe we can have a good, sound, honest, and efficient civil service.

Mr. Chairman, I think I have taken up your time long enough. For my own good, as well as for your own, I am not going to burden you with any further remarks. I think

it would be dangerous to do so. We have great problems facing us, and all we ask of the people of Ontario is a fair chance to show what we can do. If we cannot accomplish anything, if we do not do something to better the general administration, then we will deserve what we will get, I think, at the hands of the citizens of this province.

I thank you again for this second honor I have had of speaking to the now large and powerful Canadian Club in the city of Toronto. The other occasion was a smaller one, but this, I feel, is a great honour, Mr. President, and I thank you for it.