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An Englishman Views Canadian Politics

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MR. CRAWLEY:—I feel that there are many Englishmen with better qualifications to address you than I have—prominent business men or Conservative or Liberal M.P.'s. So that there shall be no misapprehension I should explain that I am a prospective labor candidate for the English Parliament, and when I mention the word labor I begin to feel the weight of your disapproval closing down on me. A word on the subject of my lecture. I don't imagine for one moment that I can tell you anything about Canadian politics that you don't know, but sometimes when one looks at a snapshot of oneself one notices things one had not seen before. My impressions are obviously of the snapshot variety, and in them you may have the same experience.

I wonder if you realize how extraordinary ignorant we are in England about Canada. Just before I landed I tried to write down just what I expected to find, and I found it very difficult. I had been in the United States twice, and I was told it was not like the United States. Then I tried to remember what I had learned at school, and I got some garbled memories of Quebec and the Heights of Abraham and Wolfe, and victories over the French. I also had impressions of red Indians. And I had been to France, seen the Canadian trenches, and learned something of what Canadians had done in the war, but so far as Canada itself was concerned I found that I had but the haziest of ideas. When I went to school imperial history was taught on very imperial lines. The Empire story was full of conquests and colonies. Nowhere were we taught the one real fact of the British Empire that the Dominions were essentially

independent countries, and that particularly in the event of another war we in England have no right to expect Canada automatically to support us. That is what we have been taught of late years, and so when I came I expected to find myself in an independent and foreign country, and to feel somewhat as I had felt in the United States.

My first impression, which must also be the impression of most Englishmen landing in Canada is the extraordinary social freedom in this country. To me it was like a breath of fresh air. In England we suffer from the caste system and real snobbery. It is literally non-existent here. There may be some forms of snobbery here but they are not noticeable to any extent.

On your trains the attendants and the train crew will come along and talk to the passengers on any subject that may be of mutual interest. In England if they did that they would be reported to the company and probably get the sack.

The girl behind the counter asks you what you want as one citizen to another. The social life of Canada is on an entirely different basis from that of England, and it is the most refreshing experience one could undergo. The predominant impression of Canada, therefore, is of the marvellous social equality, and it is an impression that carries through. It is the most important and overrides any other impressions one may get in travelling through the country.

Turning from that to politics the first province I entered was Quebec, and I know that Quebec is an exceptional province. Having felt this atmosphere of social freedom, one expected to find it also in the laws and institutions, and in general one did find them. But one did find in Quebec some startling contradictions. First the padlock law. I had heard of it before landing, and something of its special applications, but it was something of a shock to find that it was a law that struck at the fundamental democratic idea of freedom of speech. One is told that this act is not intended to be used generally but only with special application to communism, but even then communism is only the expression of one form of opinion. In every other province of Canada speech is as free as the air, but in Quebec it no longer exists. One was also told that it had only been

operated once but one was suspicious of that because of the trouble we have had in England with the Official secrets act. That act was, it is said, only to be used against spies, but in fact the letter of the law allowed it to be used against the press, and finally it was used against a Member of Parliament who considered it necessary to disclose some information he had obtained as a Territorial officer which injured the government's reputation. So I was surprised to find this law in Canada and suspicious of assurances.

And it was not only this law that was a surprise. There is also in Quebec apparently the right to search a private dwelling without a warrant on mere suspicion. I was told that the house where I was staying had been entered and searched by the police, and that they had no defense against this form of action. Public halls, I heard, had been denied to those members of the community who wanted to express critical opinions of the government, and that there was taxation without representation. One hears of a section of the community taxed for schools that has no say in their management.

And this to an extent that surprises one because one had felt this sense of tremendous freedom among individuals and expected it to be reflected in the laws of the provinces and of the Dominion, that they would be more liberal than our own laws. After finding out how these things worked in Quebec one had a sense of contradiction and a fear that the institutions of Canada were becoming less free. After leaving Quebec one regained the impression of the essential freedom of Canada, and the feeling that one had experienced in that province began to pass away.

The next place I visited was Regina, and here and in other cities of the west the sense of freedom and individualism expanded still more. I attended a debate in the Legislature, and whatever other feelings one got one realized that it was conducted in the best traditions of the parliaments both of England and Canada, with the freedom of members to express whatever they might feel, whether favorable to the government or their own party or not. Here too one felt many gleams of an individualism that was not just looking out for itself and its own interests, but was concerned rather with the general good.

But here again as one looked at the organization one came up against a certain sense of contradiction. The great problem which was being discussed was the guaranteed price of wheat. That in itself seemed something of a contradiction of the rugged individualism of the farmer. It seemed that while he wanted to be allowed to raise what he liked and farm as he pleased he was not prepared, apparently, to carry that through to its logical conclusion and get what prices he could and where he could. He seemed to be convinced that the rest of the community must allow him to do as he liked with his farm and still give him a guarantee as to the price of what he raised. When one suggested that they might one day turn round and say, "If we are going to go on doing this we will have a say in how you farm," there was an immediate protest. There was a contradiction there that affected the whole system.

There was the same doubt on the question of relief. Everywhere one went one heard that the problem was one that must be the responsibility of the Dominion as a whole. There again if one suggested that the principal of insurance might be a good thing from the point of view of the reliefee because it would preserve his independence, one still got no response. The feeling again was that people had a right to support by the state whether they could earn their way or not. Personally I do not deny that right but it is a contradiction when one considers the intensely individualistic attitude of the farmers in response to any suggestion that anyone else should have a say in how they should farm, even though they were not prepared to accept the results of individual trading and wanted a guarantee for what they produced. In the rest of the west one found the same freedom and friendliness, but there were an enormous number of political contradictions.

Next came Alberta and social credit. A nation which can throw up a government like that must be immensely courageous, and cannot be accused of lack of individuality, though even when one investigated that one found curious contradictions. I have not time to analyse the economics of Social Credit but there are two of its aspects I would like to mention—the press and licensing laws. I was given the terms of the press act and it seems a very curious document

to have come from a people who seem to be struggling for their own independence. They seemed to be demanding to be allowed to do as they liked themselves and at the same time trying to deny the first fundamentals of democracy, the rights of free speech and a free press. Under the act newspapers were to be required to disclose the names of anyone who gave them information. If that were to apply the freedom of the press would be gone.

Also when talking to Albertans one kept hearing that the will of the people was supreme, and that what this government wanted to do must be done, and that the banks must do whatever they were told. There again that thoroughly democratically minded government seemed to be trying to accomplish its aims by thoroughly undemocratic methods. If it does succeed the banks must fade out or be ruined. It seems to me that they should be made to do one thing or the other, for a dictatorship within a democracy is something that cannot exist.

When one arrived in Ontario one did so with a feeling of anxiety, with the thought that people were so indifferent to Government, because of their intense individuality, they were allowing things to drift into undemocratic forms. When one arrived here one became aware that most people seemed quite indifferent to what was going on. They knew there were inconsistencies, and mildly thought that something ought to be done about it. There seems little difference between the parties and neither is putting forward any concrete program.

In this lecture I cannot analyse party programmes, but two things I have noticed. Two days ago in the paper a Canadian Minister was putting forward the idea that most problems of Canada were not subjects to be decided on party lines, but rather by the method of referendum. That is a very peculiar and significant idea, and seems to be part of the general contradictoriness of things here. If parties cannot put forward programs it is difficult to see just what one would be voting for in the support of either party. One wonders whether that tendency is a real one or just an individual instance.

The other thing I noticed throughout Canada is something less difficult to define. I find there is a tremendous

sensitiveness in discussing political matters. In England we are used to very plain methods of speech, but here people are very cautious in talking to each other. It may be because you are much more polite than we are, for there seems no good reason why people should be so cautious. There is nevertheless a decided reluctance to call a spade a spade.

That is a very superficial and rough view of Canadian affairs. I have only made a guess at it and my guess may be entirely wrong.

The second subject in which I have been interested is the Canadian outlook on foreign affairs. I would like to emphasize that I was brought up in the conservative tradition, and it was dinned into us over and over again that the Dominions were independent people and that we must expect them to have independent views, possibly quite different from those of the British Government. With that background I came out here expecting Canada to have a very very independent view of foreign politics. When I say that I mean a point of view based on self interest, and so I have tried to analyse just what is the Canadian Interest. War and collective security, with the possibility of force having to be used are the crucial points at the moment, and in this connection I have tried to see what Canada has to gain or lose, and as far as I can see her foreign policy must turn on three things.

First Canada is an exporting country—her prosperity depends to a large extent on her exports. If that is so Canada has important interests in keeping the markets of the world open and free, and is likely to support the nations who desire the same thing. The second fact is that Canada is a member of the new world, and of the north American continent, and the very physical environment makes it necessary for her to be involved in cooperation with the other nations of the continent. Therefore the majority in Britain do not expect her to fight in European quarrels. The third, obviously, is that Canada is a member of the British Empire, and even from a purely selfish point of view there are excellent reasons why she should support the policies of the Empire. Great Britain is Canada's best customer, and as Britain still wishes to keep the world's markets open and free, it seems obvious that she should have the support of

Canada in trying to fulfill that aim. I suggest that we give a great deal of thought to that point of view.

There seem to be two main points of view among Canadians in respect to their British policy. The first is quite definitely a British point of view, and assumes that Canada will defend British interests under any circumstances. The second, and it was rather a surprise to me, is that of complete isolation. It is held to a large extent by French Canadians, but does not favor unity with the United States. About isolation one feels that it is impossible for Canada, for if the link with the Empire is broken there must inevitably be a trend towards the United States. One gathers that they would be prepared to fight to preserve the British connection, but at the same time they hold that Canada must not be involved in European conflicts. It is difficult to reconcile the two ideas.

The other isolationist point of view is much more logical, for if you favor closer union with the United States you need not depend so largely upon European trade and you could be more or less a self-sustaining continent in North America. As I say that is logical but it can only be accomplished if Canada is willing to accept a very much lower standard of living. Canada depends on her exports, and if she were part of them she could not export to the United States.

With regard to the British school of thought, that too is difficult to reconcile with a logical outlook. It seems to be based entirely on sentiment and not on the Canadian outlook at all. Their support of Great Britain is not based on the fact that the connection will benefit Canada in the long run, but simply on the fact that Britain is Britain. In other words one finds that support of Britain is based solely on sentiment. As an Englishman one cannot help but feel a great deal of comfort in the extraordinary strength of that sentiment, even though support that is based on only sentiment is obviously unsound. The idea that the Empire should be maintained just because it is British seems to me to be ridiculous. But if the empire is fulfilling a useful purpose there seems to be every reason to support it. That, however, does not seem to be the reason for support in Canada. Because it is British it is sacred. That is a very dangerous

point of view, because sentiment is subject to reaction. After the last war there was a very serious reaction against the things that Canada had fought for—never again would Canada imperil herself for British interests or fight in Europe. That sounded sensible but after all it was only a wave of sentiment, for after all it was the next generation that would have to decide whether to fight the next war or not. If they come back from another war feeling that they have been fighting in the best interests of Canada there will be no similar reaction, but if they come back feeling that they have fought simply to keep the Union Jack flying on both sides of the Atlantic, it will not be long before there are no more Union Jacks flying on this side. No, the British Empire is not founded on sentiment. It is an association of free peoples, based on the necessity of preserving for each other their common interests of liberty and freedom. In these interests Great Britain is as willing to offer close cooperation to France and the United States as it is to any part of the Empire.

Surely in such an association of free peoples the first and vital necessity is that it should be purely voluntary, and the one and only basis on which the Empire can survive is that every Dominion should be independent. For that it is necessary to have an independent point of view, and I think that is coming to Canada. When it does I think she will find her real greatness in close cooperation with Great Britain and with the other democracies of the world.