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Out of My Experiences

BY MISS AGNES G. MACPHAIL. M.P.

PRESIDENT JAMES:—Miss MacPhail, ladies and gentlemen, from the earliest day of Canadian history women have always occupied an important place in the national and political life of Canada. Today it is my privilege to present to you one of the outstanding women of our time—Miss Agnes MacPhail, M.P. Miss MacPhail has been a member of the Canadian House of Commons for fourteen years. She was first elected in 1921 and was returned in three subsequent general elections. Miss MacPhail occupies the unique distinction of being the first, and to date, the only woman member of the Canadian House of Commons. Miss MacPhail, we welcome you here today, not only as a member of the House of Commons, but also as a woman who has given outstanding leadership and thought and attention to many of the major Canadian problems. I present to you Miss MacPhail. The subject of her address is, "Out of My Experiences."

MISS MACPHAIL:—Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen; my listeners on the air, and my mother, I am very happy indeed to be here today but just slightly non-plussed to have to address two audiences at once. I think it is very easy to talk to such a jovial and intelligent one as that facing me—because it means so much, the language of the face—not so much for you, but for me. But it is difficult to make a speech suitable for people whom you can see and also suitable for those whom you cannot see. It is something like trying to entertain two groups of friends at the same time who do not really like the same things—the one is staid and the other gay. I do not know how we are going to get on but we will just have

to do the best we can. Then to add to that, here it is my privilege and my embarrassment to have on the left of me and on the right of me such eminent gentlemen as Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen, whom I have always liked so much and Mr. J. S. McLean, of the Canada Packers. I wish to say to the farmers he is nice. I like to eat with him at any rate. There is just this difference, however, the people of the radio audience can turn the dial, but if those in the audience here who would like to get up left the room, it would suddenly look like what the House of Commons is when anybody with ideas stands to address the House.

Now the speech I am going to make today is one designed for tired business men. You know how he is misunderstood, or is it just tired? And the person who is to address you, if I may take a moment, is essentially the same person who was elected to the House of Commons in 1921. I am a country woman, bred and born. I will always be of the country and very proud of it too. I remember, when I was teaching school, the fellow who started me for the place that lands me here today. He was Sam Broden. It was really a hamlet called Black Horse on account of the tavern, which was falling into disrepair. Sam Broden was very interesting—what you might call a character, not interested in "the top" what ever that is. I mean that place you climb over everybody else to get to. He was a scholar and read very widely and wanted a job that would give a living without having to spend too much time and energy—and so he kept store. And so we met at Mr. Broden's store and we talked round any question we were interested in. We read party papers—both sides—and found them very illuminating; and it has helped me through all the time between then and now. I think in the whole township there were two Liberals and a half. I was the half. In the evenings we used to go into the back of the store and met some very charming people who were called Conservatives or Tories. We used to play crockinole, eat peanuts and talk politics.

As I said when I started out, I am essentially that

same person. I recall the comic figure I must have been. I did talk politics. I attended a good Bible class rather religiously—you know what I mean—regularly, at that time. I was not over serious. I danced until 5 o'clock (sometimes later) and did not bother going to sleep before I went to school. There was a little change I must admit. That comic figure that went to the House of Commons in a sailor hat and a serge dress—you know what I mean—it cost me \$45 and this one is only \$14. There has been a tremendous lot of talking about that poor dress. I do not wonder the press people had a lot of fun at my expense—because anyone who is going to reform the world without taking a laugh in between—well it is funny. And so all this long time now I have been in the House of Commons and, like other members who are there now, I hope to be there a long time longer. Because after all the House of Commons is a very interesting place. It is more or less fascinating. There are forces that play there—the ever-watchful gallery—the ever striving press gallery—all striving for favor. Then there are those now striving for the favor of the people and the powers—all so very exhilarating. I am so happy to have been there.

When I look back over these fourteen years to when I entered the House, and recall who the big wigs were then—one sits here now—Mr. King, Mr. Meighen and Mr. Fielding, well, I remember the awe with which I looked on these people, whose names were household words for a long time. The Prime Minister in 1921 was Mr. MacKenzie King who had great faith in the star of his destiny. I think there is a little difference now, because the Prime Minister has the belief that destiny and the Prime Minister are synonymous terms. Mr. Meighen I always enjoyed and I do still. I think that Canada has lost a very great deal by the fact that he has not been in the Commons from that day. I have said that many times and in many places. He has a crystal-clear mind. He is a great leader. I have heard him simplify a complex problem when discussing it. If you will grant his premises you must grant him all the rest, because there is no blemish in his logic from beginning to end. These were happy days

so simple days they were. We hardly had any unemployment—yes, a little seasonal—not so much. It is true farm prices fell disasterously but the farmers had reserves then—cash and stamina. I remember we talked all night in the House of Commons and had breakfast before you went home—if you could get a better breakfast at the Commons. The debate on the budget lasted a month and we spent time—I cannot tell how long—in discussing Crow's Nest Pass. We had a French member in the House—they are marvelous at the English language and put us to shame because we know so little about French. But this member could not get it straight and he said Pass Nest Crow three times and then gave it up. Now he is a judge.

I remember Mr. Woodsworth telling the House of Commons and me at that time that the Capitalistic System was coming to an end. Nobody believed him. I remember the first time I sat in the House of Commons he said that the German reparations could never be paid. He was called a traitor. You know what you call the Germans—some other word—some of you think of it.

These were indeed very happy days when the simplicity of life had not completely gone. I want to talk about the differences between the two great parties. I think it is largely a difference of attitude and not in policy. I am speaking very frankly. There is no use in talking otherwise, when I am speaking of my experiences. I will let the other fellows tell their experiences and sit back quietly while they tell them—if I can. There is a great difference. The Tories are dominating—we will say Conservatives. They rule with a rod of iron—at least the head does, and the others through him. I think they do assume a very superior attitude, which, I suppose, accounts for the superiority of Toronto the Good. For a long time the Conservatives had a corner on superiority and, for a long time, a corner on patriotism. I mean one's devotion to one's country was always an open question, unless one is a Conservative and an Anglican. If you are a Conservative, a Methodist and an Orangeman, you can get by. And now to my amazement they are encroaching upon, not quite having a corner on, what is called 51 per cent

Godliness. I offer two proofs. The Prime Minister said to the Young Conservative Club, "God has been very good to me." And as a second proof I offer Denton Massey. When I went to Bible Class in Black Horse I went primarily because of the brilliance of the man who led the class. I think it was written that "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." Maybe he will at that. Even in their personal relationships the Conservative friendliness, with some exceptions, is studied. It is a studied friendliness. There is a deliberate quality about it and the more aristocratic are charmingly condescending.

The Liberals were once the people's party but they are so no longer. Their sin, their greatest sin—I mean unforgivable—you see we are all Biblical nowadays—is lack of faith in their own program, if any. They lack courageous action and upsurging mental energy. They excel in incomparable inactivity. There is a better word than inactivity—inertia—that is it. I think they are to be—I am speaking Federally. I think they are to be particularly blamed—I mean this seriously—for their waiting policy through this trying time—waiting for ballots of the electors to waft them into power. The Liberals set great store on personal liberty. I would like to ask how much liberty has the destitute? Liberty to have two slices of bread and coffee or not to have them! Then Liberals talk so much about great Liberal principles—then the constitution, about which nothing can be done and, until something is done, nothing can be done about anything. I think in personal relationships the Liberals are spontaneously friendly in an unstudied fashion. There may be at the back of their minds a lamb and lion—you know what I mean—and possibly I am fearful of the lion inside the lamb. I think with one or two exceptions the Conservatives eat, drink and are merry only in presence of the elected. Of course, the Prime Minister will say I exaggerate. He said so in the House of Commons the other day, and I trust the judgment of a master of the art.

And now that only leaves "the corner" which is to your extreme left, Mr. Speaker—these are the names by which we are called, out loud, at any rate. What of all

those who sat in "the corner?" For more than thirteen years now we have done the fetching and the carrying—you know the story of the long, lanky Negro who does the fetching and the carrying? We have fetched going on thirteen and a half years. We have fetched the ideas which we thrust into the faces and, if possible, into the minds of the ruling power and their understudy—the opposition—but which in the past they seldom took and which now they take often without thanks. And the carrying? O yes, we carried the blame in the House and in the country. Do you know anything more comfortable than to have somebody around whom you can blame? Wives will understand that. I think the work of the people in "the corner" will stand up under scrutiny. I will say to my C.C.F. friends that they should remember that Canadians are conventional. Canadians can be radical, but they must be radical in their own peculiar way, and that way must be in harmony with our national traditions and ideals. The strength of those in "the corner"—which is my last word about that—lies in the functional organization on which it is based. I think the time has now come when democracy and capitalism are incompatible. Neither will work successfully while the other exists—at any rate in the larger form which now exists—the technique of the new democracy will be more through action along scientific lines and less discussion.

Just think of it—in the House of Commons two hundred and forty-four people listen while one member of the House discusses estimates item by item. Two hundred and forty-four sitting listening to the needs, shall we say, of a station at Riviere de Loup, or a wharf at Honey Harbor, or a public building at Timmins, about which none of us knows anything. You cannot get inefficiency in more extreme example. I think the House of Commons should be a place where general principles are discussed and no details. Really, I think the League of Nations has a good system where a plenary session is held and everybody meets to make a beautiful speech about peace—perhaps for home consumption. After this they are divided into committees, where everybody goes on the mat, or puts

the other fellow on the mat. They again go back into their plenary session. It is possibly a better one. At any rate, it could not be worse. I want to see democracy make changes in order that we may continue to have it. Let me give you something about an analysis of the membership of the House of Commons made by my secretary.

She took a Parliamentary Guide—she is a very efficient person—and found that out of the two hundred and twenty-four members who had registered the date of birth twenty-three members were over seventy with the oldest seventy-nine and the youngest thirty-three. We found that farmers—and this takes in farmers who are Conservatives, farmers who are Liberals and farmers who are farmers—constitute 13% of the House; lawyers 30.9%; doctors constitute 11.9% and merchants and manufacturers 15.4%.

Now I want to say a few things about that. There are too many people over seventy. People over seventy have less idea of what tomorrow is going to be, than a person of twenty-five. That cannot but be true—I mean put them in the Senate. There are too many practising lawyers in the House of Commons. They are experts in the art of making clever and able, convincing arguments, regardless of their opinions in the matter. And lastly they are not so important as their numbers in the House of Commons would signify. Lawyers are not an economic group and, I say this sadly, more than any other group they have sold themselves to the highest bidder. That does not give any pleasure but it is devilishly true. Then how is it that 11.9% of the members of the House of Commons are doctors? Because elections, as we conduct them, are popularity contests. That is why; and the doctor knows so many things and is usually such a likeable fellow that either party says this man should win the seat. It does not follow, of course, that he is going to be particularly effective in the Commons. He may be, as have lawyers. What I am pointing out is, however, that doctors and lawyers are not basic groups and their percentage of representation in the House of Commons is altogether out of proportion to the importance of the whole economic group.

I think we need in the House of Commons more manufacturers, more farmers, more industrial workers, more engineers and, particularly, more university professors who are specialists, and we would soon get away from the child-like attitude that university professors cannot take any interest in the running of their country. These, we say, are people who know a great deal about one particular thing and they cannot do anything but teach other people who, in their turn, cannot do anything about it.

Well, I would not be surprised if, in the future, there is a break in the kind of people who go to the House. I am not very happy about that because it will likely eliminate me, but I should be glad to step down voluntarily, if it could be done.

I think there are a few things that we must have if we are going to keep democracy. One is that people in a constituency select the most able person, regardless of his politics and regardless of his occupation, to represent them. They will finance him within the constituency and no power outside the constituency can come in and say to the people, "This is your man, and we will finance him." I think it is absolutely necessary in a democratic country that the people should know, if not the details, at least an outline of the progress, the direction and the tempo to be travelled or sped by the candidate when elected; and having got that person into the House of Commons, I think that no power should stand between the elected member and the discharge of his duties as outlined by him to those who elected him. And I think if we are going to have a democratic form of government, we must have a civil service that is on the merit principle and free from patronage. Conservatives always say that, when the Liberals are in power and the Liberals, when the Conservatives are in power. I think we should have a judiciary that is absolutely free from political domination. I have always said—I may be wrong—that many of the lawyers in the House of Commons are good party men, because the heaven of the lawyers is the bench.

And what we need if democracy is going to function at all—we need to recapture the sovereign powers so that

the state is more powerful than any economic groups within it. This is particularly true of finance. What blinking fools we have been to hand over the making of money out of bits of carved paper or inexpensive paper or figures to people whom we call the chartered banks and they wear a halo of righteousness round their heads. It is very true.

We need very much now, courageous people. We need them in the country; we need them in business. We need people who have convictions and who have the courage of them in the cities, towns, villages, in Parliament, in the Senate, on the bench—everywhere we need people with courage. I think that more than any other quality we need courage in Canada now. And may I say this? A great attribute—if that is the right word—of the Prime Minister, which I so much admire, is his tremendous courage. Whether you agree with me or not, I think Stevens has courage. And out of my experience I would say that efforts for social reform would scarcely have come if Mr. Stevens had not had the courage to take his political life in his hands. I admire courage such as Ian Mackenzie exhibited in the House when he came out with a personal program. Well, he could not get the party to do it, so it was better than nothing. That is why I like Woodsworth. Woodsworth has the courage of his convictions. He is ready to go to jail for them, but change them he will not. Why not?

I do not need to harrow you with conditions. We have them. I noticed relief agency figures at Ottawa showed that there were 1,350,000 on relief. We know they are having a bad time—a difficult, terrible time—we know that. You get young people whose energy has no outlet and they get into a state of almost melancholy. You know without me telling you that half the people are over-worked and the other half have no work. We have rich and poor, plenty and want. We know all that. What is it we lack in Canada? Is it food? Is it clothes? Is it material for houses? Is it radios—automobiles—books? I do not think so. I think we lack one thing only and you spell it m-o-n-e-y. I do not think there will be any return to prosperity until production is measured by goods

and services we can produce. Our real wealth is being measured by the amount of money available. I am telling you—I am not right—but I am going to be one of these days. It is coming just as sure as the world. You know we were not going off the gold standard but we went off the gold standard. And just as surely we are going to come to the time when we shall be awakened to the fact that goods and service are wealth and nothing else. The only things that give gold value are goods and services. The only thing that gold is good for is to make bracelets and earrings. What kind of idiots are we to think that paper written against goods and services in Canada is of no value. Put the unemployed into the gold mines and write paper sufficient to move goods and services. I do not care whether there is an ounce of gold or silver against money. I want currency of the realm—Canadian national currency with which I can go and buy chiffon stockings, take a trip on a steamship or something or other. That is all.

The City of Montreal with a debt of \$255,000,000 and interest charges of \$13,000,000, a debt of \$100,000,000 greater than the debt of the Province of Alberta. There is Vancouver with a tax levy of \$10,000,000. In the City of Hamilton the estimated cost of relief this year is \$800,000 and they are carrying a deficit of \$600,000 from last year, making a total of—well, work it out for yourself. Why that thing cannot go on. Anybody knows it cannot go on. If we continue, we cannot meet our contractual obligations. We may as well admit it. What I want is a charge of money-policy where we have good money—more dollars—to meet our contractual obligations. What is the Creditors' Arrangement Act, if not a frank admission that contractual obligations cannot be met? It will go on and on until we come to the place where we are ready to admit that money is only a convention, a bookkeeping system, and that we are suffering from a chronic shortage of purchasing power. There are some things I would like to see done and I have two minutes to tell you them.

I would like to see everybody, who wants to, retire at

the age of seventy—if you like sixty-five or sixty, and not retire on a pittance but on an amount to enable them to live comfortably. People of seventy should have time to read, an opportunity to travel, do what they like or visit their friends; and let us get youth to work. Where are we going to get the money from? Simple. Just where the bankers get it. Make it. They make it out of figures. We have to pay interest on interest on interest on interest, I would not have that. I do not see why the Federal Government should not regain for themselves the sovereign power of making money and have complete control over the volume by careful watching of the index figures of trade and commodities to determine exactly how much should be put out. Read the history of Sweden. Why cannot that be done in Canada and avoid the conditions of the past five years?

I have come to the conclusion that we are close to the time when we must finance consumption direct without going through production at all. As a beginning let us have a national superannuation fund. I do not care what name it is. We cannot go on producing and producing unless we can consume the goods we produce. The more we save and invest in production the more we add to the disequilibrium between production and consumption and the more we are deferring the day of recovery. We have followed for years a policy of deflation. We have fashioned a rod for our own backs that has laid the flesh open. I do not think that the control of money is the only thing but I think it is the most important thing. I think there are other things. I think you and I will live to see other great changes such as social services and an enlargement of the idea of public utilities. If we can sell liquor under government supervision, why not milk? If we can have Hydro as a public utility, then we can have many other things equally necessary. But we cannot do things we would like to do such as state medicine, until we change our money system and we cannot meet our contractual obligations. In my opinion, I do not care how much you disagree, the key-log in the jam is the money system under private control which limits production and consumption. We have got to move the key-log.

You have been very good. It is one minute past two. I thank you so much.

THE CHAIRMAN:—Miss MacPhail the applause of this audience speaks much more strongly than anything I can say by way of appreciation. We do thank you and we have appreciated your thoughtful address.

The speaker next week, gentlemen, will be the Hon. Robert Weir, Minister of Agriculture.