

# THE CANADIAN GENERAL ELECTION

From the *Westminster Gazette*, October 25  
(OLD LIBERAL WEEKLY)

THE election campaign in Canada is now well under way, all the various parties having begun active operations in oratory and organization, and nominating conventions being held every day. Parliament was officially dissolved on October 4, but as the Government are convinced that a protracted campaign will be profitable to them, they have delayed the date of the polling till December 6. Mr. Meighen has reorganized his Cabinet, and while he has secured a few valuable recruits, and has at last managed to enlist passable representatives from the Province of Quebec, the new Ministry excites little enthusiasm or confidence in the country.

The approaching election finds the electorate perplexed by a confusion of issues and parties. For the first time since Confederation, the alternate monopoly of power enjoyed by the two historic parties, the Liberals and Conservatives, is seriously challenged by the appearance of a third party variously called the Farmers' or the National Progressive Party. By-elections have shown it to be capable of sweeping at least the rural constituencies west of the river Ottawa, and it is the dominant political force in the prairie provinces, enjoying the support of city papers like the *Manitoba Free Press*. The new party had its origin in the dissatisfaction of Radical elements with the forces controlling the Liberal Party; and the charge that the powerful financial influences centred in Montreal and Toronto have had since 1900 an undue influence over its policies might be difficult to refute.

The first signs of revolt came from the

prairie provinces, where farmers' associations began to be freely formed about 1906. Their pressure drove the Laurier Government to negotiate the famous Reciprocity Treaty of 1911; but it was defeated by a combination of circumstances, and by methods which many of the victors would like to forget. The Conservative Government, which came into office under Sir R. Borden, was in deep water when the war broke out, and, after directing the national war-effort for three years, broke down in 1917, when it was replaced by a Coalition of Conservatives and Conscriptorist Liberals. Sir Robert Borden, who headed the Coalition, always hoped that it would develop into a permanent Centre Party; but the Liberal elements gradually withdrew, and to-day Mr. Arthur Meighen, who became Premier in 1920, on the breakdown of Sir Robert's health, can command the support of only a meagre band of comparatively insignificant Liberals. For all practical purposes his Cabinet and party are Conservative in structure, but for window-dressing purposes they enjoy the title of National Liberal and Conservative.

Meanwhile, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the veteran chieftain of Liberalism, had died in 1919, and at a National Convention the Liberal Party had chosen as his successor Mr. W. L. Mackenzie King, who, at the age of forty-six, had enjoyed long political and administrative experience. He organized the Labor Department at Ottawa as its first Deputy-Minister, and, entering Parliament in 1909, became its first political chief. Defeated in 1911, he entered the service of the Rockefeller

Foundation, and has published the fruit of his researches under its auspices into labor problems in a book called *Industry and Humanity*. Mr. King can therefore claim to be an authority upon industrial problems, and he is a first-rate platform speaker. But his mind works too slowly for success on the floor of Parliament, where Mr. Meighen has always been his master.

His supporters for the Liberal leadership thought that Mr. King would attract the enthusiasm and support of the Labor Party and the insurgent farmer elements; and he has been unwearied in his overtures for their alliance. But the farmers, while admitting that the new Liberal programme came reasonably near their own, still suspected the honesty of purpose of prominent elements in the Liberal Party, and, flatly declining to come into its fold, set about the organization of the National Progressive Party. The great mass of the rural vote swung to the new party, and Liberal candidates at by-elections in country constituencies fared badly.

Thereupon the Liberal Protectionists were able to argue with some force that the Radical low-tariff programme had failed to attract the expected rural support, and was alienating Liberal voters in industrial centres. So, since the campaign opened, Mr. King, and other Liberal leaders have shown a disposition to prove by their public utterances that they are not such relentless critics of the existing fiscal system as they seemed a year ago. Some frankly Protectionist speeches made by Sir Lomer Gouin, Mr. Lemieux, and other leading French-Canadians, at a party banquet in Montreal, at which Mr. King was present, have convinced the Progressives that their suspicions were well founded, and hopes of coöperation in the election and an adjustment of

seats between Liberal and Progressive candidates have disappeared.

In the regions lying west of Ottawa the Liberal Party is more or less derelict, and can expect only a modicum of seats. But it has one great bulwark of strength: the French-Canadian race, numbering almost one third of the whole population, is, unless the signs are false, firmly determined to pay a last tribute to the memory of its beloved Laurier, by casting an almost solid vote for the party which he so long and ably led. Liberalism is also strong in the Maritime Provinces, where politics are determined at birth, and Mr. King might secure three fifths of the seats there. It is hardly possible that he can obtain a clear majority over the other groups, but he commands the greatest number of safe seats, and may head the largest group in the new House. At present, he is campaigning in Nova Scotia, where the Premier is also on the warpath; and he intends to visit every important centre before election day.

The prospects of the Government are not bright, and there is almost complete unanimity among the political experts that they cannot hope to obtain a clear majority. One of their new ministers, in a recent speech, would claim only 110 seats out of 235, and more pessimistic judges predict that their quota in the next House may be reduced from 125 to 60, which would leave them the smallest group apart from the Labor Party. Mr. Meighen, however, is a born political fighter, and, if he had better platform assistance, might make some headway before polling day. Both in his election manifesto and in his speeches he has strained every effort to narrow the contest to the tariff issue. He draws harrowing pictures of the adverse effects upon Canadian industries which the consummation of the Opposition programmes

would produce, and asserts that, in view of recent and impending tariff legislation at Washington, it would be criminal folly for Canada to lower her tariff walls. He accuses the Liberal Party of hypocrisy in its tariff attitude, but hitherto has directed his main fire upon the Progressives. Undoubtedly an able appeal to Protectionist sentiment, such as he can make, will win votes in the Eastern towns and cities; but the general unpopularity of his Government and the fact that the Liberals disclaim all idea of drastic tariff reductions make it unlikely that he will be able to snatch a victory.

Mr. T. A. Crerar, the Progressive leader, inaugurated his campaign at Brandon, Manitoba, on October 5, and in his initial speech struck a note of vigorous Radicalism. He assailed the Meighen Government as a creature of the big business interests, and challenged it to expose the sources from which its obviously ample campaign funds are being secured. He admitted that the Progressive movement, starting among farmers anxious to redress serious grievances, was in its inception tinged with class-consciousness, as both Mr. Meighen and Mr. King have charged, but asserted that it was now attracting to itself, and welcoming, people of all classes. He countered the Premier's argument that Protection had brought prosperity to Canada, and found valuable ammunition in the figures of the last Census, which, though not fully published, are likely to show that Canada's population will once more be over a million short of expectations. He stressed other drawbacks of Protectionism, and urged that the natural industries of the country, like agriculture, had been stifled by the special privileges conferred through the tariff on artificial secondary industries.

He complained that neither the Premier nor the Liberal leader offered any solutions for the other serious problems of the country in their speeches.

His speech has caught the ear of the country by reason of a freshness and vigor which have been absent from the orations of his rivals; but it is not to be expected that his tariff policy will excite much enthusiasm in Eastern industrial areas. The Progressives will contest every seat with a rural vote outside Quebec, where they have scant foothold, and will leave urban seats to the Labor Party, with whom they have formed a working alliance in mixed constituencies. They do not cherish any hopes of a clear majority, but hope to return in sufficient strength to force, as in Australia, a fusion of the older parties and clear the decks for a real fight at the next general election.

There will be a multiplicity of three-cornered contests, and even after the last poll has been declared, there will be great uncertainty about the character and composition of the next administration, a fresh coalition being a probable solution. But, whatever the result may be, the holding of the election cannot fail to have favorable reactions upon the political life of the Dominions. The Progressive Party represents the efforts of new forces, which could not find expression, either through a Government surviving on a mandate secured on a special war issue, or an Opposition limited in its outlook by the controversies and circumstances of pre-war days. They have ended the stagnation which has reduced Canadian politics to a low ebb for two decades; and from the process of readjustment now begun, two healthy parties, representing real divergences of opinion, ought to emerge.

# THE REBIRTH OF AMERICAN POETRY

BY VALÉRY LARBAUD

From *La Revue de France*, September 1 and 15  
(POLITICAL AND LITERARY FORTNIGHTLY)

NOBODY in England ventures to speak of a poetic renaissance. In the United States people do.

'American poetic renaissance is no longer a phrase. It is a fact. The last few decades have witnessed a sudden and amazing growth in the volume as well as in the quality of the work of our poets.' Thus does Mr. Louis Untermeyer express himself in the preface to his book, *Modern American Poetry: an Introduction*, and, indeed, if England can point with satisfaction to the collected works or the thin volumes of a score of genuine poets or interesting beginners born between 1870 and 1890, the United States can offer, in opposition to them, the distinguished names of five masters whose originality and power are beyond dispute: Edgar Lee Masters (born in 1869); Edwin Arlington Robinson (also born in 1869); Robert Frost (1875); Carl Sandburg (1878); and Nicholas Vachel Lindsay (1879) — without reference to younger men, of whom three or four at least can stand comparison with the poets of the English group of the magazine *Wheels*.

A disconcerting fact presents itself to us in the very beginning. The *direct* influence of Walt Whitman is almost wholly lacking in contemporary American poetry. The work of the few poets who imitate him does not appear in the literary publications that really count. These imitators write for a public that is behind the times, for people who have at last discovered that Whitman is a great poet, but who cannot go beyond him; and what they write is

Whitman vulgarized and weakened, Whitman as he might be if his poems were dictated by spiritualistic table-tapping. But the genuine Whitman himself is published in editions of fifteen thousand copies at a time. Poor Whitman, whose poems did not sell during his life, who was scoffed at and treated like a village idiot by his rustic compatriots!

It is Whitman's *indirect* influence which appears, as if by reflection, in the best pieces in Mr. Untermeyer's anthology. It is Whitman, and Whitman alone, who has rendered possible this freedom in poetic form and in choice of subjects. It was he who taught the artists of his country, some fifty years ago, that a poet's power displays itself, not so much in the difficulties overcome as in the opportunities discovered. It was he who told them, with that strange prophetic tone, at once epic and familiar, — the tone of the old Puritan preachers, now transmuted into literary beauty, — that the subject of a poet's song ought to be 'the commonplace,' and also the 'I,' moral and physical, the daily spectacles of street and field, the great harbors, the factories, the work of modern man, and last of all, 'these states.' He opened the doors, pointed out the new directions, and gave a great impetus and a fruitful example to the poets of the whole world. In the United States it is the poets of the so-called 'Chicago School' who owe him most, though none of them wish to be regarded as his disciples, and none can be. His indirect, in-