

NEIGHBOR TO THE NORTH

Dossier on Canada's war effort. The parties and the issues in the critical new session of Parliament. What labor thinks of Premier King's policies.

Ottawa, Canada.

GEOGRAPHICALLY and economically Canada and the United States form a unit, and in recent years there has been widespread sentiment in both countries for North American solidarity. The feeling is growing stronger, especially now that the United States is at war. For I need hardly tell you that this event has done more than almost anything else to revive enthusiasm among Canadians for their own war effort. Despite our covert sneers at the flamboyant aspects of life in the States, most Canadians nevertheless entertain the greatest admiration for our bustling neighbor to the south. Our popular culture is influenced strongly by American mass production. The habit of thinking of ourselves as an American nation has definitely triumphed over the atavistic ties of the empire world outlook.

Next to Winston Churchill, President Roosevelt is the most popular figure up here. In saying this, I rather deliberately exclude our own Prime Minister, Mackenzie W. L. King. For even his best friends admit that this pudgy little bachelor is one of the most colorless leaders of all time. Ordinarily phlegmatic, Canadian audiences are these days vigorously applauding the newsreels of Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin. But the appearance of Premier King is invariably greeted with a stony silence, broken by the feeble hissing from a few embattled Tories in the back rows.

A good deal of this is due to the circumstances under which Canada entered the war. Isolationist sentiment was still strong. The undemocratic methods used to mobilize the country developed a powerful undercurrent of dissatisfaction. Even though the hastily adopted Defense of Canada regulations were stringent, they could not prevent, and in fact tended to develop, a definite inhibition among Canadians toward the war effort. I go back to these things because only if you remember them will you understand the political crisis in Canada, as reflected in the new session of Parliament.

IN THE first wartime election, March 1940, the dominant issue was the opposition to the conscription of man power. The Mackenzie King government, led by the Liberal Party, returned to power with a comfortable majority of seats in the House of Commons, on a program of "limited participation." Economic aid to Britain was emphasized over direct military contribution. To date the Liberal government has failed to bring about conscription for overseas service; and it is this issue which now dominates politics here because most people are highly dissatisfied with the way Canada lags so far behind Britain in pushing the war on all fronts.

Of 12,000,000 Canadians, some 600,000 are engaged in war production. Four hundred thousand are enlisted in the armed forces, but only 120,000 are serving overseas. Some 27,000 Canadians are engaged in active service with the Navy, and the Commonwealth Air Training Plan, which is Canada's great contribution, has enrolled some 15,000 students from all

over the empire. Yearly war expenditures are averaging more than \$2,500,000,000.

While not unimpressive in themselves, these figures fall short of what is required for an all-out effort. Moreover, they don't reveal the unsatisfactory state of affairs in war production, which lags far behind Canada's capacity. As in your country, we have had our difficulties persuading big businessmen to release their exclusive hold over the running of the war. Some forty-odd boards which administer the war effort are dominated by representatives of industry, who in turn have concentrated contracts in a small number of the biggest enterprises. They are reluctant to expand capacity, in order to retain the delicate balance of market controls in the postwar period. The cost-plus system of awarding contracts has led to waste, idling of machinery and men, together with profiteering and graft. And with few exceptions, the biggest businessmen have shown a keen interest in the possibility of wrecking the unions.

But the pressure of popular feeling is beginning to change the situation, even though much too slowly. Incidentally, the recent agreement equalizing priority rights between Canadian and American firms was of inestimable value in shaking things up. So was President Roosevelt's call for a radical increase in production quotas, which our Minister of Munitions and Supply, C. S. Howe, was impelled to follow.

But the major problem is one of leadership. We need leadership and a program here, and that is what a good deal of the talking in Ottawa is about. The official opposition, the Conservative Party, has taken advantage of the weaknesses and mistakes of the Liberals to pose as the super-patriots and exponents of an all-out effort. They have raised the clamor of conscription for overseas service. They are pressing for an all-Party national government. This would be all to the good except for the fact that the Tories are widely discredited by the misdeeds of past Conservative administrations and by their intimate connections with the unpopular pro-fascist groups, including the malodorous premier of Ontario. He is the same Mitchell Hepburn who made such an ass of himself on a recent trip to New York.

Only recently this party's sacred cows placed Sen. Arthur Meighen in the leadership. He is one of Canada's most cynical reactionaries and his elevation can only be considered a defiance of public opinion. He is very petulant about the fact that in South York, Ontario, he is being forced to contest a seat in the Commons. The election comes off on February 9, and his opponent, J. W. Noseworthy, is giving him a hot race, campaigning on an all-out, national unity platform with the support of labor and progressive elements.

The second opposition party is the Social-Democratic CCF, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation. This party has made important gains in recent provincial elections and is rapidly growing in prestige. But its development is seriously handicapped by pacifist and reactionary influences in the top leadership, and by deeply ingrained sectarian habits. For example, in its latest pronouncement the CCF calls for national selective service, but only on the condition that wealth be conscripted first. This may express a definite popular feeling about the contribution which the wealthy must make to the war, but to put the matter this way tends to line the CCF with the opponents of an all-out effort and may also undermine the ability of the labor movement to take leadership in the country.

Similar sectarianism plagues the New Democrats. These are the unorthodox followers of Major Douglas, the theorist of Social Credit. They are so enmeshed in fanciful complexities of monetary schemes that they are unable to give a realistic

expression to the progressive sentiments of their following in the prairie West.

IT BECOMES apparent, then, that real leadership must come from Labor. The Canadian farmers, who are well organized in the fight for parity prices and dollar wheat, and the middle class, which is hard hit by mounting living costs and rising taxation, would support an initiative from the labor movement. But such an initiative is not yet forthcoming.

The trouble is that the Canadian labor movement is, by British or even American standards, alarmingly weak. Only some twenty percent of Canada's workers are organized. Big gains have been made in the mass production industries such as auto, especially the recent contract with Ford. But even here the movement is young and does not have enough of a tradition for political action. Moreover, the labor movement is sadly divided. There is the AFL Trades and Labor Congress; there is the Canadian Congress of Labor, in which the CIO unions are centered, and there is in French Canada, the independent Catholic syndicates.

On top of it all, the workers are deeply resentful about Mackenzie King's anti-labor policies and find it hard to grow enthusiastic under his government's leadership. There was, for example, the recent Order-In-Council PC 8253, which freezes wages at the 1926-29 levels and provides an inadequate bonus toward meeting increasing living costs. This is rightly regarded as an effort to maintain wage inequalities and bring the whole standard of living down to minimum levels. It also tends to destroy the labor unions and prevent organization. You must remember that Canada has no Wagner act. And while there is an Order-In-Council PC 2685 which endorses the principles of collective bargaining, it is not mandatory and contains no provisions to bring the recalcitrant employers into line.

There is almost no labor representation on the government boards that administer the war effort. Government intervention in labor disputes has been almost invariably on the employer's side. In some cases government agencies have been instrumental in fostering company unions, which recalls the fact that Mackenzie King earned the title of father to company unionism as manager of the Rockefeller interests during the last war.

The most striking example of this is now taking place in Kirkland Lake, northern Ontario, where some 3,000 gold miners are still on strike for recognition of their Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union. Although union recognition was in this case unanimously recommended by a government conciliation board, the employers stubbornly refuse to confer. Their spokesman, none other than Mitchell Hepburn, the provincial Premier, is trying to smash the strike by armed force. Despite repeated pleas from trade unions, church bodies, and influential citizens' organizations, the federal government won't intervene to restore production, and thus tacitly assists Hepburn and the mine operators.

This is not to say that there haven't been some changes. But they seem mighty insignificant. It is true that C. S. Jackson, international vice president of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers, was released after an outrageous internment. An ex-labor man, Humphrey Mitchell, was appointed to replace Norman McLarty, the corporation lawyer who had been Minister of Labor. Some tentative gestures have been made to meet with labor representatives to talk over production problems. These are, of course, welcome developments. Stimulated by American examples, many unions are formulating plans for speeding production: the Montreal Aircraft Workers,

AFL, has done so, and so have the CIO unions in auto, steel, and electric. They arouse the widest interest and their initiative cannot long go unrecognized.

BY WAY of conclusion, I should not omit the activities of the Canadian Communists. Although the Communist Party is still illegal, its widely distributed literature is having its effect. The labor movement, as well as the people as a whole, is listening to its proposals for winning the war. The Communists advocate a master plan for the total mobilization of Canada's manpower, industry, and agriculture under democratic government intervention. They are urging a national selective service for overseas as well as home service. They ask for labor partnership through trade union representation on the war boards. PC 8253 ought to be repealed and legislation guaranteeing the right to organize made effective. At the same time a twenty-four-hour work day with equal pay for women for equal work could go far to speed production. And above all, they suggest an end to government by Orders-In-Council, and democratization of the setup, not the least aspect of which would be the release of the scores of anti-fascists still in jail.

There's a lot to be done, as you see, and much more to be said about French Canada. We know we are behind Britain and the States in what we are doing for the war. But what we might do, if properly organized, inspires us to keep plugging. That's why you will be hearing things about Canada before long.

AUSTIN CHAMBERS.



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