

# CANADIAN DISUNION

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FEW in Canada will deny that the symptoms of national disunion, sectional and provincial differences and provincial antagonism to federal authority are at present more numerous and more grave than they have been since the Confederation pact was brought into being seventy-one years ago. Paradoxical as it may seem without benefit of qualification, the present Government at Ottawa, which was elected to office less than three years ago by a record-breaking majority, is now pre-eminently concerned with national unity, and intimations have been forthcoming from its inner councils that the major issue in the next federal elections will be just this: that is, harmonious relations between the Dominion and the provinces, and among the provinces themselves.

It must be concluded, therefore, that the overwhelming political unity indicated by the polling results on October 14, 1935, was scarcely accurate evidence that the national unity which is admittedly so essential to national progress and harmony existed in any generous measure at that time. Were we not fully informed on the underlying causes of dissension, it would be a matter of further surprise that national disunion and political and sectional disintegration should have developed and grown during the past few years; for it is obvious, from surface readings at any rate, that if political unity ever existed in the Dominion of Canada, it has existed during that period of the recent past. In the general election campaign of 1935, eight of Canada's nine provincial Prime Ministers, all heading Liberal administrations, urged the election of the Liberal Party, headed by Mr. King, to Ottawa. The citizens of Canada heeded this advice only to find, less than three years later, internal strife multiplied. In the interim, moreover, only one province, Quebec, has changed the political character of its administration. Apparently, the deplorable state of national disunion, so evident at the present time, is caused by circumstances and conditions far removed from the labels of political parties.

Unfortunately, this is more easily accounted for than corrected. First of all, it must be obvious to anybody that the national soil has been made fertile for differences and antagonisms in the perpetuation of one large racial minority. It

would be surprising, indeed, if sectional differences did not crop up to plague the central Government in a land of more than 3,600,000 square miles where Nature has been now lavish, now niggardly, and where political boundaries were not always, if ever, established with a view to equal riches or like opportunities. It would be idle to argue that interests would not clash in a country where industrial activity was confined almost in its entirety to two Central Provinces, while the great wheat-growing areas were confined to another section. In fact, from the economic point of view, it might be said that Canada's troubles are parallel to those of the world in the past decade when nationalism, restraint of trade and attempts at self-sufficiency have been most rampant, owing largely to economic inequalities between the nations.

The above brief enumeration is not by way of saying that Confederation was doomed to fail, or that the architects of the *British North America Act* foisted an unworkable plan on the provinces. Many of the difficulties existed or were foreseen at the outset, and provisions were made for their gradual elimination. Many difficulties, however, were not foreseen, could not be foreseen, and it must be confessed, if we are to be impartial and unprejudiced in our diagnosis, that the developments since 1867 have been mainly of the type to strain the spirit of unity, rather than to tighten the bonds of Canadian nationalism.

First of all, the pulp and paper industry, off-shoot of two of our most fruitful resources—timber and hydro-electric power—is principally a post-Confederation development, and its resultant economic benefits have accrued to Quebec and Ontario. The Fathers of Confederation had little, if any, conception of the importance, nay, the existence, of a great wheat empire in the West. The physical separation of this area from the industrial East is, obviously, a factor tending to disunion. The formerly large industry of wooden ship building has virtually disappeared from the Maritimes. Shipping has steadily been diverted from the Maritime Provinces to St. Lawrence River ports, another factor leading to the unbalancing of economic sharing between the provinces. I am making no attempt at this stage to account for these changes, since explanations on this score would constitute a study in itself. I think it is fair to state, however, that artificial political measures play a small part in these economic transformations. In short, most people would subscribe to the belief that Nature and other

unpredictables have favoured some sections of the country, and neglected others. In more recent years, the advantages of the great gold mining industry have been bestowed largely on the Central Provinces, serving further to dislocate the even distribution of national wealth.

All the above may appear discouraging and, in a sense, "defeatist". But it must be admitted by all who desire, above everything else, a united and harmonious nation, that it is idle to ignore these facts. A recognition and an understanding of the worst obstacles in the path to national unity is a prerequisite to an undertaking to overcome them. A moderate approach to these problems, and an acceptance of compromise by the various factions involved, are essential if the task of achieving national harmony is to be successful. It is unpleasant to report that the spirit of compromise, or in the vernacular, "give and take", is not abroad in the land.

In a public address recently, Mr. Angus L. Macdonald, Premier of Nova Scotia, approached the problems of Confederation soberly, if realistically. He asserted that eighty per cent of the benefit of the present federal tariff was enjoyed by the Provinces of Quebec and Ontario, in which were situated eighty per cent of Canada's industries. Mr. Macdonald estimated Ontario's net benefit from the tariff at about \$50,000,000 annually, and Quebec's annual net benefit at about \$30,000,000. In 1931, he stated further, a provincial (Nova Scotia) Commission of Economic Enquiry calculated that the net loss to Nova Scotia because of the tariff amounted to \$4,500,000.

For the deduction and conclusion, we shall allow Mr. Macdonald to speak for himself:

If the figures which I have been using are at all accurate, it must be evident that the Province of Nova Scotia, and indeed the three Maritime Provinces, and I might add the Western Provinces as well, for the Western Provinces by our figures suffer even more grievously than we do—the East and West of Canada—are bearing a burden of great magnitude. . . .

I point out these facts, not in any critical spirit, and with not the slightest feeling of envy for the material success that has been yours (he was talking before a Toronto audience). As a Canadian, I rejoice with you in that success. But as a Nova Scotian, I feel that if I am to speak of Nova Scotia's relation to Confederation, I should tell you what is in the minds or what at any rate I think is in the minds of most of our people.

It is interesting to hear Mr. Macdonald's argument out to the end. He declared that from the Nova Scotia point of

view, the strongest argument in 1867 for Confederation was on sentimental ground. The head of the present Nova Scotia Government stated unequivocally that, in his opinion, from the standpoint of economics, it would have been distinctly to Nova Scotia's advantage to have remained out of Confederation. Mr. Macdonald revealed that in 1867 Nova Scotia was the wealthiest province *per capita*, while to-day, he asserted, she is the poorest in *per capita* wealth, only fifty-seven per cent of the Canadian average.

Mr. Macdonald's remarks make rather painful reading for those who like to think that an equitable distribution of economic benefits has been steadily permeating the Dominion's life, or that tariffs have helped to spread benefits evenly. For the moment, then, let us accept as established fact the unequal state of affairs as pointed out by the Nova Scotia leader, and let us seek out the major premise for a practicable corrective measure. Again, according to the Maritime reasoning, it is urged that

Federal policies must take into account the interests not only of this or that portion of the Dominion, but of all its parts. They must consider not merely the populous and wealthy sections, but the most sparsely settled and the poor as well. In so far as *Federal measures and Federal policies can provide it*, there ought to be equal opportunity for the citizens of every province of Canada.

(The italics are my own.)

Thus we may conclude that the "have not" provinces, if we may so designate the Maritimes and the Prairies, look to a strong Central Government with the will and the power to minister to their needs, enlarge their opportunities, and correct alleged inequalities. Ontario and Quebec are the "have" or privileged provinces, and an examination of the attitude presently adopted by the administrations of these Central Provinces, given briefly immediately below, should be sufficient to show one of the principal causes of national dissension.

In the Ontario Submission before the Rowell Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial relations, Premier Mitchell F. Hepburn declared that his Government was emphatically opposed to any enlargement of the power of Canada's Federal Government. On the contrary, Ontario's outspoken Brief before the body which is sometimes referred to as the agency to work out a plan of Re-Confederation urged that provincial

autonomy should be further extended. Before the same Commission, the Government of the Province of Quebec endorsed Ontario's stand against any federal extension of power. Quebec further revealed its unsympathetic attitude toward Ottawa by refusing to recognize the Rowell Commission's jurisdiction to investigate provincial finances. It is plain that the larger objectives of the Central Provinces in unison and the greater part of the rest of Canada are separated by an impregnable wall.

Lack of sufficient space here prevents me from making a more detailed analysis of the Ontario and Quebec arguments on Federal-Provincial and inter-Provincial relationship, as set forth in their respective briefs before the Commission. It should be evident, however, from the comment given, that the desires of these two richly-endowed Central Provinces are at the other end of the pole from those of the recently and currently less-favoured sections and provinces. The strain thereby caused on national unity is vividly emphasized in the words of Premier John Bracken of Manitoba after he had digested Premier Hepburn's Submission to the Royal Commission. He said:

I should not like to think that the views he (Hepburn) expressed with respect to tariffs, monetary policies and Dominion-Provincial relations generally, are those of any large section of Central Canada. If they are, I am afraid that prospect of a more united nation is much more remote than many of us had hoped.

The economic ramifications involved in the matters briefly touched upon in the foregoing are not new developments. Troubles of a sectional and provincial nature, in lesser or greater degree, have been in the process of growth for years. The upheaval in Alberta, however, which dates from the election of a Social Credit Government in that province in August, 1935, and which constitutes a very forceful negation of national unity, appears to be a new development. In reality, however, it seems impossible to attribute the advent of Social Credit and provincial chauvinism in Alberta to anything other than the existence among the citizens of that province of extreme economic hardship, and concomitantly, the passionate desire of the harassed electorate to try anything as a palliative. The political success of Social Credit in Alberta to date may be said to be another manifestation of revolt against economic inequality with the seemingly richer sections of the Dominion. The so-

called inequality may be imagined or alleged; its existence was widely enough believed to induce the voter to exercise his franchise in favour of a list of candidates dedicated to impracticable and unorthodox policies.

Nearly everyone will agree that if Western Canada had not suffered so severely from drought and its allied agricultural disabilities during the past decade, there would never have arisen the present state of affairs in Alberta. That is where the stress and strain on national unity recently brought about by Alberta's course differs from the other Federal-Provincial and sectional tensions. It is my belief that a certain amount of disunity between the interests of the Central Provinces and the Maritime Provinces, and between the Central Provinces and the Western Provinces would have grown up and flourished even if we had never suffered from the effects of a severe economic depression during the past decade. The present Alberta problem came into being as a result of the grave plight which is common to all the Prairie Provinces. It was nourished by a group that made political capital out of the trying situation, and the province's wild flight from realities can be said to constitute a problem or disturbance within a larger problem. This theory, I submit, is none the less sound even if you grant to the Social Crediters the virtue of sincerity, or are generous enough to say that they are misguided zealots. More recently, social credit has become synonymous with debt repudiation by legislation, scarcely a new idea, but certainly not an honest or sincere policy that could be associated with a new and revolutionary monetary theory.

Enough evidence has been submitted to prove that we do not all speak the same language, that is, in a figurative sense. Literally, too, we speak more than one language in Canada. I think that it would be idle to argue that bi-lingualism is not a force for cleavage and disunion. The ideal of minority rights is commendable, but its virtue in making for national unity is not discernible. On the contrary, since the voice of French Canada is circumscribed by one province, or at most, two, the continuance of this condition is rather an agency for "difference". Sameness would seem to be a better premise for unity. Variety may be the spice of life; fundamental differences do not lead to a united national consciousness. In this connection, it is illuminating to note the attitude of Msgr. Camille Roy, rector of Laval University, speaking for the permanent com-

mittee of the French Language Congress, in the latter's Submission before the Rowell Commission. The following is an excerpt—

Social harmony between the two races in this country will be imperfect until in all the provinces of Canada there be bilingualism of a widespread nature based on the historically privileged conditions of the Canadians of the French language. Social harmony between the two races cannot but facilitate the solution of many economic problems. The Province of Quebec is endowed with institutions which are peculiar to it. For example, it has its own civil law, and this part of the body of the province, and in a large measure constitutes its original structure.

The permanent committee (of the French Language Congress) is persuaded that certain modifications which may be made to the constitution will bring about repercussions of a disastrous nature on the civil law of the Province of Quebec, and by way of consequence, upon the social and economic life of the province. It is for this reason that the permanent committee believes dangerous those amendments which may have as object the transfer to the federal authorities of legislative power dealing with labour conditions.

In a general manner, the permanent committee believes that it will be perilous to give to the federal authority the right to legislate for what is termed social or workmen's legislation. For example, the provinces are not equally industrialized.

This rather long quotation speaks for itself. Where it does not plead for an expansion of the French influence, it urges the maintenance of the *status quo*. Little of the spirit of compromise so essential to national unity is noted. Moreover, the context of this Brief makes it clear that the spokesmen for this responsible body of French Canada add their voices to those which have been raised against the principle of a federal scheme of national employment insurance; yet five of the provinces have endorsed or urged the carrying out of that very scheme.

It is often said these days that the price we in Canada and those in other democratic countries pay for free institutions and a parliamentary form of government, in short, democracy, is a sad state of inefficiency. In a parallel sense, I think it might be said that the admirable state, for it is admirable from a cultural and human point of view, of perpetuating the French language, customs and tradition in Canada is at the expense of a certain form of national unity we do not enjoy at present. No offence is meant, since it is my honest conviction that if Canada were all French, national unity and all its attendant virtues would accrue to this country in the same generous

measure that I think it would flow if the country were all English. Fundamental divisions of race, language and customs are not salutary attributes of a country seeking national unity.

If the Dominion of Canada is to be more than a name in the years to come, it seems evident that the present generation is obliged to accept the challenge inherent in our differences and inequalities. Obviously, no easy road lies ahead, nor should we deceive ourselves that violent changes in forms of government or economic practices will lead us to Utopia. A raising of the standard of national character, however this can be accomplished, would serve us best at this time as the instrument for attaining harmonious relations and cementing unity. It is our test. As Dr. A. G. Huntsman of the University of Toronto, speaking before the Royal Society of Canada, so ably put it—"The mental calibre of a nation is shown by the extent of the diversity that it can weld into a sufficiently harmonious orderly whole." There is an inspiring message, too, in the words of the Right Hon. Ernest Lapointe, Minister of Justice, in his Convocation address to the graduates of McGill University. "In order that a people should truly be a people, a nation one and indivisible," said Mr. Lapointe, "it is not sufficient to have the same laws, the same customs, the same interests; there must be the common will to be, to live, to last; each citizen has to realize that he is part of a whole, a cell of an organism, that he has duties as well as rights and responsibilities; in other words there must be on the part of all a voluntary co-operation, a willing contribution to the general work."

Not all voices strike as depressing a note as much of the above text does. Mr. John W. Dafoe, editor of the *Winnipeg Free Press* and a member of the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial relations, told a Canadian Club audience in Vancouver not many months ago that there has been going on in Canada a national integration, the extent and strength of which is not known even to those who have worked for it and desired it. He declared that it would not be revealed in its full power unless the need arose for its manifestation. "If that need arises," said Mr. Dafoe, "it will be found that the country called Canada is a real country, and that the name Canadian borne by its people is not a term merely of convenience." Let us hope that the speaker was right, and that the need for proving our fundamental unity does not arise from causes more disturbing than those hitherto experienced.