

THE BOGEY OF FASCISM IN QUEBEC

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IT is a common belief in many sections of Canada and the United States that the Province of Quebec is advancing rapidly along the road to Fascism, and is only awaiting the appearance of a *Führer* who will set up a totalitarian dictatorship on the banks of the St. Lawrence, dissolve all political parties, crush the labour unions, regiment industry, liquidate all Communists, Socialists and Liberals, and establish a Corporative State, all with the approval if not the actual support of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in the province.

From an intimate acquaintance with the political situation in this province, however, I am quite convinced that this belief in the ultimate triumph of Fascism in Quebec is quite unfounded, and is due to a lack of knowledge of the political and economic situation, and a misconception of the rôle the Catholic Church desires to play in provincial affairs.

It is true that the most significant feature of Quebec politics to-day is the re-birth of the spirit of French-Canadian Nationalism, which has appeared at different intervals in the past with varying intensity, and which is characterized by an emphasis upon the strengthening of the bonds of French-Canadian culture, a resistance to Americanization, and a policy of Quebec for the French-Canadians. This policy, be it noted, does not necessarily imply Separatism, and secession from the Dominion of Canada, much less the setting up of a Fascist State in Quebec, for it must be remembered that Quebec Nationalism was an important factor in the political life of the Dominion long before Fascism was ever heard of. It does imply a tendency to resist all attempts upon the part of the federal government at Ottawa to extend its influence over provincial affairs, and a desire on the part of the French-Canadian to participate to a greater extent in the economic development of the province, which up to the present time has been largely due to American and English capital.

The present phase of Quebec Nationalism can be said to date from the early 1930's, when the country was in the throes of the economic depression, with the consequent unemployment and

economic hardship which was felt by all classes of people, but particularly by the youth of the province, fresh from schools and colleges, who came into a world which had no place for them in its economic structure.

Dissatisfaction with existing economic conditions, and particularly the predominant part played by the English-speaking section of the population in the economic life of the province, together with the corruption prevalent under the existing régime, resulted in a realignment of political forces in the Fall of 1935, and the formation of a so-called National Union Party headed by M. Maurice Duplessis, and made up of both Conservatives and dissident Liberals headed by M. Paul Gouin. The chief purpose of the National Union Party was the overthrow of the Taschereau Government, at whose door all the ills of the province were laid. It was accused of surrendering to the forces of the English financiers, and selling the French-Canadian's birthright for a mess of pottage.

The formation of the National Union Party, however, was only one aspect of the Nationalist movement in Quebec, although it was by far the most important one. More or less coinciding with the appearance of this group, there sprang into existence many smaller intensely Nationalistic movements, such as *La Jeunesse Nationale*, *Le Jeune Canada*, *La Nation de Quebec*. It is the activities of these latter groups with their fiery slogans, their parades, their uniforms, and their demonstrations against Communism, which have no doubt largely contributed to the belief outside that Quebec is going Fascist. It is not generally known, however, that the influence of these associations in the political life of Quebec is comparatively insignificant, although up to the present they have been able to focus attention on their activities out of all proportion to their importance. Their membership is almost totally amongst young college students, and probably does not exceed more than a few thousand members.

Moreover, the aims of these organizations cannot be termed Fascistic in the strict sense of the word. The basic principles of all these groups are pretty much the same, although there is sometimes a difference of emphasis on certain points. In general, however, their programmes are characterized by anti-Semitism, and a certain amount of anti-English feeling; an intense Nationalism which sometimes expresses itself in what is known as Separatism, i.e., the promotion of a separate French-Canadian State on the banks of the St. Lawrence; a demand for the reform

of Capitalism and the curbing of Communism; and advocacy of a system of Christian Corporatism as the ideal form of social organization. There is no demand for the setting up of a totalitarian dictatorship on the German or Italian model.

The only organization in the Province of Quebec which can be termed Fascist is the National Christian Social Party whose *Führer* is M. Adrien Arcand. This avowedly Fascist organization publishes its own monthly paper, *Le Fasciste Canadien*, is violently anti-Semitic, repudiates democracy and advocates authoritarian principles in politics, makes war on Communism, Socialism and Liberalism, attacks "Finance Capitalism", and has as its ultimate goal the establishment in Canada of a totalitarian Corporative State on the German and Italian models.

It is this organization that the London *Daily Herald* referred to in a recent article headed, "Fascist Army Drilling in Canada", in which it stated that M. Arcand's movement, numbering 25,000 members in Montreal, and 80,000 in the Province of Quebec, included a well-drilled and well-armed body of storm troops. Where the *Daily Herald* obtained its information I do not know, but certainly no one in the Province of Quebec or the City of Montreal has ever heard of any arming amongst these self-styled Fascists, although they no doubt are doing a certain amount of drilling of a semi-military nature. It must have come as a pleasant surprise to *Führer* Arcand to be informed that his movement had grown to the proportions the *Daily Herald* claimed for it, as at recent rallies of the Party held in Montreal, Quebec's Fascists have been able to muster only between one thousand and fifteen hundred people all told, many of whom no doubt merely attended out of curiosity. It is the consensus of opinion amongst those who are familiar with the political situation in this province that the National Christian Social Party does not number more than a few thousand members, and its importance in political life is negligible, despite the fact that it has been exceedingly clever in missing no opportunity to publicize its activities.

It is not to these groups that we must look in order to gain an understanding of Quebec politics, and the direction they will take in the future. The political group whose policy and activities are the greatest factors in Quebec affairs to-day, and apparently will be for some time to come, is the National Union Party of Premier Maurice Duplessis. As to the Liberal Party, it may be discounted as a force in Quebec political life for some time to come, as it appears to be completely

disorganized and discredited, is suffering from lack of leadership, and is still in the Valley of Humiliation after its crushing defeat a year and a half ago.

As we have noted, the National Union Party came into being through a coalition of all those forces that were opposed to prevailing political and economic conditions in the province, and the system of political patronage which was the most characteristic feature of the existing government. This coalition was made up of Conservatives under M. Maurice Duplessis, a group of young Liberals under M. Paul Gouin, who were dissatisfied with the leadership and policy of the Liberal Party in Quebec, and a few independent non-party men.

The main points in the programme of the new group were the greater participation of the French-Canadian in the economic development of the province, a greater emphasis upon the development of a distinctive French-Canadian culture, and the strengthening of the bonds of race and religion; a thorough investigation into the prevailing system of political patronage, and the elimination of corruption in public affairs; the curbing of the trusts and the passing of legislation that would facilitate the municipalization of electricity; legislation guaranteeing fair wages and better working conditions for employees in industry, and the further development of the prevailing Collective Labour Agreement Extension Act in the direction of the corporative organization of society as laid down by Pope Pius XI in his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*.

Although the National Union Party came to power riding on the crest of the wave of Nationalism, and although it had gained many adherents by capitalizing on the prevalent anti-trust sentiment, which was to a very large extent anti-English sentiment, nevertheless, when once in power M. Duplessis lost no time in repudiating any desire on his part for the secession of the province from the Dominion of Canada, and went out of his way to reassure the English-speaking people that his government was impelled by no merely anti-English or anti-Capitalistic bias, but wished to secure for the French-Canadian his proper share in the economic development of the province.

It is a cardinal principle in M. Duplessis's political philosophy that if the people of the Province of Quebec are to achieve material prosperity, and Quebec is to take its place alongside Ontario as one of the chief industrial provinces of Canada, there must be

harmony in the relations between Capital and Labour. As a means of eliminating industrial strife, and at the same time advancing the cause of social justice, the Duplessis government strongly advocates the principles of Corporatism.

There is in the Province of Quebec to-day a strong and rapidly growing body of opinion which inclines towards the Corporative concept of society. Corporatism finds its adherents not only amongst the members of the present government, but also amongst the smaller Nationalistic groups and particularly amongst the Roman Catholic clergy.

This tendency towards Corporatism in Quebec is not to be confused with the Corporative State in Italy, which is based on entirely different principles. The Corporatism advocated by the National Union Party and the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec is what is known as "professional Corporatism", and is based upon the principles laid down by Pope Pius XI in his encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, for the peaceful settlement of disputes between Capital and Labour. The Corporative movement as it is developing in the province is a step towards Democracy rather than Fascism. To the existing structure of political Democracy it adds the framework of an industrial Democracy and self-government in industry, similar in many ways to the ideals of the Guild Socialist movement in England. It consists in the voluntary organization of all employers and employees in a given industry into associations which are known as corporations. These corporations are formed for the purpose of settling disputes between Capital and Labour, making agreements as to wage scales, hours of labour, etc. Only when the corporation has enrolled within its ranks the majority of employers and employees in a given industry, may it apply to the government for a charter, and be given legal status, and then all the decisions of the corporation become legally binding on all the industries in that particular branch of economic activity.

This "professional Corporatism" differs from Fascist "state Corporatism" in that these professional organizations are autonomous and self-governing units within the State, separate from the political government, and not merely organs of the State and part of the government as in Italy. The representatives of Capital and Labour in the Corporations are democratically elected by the employers and employees, not appointed by the government.

It is difficult to understand Quebec politics unless one realizes the great part played in them by the fear of Communism, which is one of the greatest bogies of the present govern-

ment and a prime factor in its policy. The steps taken by the government to combat this threat of Communism, such as the rather stupid "Padlock Law", under which the Attorney General is empowered to padlock any dwelling or building which is used for Communistic purposes, have been the chief cause of the outcry against the provincial authorities amongst the advocates of free speech and democratic liberties, such as the Civil Liberties Union, and the C. C. F. Party, who contend that M. Duplessis is using the threat of Communism as a pretence for the suppression of freedom and Democracy, and as the first move towards the establishment of a Fascist State in Quebec.

This is not quite so, for although the danger of Communism in Quebec may appear to be greatly exaggerated by the present government, and in the opinion of the writer it is, nevertheless, to M. Duplessis and his associates it is a real and growing threat not only to the political and economic structure of Society as we know it, but also to the moral and intellectual life of the province, to the Roman Catholic religion, to all those institutions and traditions which the French-Canadian holds sacred and inviolable. It is this fear and hatred of those things which Communism stands for which has prompted the government to take what it considers merely just and adequate steps to combat the evil, and there is no doubt that the overwhelming majority of the people of the province are in agreement with the policy of the government in this respect.

There is no doubt that M. Duplessis in his actions and policies has often assumed an autocratic or even a reactionary stand. He completely dominates the National Union Party which he leads, and will brook no deviation from the line of party policy which he has laid down. In his dealing with the opposition in the Quebec House he is at times brusque, discourteous and domineering. He sometimes acts in a very high-handed manner, as when he forcibly ejected General Panet as head of the Montreal Relief Commission on charges of incompetence, without the presentation of adequate proofs. His handling of the recent strikes in the province was characterized by lack of judgment and by the same obsession of the Communist bogey.

Despite all this, to tag M. Duplessis as a Fascist or the advocate of a Fascist State is absurd. Duplessis is no potential Hitler or Mussolini aspiring to dictatorship, but on the other hand is a typical politician of the old school of party politics and parliamentary government. There is no anti-Semitism, racialism, totalitarianism or anti-democratic tendency in the policy

of the present government. Strikes are not forbidden; labour unions, whether Catholic or international, have retained their autonomy; wages under the Duplessis régime have been raised rather than lowered; business is not being regimented, the freedom of the press has not been violated, the right to criticize freely the policy and activities of the government has not been curtailed, and indeed attacks upon the government by its political opponents are more violent and vociferous than ever. The by-elections which have been held since the new government came into power have been conspicuously free from any taint of corruption or coercion. The very organizations which are so loud in their denunciation of the suppression of free speech in Quebec, such as the Civil Liberties Union and the C. C. F. Party, are continually holding meetings and rallies, and discussing openly the loss of the freedom which they are exercising.

Allied with Premier Duplessis in his campaign against Communism is the Roman Catholic Church. The activity of the Church along these lines, and its position and influence in the affairs of the province, have been the subject of much misunderstanding. It is a prevalent belief in many quarters outside Quebec that Cardinal Villeneuve, the Primate of the Church in Canada, largely dictates the policies of the present Quebec government, that clericalism is rampant in the province, and that the Cardinal is working behind the scenes to establish a Clerico-Fascist State in which the Roman Catholic Church would occupy a predominant position. There is, however, really no evidence to support this view. Quebec is a province in which a large majority of the people are Roman Catholics, including the members of the present provincial government, and it is only natural, therefore, that the policies of that government should largely conform to Catholic principles and teachings. The high ranking Church authorities have again and again reiterated their stand that they have no desire to interfere in provincial politics, and that their sole interest is in having Quebec remain what it is to-day, a Christian province. It is for this reason that they see eye to eye with Premier Duplessis in his fight against Communism with its atheistic and materialistic tenets. Cardinal Villeneuve stated in a speech at Sherbrooke, Que., last August;

Never did I wish this province to be transformed into either a clerical or a Fascist community. But I want it to be a Christian community. May I ask all my English-speaking compatriots not to decide too soon that I, or the Catholic Church, intend to subdue liberty in this country.

Another widespread mistake is the tendency to hold the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec accountable for many things which are not the result of Catholic teachings, but are due to the traditions and racial characteristics of the French-Canadian, and the peculiarities of his culture. In this respect it is interesting to note the hostility in the province towards the proposal of female suffrage. Now the Roman Catholic Church has never declared against the principle of female suffrage, and has never made it an article of faith that women must not participate in politics, and it is obvious that the attitude towards this question in Quebec is prompted by racial rather than religious principles. For while it is true that women are denied the right to vote in Catholic Quebec, it is equally true that this right is denied them in anti-clerical France.

In addition to the National Union Party there are two other groups in the province of which mention must be made. They are *L'Action Liberale Nationale* of M. Paul Gouin, and the *Parti Nationale* which includes such personalities as M. Oscar Drouin, Dr. Philippe Hamel, and former Mayor Gregoire of Quebec city. Both these groups were originally allied with M. Duplessis in the National Union Party, but broke with the Premier on questions of party policy. Both groups are intensely Nationalistic with a leaning towards Separatism; both demand economic reforms which M. Duplessis has been unwilling to concede; both advocate Democratic Corporatism. The strength and influence of *L'Action Liberale Nationale* and the *Parti Nationale* throughout the province are the unknown factors in Quebec politics, although at the present time they do not appear to have any great following, and in fact the recent defeat of M. Gregoire of the *Parti Nationale* in his bid for reelection to Mayoralty of Quebec City is looked upon by many political observers here as the beginning of the end for this group as a factor in Quebec politics.

From our examination of the Quebec political scene it should be apparent that the danger of Fascism triumphing in Quebec is practically nil, although the trend towards Nationalism is undoubtedly strong and growing, and may have profound effect on the future of Provincial-Dominion relations. It is for this reason that Quebec politics will be closely watched by all those who are interested in seeing Canada become a strong united country, advancing along the road to nationhood, rather than a number of smaller, semi-autonomous, self-governing units, with conflicting aims and divergent interests.