

TOPICS OF THE DAY

INTERNATIONAL FASCISM: THE DOMINION-PROVINCES COMMISSION:
FREEDOM OF THE PRESS: THE RECESSION.

INTERNATIONAL FASCISM is the most sinister appearance on the contemporary world-scene. Unless something is done, and done quickly, to arrest its impudent activities, we can contemplate only the inevitable development of a dreadful world-conflict. A group of nations has emerged, for whom the exercise of brutal, unreasoning force is the only article of political faith. The ideal of liberty is ridiculed with cynical contempt. The arts of rational persuasion have given place to the methods of terrorism. Education from the nursery to the university has become an instrument of propaganda. The ethics of national self-interest over-rule the counsels of religion, morality and truth itself. All that we call civilisation is clearly challenged.

Unfortunately we cannot be content to sit back and watch the peoples who have adopted this political outlook work out their own destiny. Fascism has become not only a method of domestic government, it has become a maxim of international policy. The same brutal activities which suppress all opposition at home are being put into practice in ruthless aggression abroad. The nations in question do not conceive that the boundaries of their self-interest are delimited by their geographical frontiers. They are all hungry for territorial and commercial expansion, and determined that nothing shall stand in the way of working out what they conceive to be a national destiny. Signed pledges are made only to be broken. Treaties are scraps of paper. Human suffering is wantonly disregarded. Force, directed brutally and swiftly, is the only weapon in which they believe and the only language they understand. When we recollect that, within living memory, a whole generation of youth offered its life to save the world from just this kind of thing, we measure the depth of the tragedy that is developing before our eyes.

The birds of a feather are flocking together and, so far, nobody has said anything more than the mildest "boo" in an attempt to disperse them. Nationalism may be their creed, but they now form a very definite international bloc in world-affairs. Italy, Germany, Japan and the Francoist Spaniards have all made an unholy alliance, directed against some vague foe, which is known as Communism. Every attempt that has been made to arrest their audacities has

proved completely futile. The despatch of commissions and the meetings of conferences have not been worth the train-fares of the assembled delegates, so far as any effective resistance is concerned. Over against the counsels of sanity, reason and humanity they oppose the methods of overt action with complete cynical disregard of every entreaty. The nations which still believe in international law and justice must speedily come to some kind of resolute action, or a worse thing will befall them.

Unfortunately, there is no genuine unanimity of opinion among the democratic peoples. France is too preoccupied with domestic divisions to count for any effective entrance on the international scene. The United States of America is more determined than ever to keep out of international entanglements. President Roosevelt's Chicago speech was greeted with an eloquent silence. Russia cannot be reckoned a democratic nation, but she is, for the present, on the side of peace. Nevertheless, her activity is incalculable, and she is hardly to be expected to espouse any world-cause. In these circumstances, the British people are rendered impotent, so far as any kind of intervention is concerned, and with distraction, division has begun to appear in the counsels of their government.

A group has evidently appeared in the British nationalist cabinet, which has determined on a policy of passive non-resistance to the aggressive activities of Japan, Italy and the Francoist Spaniards. They have accepted the position that the League of Nations was an untimely birth, for whose appearance the world was not ready. France is a broken reed. They hate Russia and all her works. The United States of America turns a deaf ear to every appeal. Under these circumstances, they have resolved to substitute an international policy of realism for one of vague pacific idealism. Germany, they believe, holds the key-position in the structure of international peace; hence the curious and unfortunate visit of Lord Halifax to interview Herr Hitler. A steady journalistic pressure is being exerted on the government to return the German colonies, to turn a blind eye to German ambitions in Eastern Europe, to refuse resolutely all suggestion of economic sanctions against Japan, to recognise the Ethiopian conquest, to enter into trade-agreements with General Franco, and to give Mussolini a fairly free hand in the Mediterranean. This is the price of peace, and if the price is both bitter to swallow and heavy to pay, they bid us consider the dreadful alternative of a world-war.

Over against the realists, there appears to be a group of idealists, for whom justice and humanity still remain as dominant words in their political vocabulary. They hold on to the battered rem-

nants of the League as the only hope for a perishing world. The members of this group, for the most part, are middle-aged men who fought in the world-war. They hate and detest the idea that all Britain fought for during the terrible years should be bartered away because of the blackmail tactics of upstart dictators. Most properly, they realise that there will be no end to the importunate and impertinent demands of the brigand nations. A stand will have to be made some day, perhaps when that is too late. Thus, the opportunists and the idealists are opposed in the only nation that is likely to give any lead against the disturbers of world-peace. Meantime, Japan thunders at the gates of Nanking, marches through the International Settlement at Shanghai, sinks American men o' war, and generally defies the world. It is a dark hour for civilisation, the darkest since 1918.

THE DOMINION-PROVINCES COMMISSION, at long last, has commenced its important deliberations. The personnel of the Commission has not met with unanimous approval, and the criticism has come from very divergent quarters. Mr. Bennett considers that the appointment should not have been made without some formal consultation with the opposition parties. The issues are too critical to warrant a procedure which left the constitution of the Commission entirely in the hands of the Government of the day. Mr. Aberhart has entered a similar protest. The membership of the Commission contains at least two avowed opponents of the Social Credit doctrines, and the Premier of Alberta considers that this circumstance will prejudice their findings when they come to deal with his particular province. On the other hand, surely Mr. Aberhart might have considered the value of an opportunity to confront his critics face-to-face, and, by opposing, to end them. But then, he could hardly address a Royal Commission through a microphone.

The Commission has been obedient to the ancient maxim which enjoined the proverbial young man to go west. There is a psychological value in their first excursion. The prairie provinces have been passing through a time of severe economic strain. A conspiracy of circumstances has arisen to bind burdens too heavy to be borne on the backs of these younger members of the Canadian Confederation. The combined incidence of a world-wide depression and continuous years of drought has turned the El Dorado of the West into a land beset by entanglements of debt, public and private, from which immediate escape is impossible. Manitoba has had a

fine harvest, and Alberta has balanced her budget, but the years which the grasshoppers have eaten have not been restored. As for Saskatchewan, at present, she is a province living on the dole.

The initial sessions at Winnipeg have been conducted in an atmosphere of almost unrelieved gloom. The shadows have darkened as brief after brief has been submitted to the Commissioners. At Regina, there has been little or nothing to relieve the sombre hues of the Canadian outlook, and at Edmonton, if indeed the Government there deigns to take cognisance of the Commission's existence, the only light that can be anticipated will be the sparks that fly in the clash of debate. The Maritime Provinces have a sufficient entail of long-cherished wrong, and governments of the proper complexion to bring it to light, to forbid any promise of hope when the Commissioners turn east. Quebec will maintain a dim twilight of non-committalism, while Ontario will probably take up the strong position of "What we have, we hold." Ultramontane succour can hardly be expected from the province of British Columbia.

The main questions to be determined by the Royal Commission are economic in character. They refer, principally, to the incidence and distribution of taxation within the Confederation framework, and, arising therefrom, to any re-arrangement of social functions as between the Dominion and the provinces. Economics has the reputation of being a dismal science, and this may account, in part, for the bleakness of the outlook presented by the prairie and maritime provinces. There is grave danger that the whole group of issues raised by the appointment of the Commission may degenerate into a wrangle over questions of subsidies and taxation, and only the statesmanlike outlook of the members will save the day for Canada as a whole. So far, the mentality that appears to have developed in the provinces has been that of a group of aggrieved people in league against some "x" of a Dominion, which is regarded almost as if it were a foreign and oppressive power. There seems to be little recognition of the fact that the Dominion is not some external entity, to which they are compelled by a bad bargain to pay tribute, but that in reality it is nothing other than themselves in a pact of Confederation. It is this development of provincialism in the outlook of the local governments that is the most disquieting feature of the sessions of the Commission which have hitherto been held.

Nevertheless, the pleas of approaching bankruptcy entered by the several provinces indicate the grave need for a revision of the *British North America Act* in its economic and social provisions.

The amendments to be drawn up will not emerge out of any attempt to relieve local burdens of debt and to redistribute federal grants. The economic sickness that has fallen on the Canadian constitution needs radical operations rather than temporary palliatives. Our Canadian economy as a whole must be drastically considered. Some attempt ought to be made towards a resolution and reconciliation of the rather contradictory doctrines that have governed the direction of our fiscal policies. Probably, it is asking too much of a Royal Commission to effect: nevertheless, nothing approaching final satisfaction will be accomplished without some dealing with the question.

Canada, like most nations in the world, is endeavouring to run her economic life along two opposing lines. She is trying to be a great exporting nation, and at the same time to protect herself against imports. Agriculture, particularly as it is carried on in the Canadian West, is essentially an international industry. It is to the world wheat-markets that the prairie provinces inevitably turn their eyes. The same is true of mining, lumbering and fishing. An elementary acquaintance with economics tells us that if we are to export, we must also import. The manufacturing centres of Canada, on the other hand, are solicitous about the building-up of indigenous industries, and, for this purpose, tariff barriers must be erected. These two ideals are not mutually incompatible. They are capable of reconciliation, but hitherto no clear-sighted wisdom has been directed towards a solution of the problems they raise. Nevertheless, this very question lies behind the whole area of discussion that is concerned with Dominion-provincial relations.

It is not difficult to understand the inability of provincial governments to view the Canadian scene in its national dimensions. Their attention is pre-occupied with burdens of local debt, debts contracted mainly through an attempt to deal with the administration of services that have developed since they were embraced formally in Confederation. An unbalanced optimism that failed to imagine the consequences of rash policies of expansion is responsible, in part, for these provincial burdens. Canada, as a whole, must bear its share in the encouragement of these extravagant and ill-considered developments, and some relief must be given to the overloaded local governments in their accumulated debts. Here again, however, the Canadian outlook ought to be reviewed on large, national dimensions, rather than by the precepts of a narrow provincialism. Nothing could be more disastrous than to allow the development of a fight between the investing interests of Eastern Canada and the invested interests of the West. Again and again,

the Commissioners should keep before them the reality of a Canadian economy as one and indivisible, in terms of which all competing claims should be reviewed.

Let it not be forgotten that Canada has two ultimate resources that have not deteriorated—the land and the people. Land, forest and sea, and the folk who toil on them are the foundation of Canadian well-being. Everything else is a superstructure built on that basis. The boldest stroke the Commissioners could execute would be to propose that the people and the natural resources, in the wider sense of both terms, are one and indivisible, and that the one belongs to the other. Already, the Dominion government is pouring out large sums of money in the endeavour to keep the people on the land and the sea. There will be no relief from the recurrent malady of intolerable accumulations of debt, so long as these resources are the objects of wild economic speculation. Perhaps the time has come to end all the era of feverish expansion, by a declaration of the principle that the natural wealth of our Dominion belongs to the people of Canada. Thereby, some measure of governmental control must inevitably be introduced into our basic industries. If those arrangements can be separated from the miserable and destructive outlook of partisan politics, we can perhaps look forward into the future with hope. Meantime, the Royal Commission will require both fortitude and wisdom to deal with the difficult questions they must consider.

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS has appeared as a definite issue within our Canadian life. The question has emerged from two different quarters, at widely sundered points. In Alberta, an attempt was made to pass a compulsory law, dictating to the newspapers part of what they must print if they are to publish anything at all. To serve the interests of truth, the Social Credit government proposed to hand out approved news to the press, so that the people should have an opportunity to become acquainted with government policies, without the intervention of hostile agencies. In Quebec, under what has come to be known as the Padlock Law, the Duplessis government has applied its recent legislation to suppress the newspaper *La Clarte* on the ground that it was propagating the doctrines of Communism. A disquieting feature in both cases is the inclusion in the legislation of a provision forbidding appeal to the law court against the executive action of the government. The first and final initiation lies with the police, presumably acting on the

instructions of the responsible ministers of State. We are prepared to admit that Canada is entitled to develop a political organisation of her own within the British framework; but if this is to be its character, it is the interest of us all to watch its development rather closely.

The Dominion government has taken a diverse course of action in the two cases. In the West, the Lieutenant-Governor exercised his prerogative to refuse his signature to the proposed legislation, and to refer the question to the Governor-General-in-Council. On this appeal, the Press Act was disallowed, and the issue will be determined by the Supreme Court. In Quebec, no such action was taken when the law was passed, and now the police have entered the premises, confiscated the papers, and padlocked the doors of the publishing establishment. The different procedures adopted only add to the confusion and disquiet of our minds. Presumably, there is some final repository of our civil liberties in every part of the Dominion; but does it reside in the office of the Lieutenant-Governor? If so, we had better do some rapid thinking on the matter of our Canadian constitution.

The question raised is of no trivial importance. Nobody declares that the press has any absolute right to publish what it chooses to print. The privileges of newspapers are subject to the same laws that prohibit any public dissemination of malicious libel, falsehoods or obscenity. There is no liberty for paper or person to advocate violence or revolution. On the other hand, it is fundamental to the continuance of political liberty that there should be the right to express opinions and to advocate views which, however distasteful to the government in power, are nevertheless honestly held and decently proclaimed. Our whole apparatus of intelligent democratic government depends upon an incessant process of discussion and debate, in which diverse views and policies are maintained. Every public course of action was first a private opinion, often vehemently opposed and valiantly held in face of calumny and ridicule. There is something far more profound in democracy than a method of counting heads and deciding by majority votes. Fundamental to the democratic outlook is a respect for every man, wherein he has not only the right to hold views but to advocate their adoption by his fellows. Of this process, publication through the press is at once a symbol and an essential method. Too much blood has been shed, too many battles have been fought for these sanctities of our common life ever to permit their destruction by the upstart whim of any man who has neither the wit nor the ability to hold the good esteem of his fellow-men

through an appeal to their intelligence. A fatal disease will have eaten into our sense of liberty unless there arises swiftly among us a determination to nip this thing in the bud and, if need be, to defy it.

The method of suppression applied to political opposition is both foolish and ineffective. Wrong views had better be brought out into the clear light of debate, and publicly refuted. If you drive them underground, they assume rank and poisonous forms. There is no surer way to make a cause popular than to turn its adherents into martyrs. The public mind properly suspects that the show of righteous indignation that can express itself only through violent activities of repression is a confession of weakness. The lack of will to allow your opponent to state his case is a subtle admission that your own opinions can hardly bear examination. Thus the dubious expedient of using force to break down opposition has the self-defeating effect of weakening your own cause and strengthening that of the other party. Political wisdom lies in a very different direction.

Mr. Aberhart's case contended that the press was in the hands of interests that had every reason to fear and hate his policies. This, from a man who has nothing to learn in the arts of publicity and propaganda, was a curious attitude that could hardly bear inspection. It is notorious that his government was placed in power mainly through his incessant use of radio, through which he was able to introduce his views directly and almost personally into every farm-house in Alberta. Nobody has questioned either his right or his ability to take full advantage of this up-to-date method of public persuasion; but, surely, he had little ground for making a plea that his views could not get a proper hearing. However, the real cause for public alarm, both in Alberta and in Quebec, is the attachment to legislation of a prohibition for the citizen to have recourse to the courts against its enactments. If that kind of decree becomes popular among us, there is an end to liberty, and the fight for civil justice will have to be undertaken anew.

The case of Mr. Duplessis will not bear any closer examination. A vague, indefinite bogey called Communism has been set up, as an ogre to terrorise the public mind. Presumably, this political and economic system, thus loosely described, is held to rest on a noxious set of opinions that are subversive of the laws alike of God and of man. The only weapon to be used against such views is that of swift suppression. But there is an old proverb about the identity of the sauce that is used in the service of the goose and in that the gander. If the phantom of Communism is the ugly appearance that suggests itself to the mind of the Quebec government as immoral,

what better precedent could the adherents of the detested doctrines find for their methods of revolutionary action than the activities of Mr. Duplessis? It is easier to introduce the ways of violence than to stop them. Every argument that is used to support the tactics of the government can be turned against them on some future occasion. But then, the very adoption of these methods means that argument is at an end, and the policeman's baton is the final symbol of authority.

We have every reason to fear a tyranny that rests its case on a smug self-righteousness. Divine authority has been too often invoked by rascals in the course of history for that expedient to impress us. Our world needs the authority of religion and the cleansing fountains of pure morality, but these will not be released by the force of government. No service is done to the counsels of religious faith by their alliance with the oppressive tactics of civil force. The best way to ensure that "It can't happen here" is to resolve once and for all that "It won't happen here". Perhaps the gravest enemy we have to fear is the cynical indifference or good-natured tolerance that gives an opportunity only for the dictator to assemble his rowdies and to manufacture his cudgels.

THE RECESSION is a new word to be added to our economic vocabulary. It is being used widely as applied to the recent threats of a business slump. Two months ago, the New York stock market prices made a sudden downward plunge, that almost recalled the crash of eight years ago, to which we date back the onset of all our more immediate economic woes. Various causes were adduced—the war-scare speech of the President, a political plot staged by the anti-Government forces as a prelude to the special sessions of Congress, the onset of a new period of commercial decline. The fact is, of course, that the stock market collapse has to be considered alongside an even more ominous feature on the economic landscape. There has been a grave falling-off in industrial production. During the summer of this year, the United States was almost approaching the volume of output reached in 1929, but since then the graph has taken a dramatic nose-dive that looks alarmingly like the same graph for the years 1930 to 1932. Alongside this information, there comes to hand news about a sudden rise in the unemployment figures for Great Britain. So far, our Canadian business life remains remarkably steady, and even reports an increased volume of trade. But, as is usual with our

Dominion conditions, we must look for delayed action or re-action, which is none the less certain in its coming because its incidence is postponed.

The description of this new turn to economic events as "a recession" is symptomatic of what is going on. It is the product of a "psychological atmosphere". Our business guides cannot be blamed if they avoid the very mention of the ominous word "depression", for who can say where the end would come to the onset of such a dire catastrophe as another period of prolonged commercial decline? Some of our bloodcurdling economic realists are already prophesying dark things by forecasting the arrival of the next depression in the summer of 1938. But nobody knows what is going to happen, and therein lies the source of most of the trouble. There is a general uneasiness abroad. The world of business cannot cut itself off from the social and political trends of the time. The miserable failure to assert any kind of authority that would represent the voice of civilisation in the international world, the rising tide of labour opinion as a force to be reckoned with in political affairs, all breeds uncertainty and disquiet. The manufacturers and the investors hold their hands, and refuse to make commitments for the future. Only a period of relative settlement at home and abroad will restore confidence to the realm of business.

In the United States of America, conditions have come to an interesting phase. In spite of all the schemes and plans he has put into operation, the President has never yet presented the nation with a clear-cut programme of economic life that has any promise of permanency. His régime has been one of audacious opportunism, and, on the whole, he has succeeded remarkably well. The indeterminate character of his policies has been an advantage, for he has been able to make rapid changes, almost overnight, to adapt his plans to new circumstances. Mr. Roosevelt has displayed an amazing resourcefulness in surmounting obstacles and turning sharp corners. The process has been costly, and, at times, reckless, but it has worked, and he is entitled to our respect for his achievements.

Over against the disturbing activities of the President, there has been a growing volume of resentment among those elements in the population who depend on settled conditions for making long-term plans. The big industrialists, whose programmes involve large capital investments, have become riled beyond endurance at what they describe as the presidential antics. After a period during which he has exposed them to a merciless criticism,

much of it entirely deserved, the President now hopes to unload his New Deal permanently on to the shoulders of the business men. What Mr. Roosevelt accomplished by large-scale spending of government money, he now proposes to be continued by industry through its own resources. The method is one of taxation, whereby he will prevent large, undistributed accumulations of wealth, and the world of business has refused to respond to his overtures.

It looks as if the long-delayed time of testing has arrived for the American President. Hitherto, he has ridden the storm by an unplanned opportunism, in which expenditure and income never hoped to meet. But he has converted nobody to his policies, for the very good reason that nobody has ever understood them, not even himself. Now, he is endeavouring to turn his plans into accepted methods of business, and the country is bewildered. A battle has been joined between the President and the business community. Large numbers of his followers have separated themselves from his allegiance. However, it is not likely that the working people and farmers will turn Republican again, unless some popular leader appears on the scene. The swing is much more likely to be to the political Left, and such may be the next movement in American politics. A period of "recession" will provide a suitable germinating time for such a growth to make its appearance.

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