

# CANADA'S INTEREST IN THE WORLD CRISIS<sup>1</sup>

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I HAVE to thank you for those kind opening words. I am a Montrealer of a sort; but I just want to say, in passing, that though I was connected with the *Montreal Star* in an editorial capacity for some years, I do not appear to have left my impress upon that paper!

I am to speak to-day for a short time about the world crisis and Canadian relations to it.

Now the world is in a crisis because there is a prospect—more than a prospect, a possibility, or even probability, one may say,—that we are going to see the wiping out, the destruction of the only thing that was gained from the Great War of value to humanity, and a return to pre-War conditions. I think the civilized people of the world are just waking up to the fact that this is a possibility; they have not taken the situation seriously in the past, but they are awakening to it to-day. There is a rally of much the same kind of popular sentiment that was responsible in the first place for the establishment of the League of Nations; but it is going to be, perhaps, “a touch-and-go affair” as to whether or not the situation can be saved.

In trying to make clear this situation in the world, perhaps I might resort to metaphor:—the metaphor of a dam built in a valley in order to control recurring disastrous floods which came at periodic intervals and destroyed the country below. We have such a dam in world affairs in the League of Nations, designed for collective security. The dam is in danger of being carried out, and there is a rallying and hurrying of people to its support. But there are those who refuse to help, and who have plenty of reasons, such as they are, for not helping. They are the people who say that the dam is not built right, that they do not like the engineers who built it, that it was built in the wrong place and at the wrong time, and that the control of the waters is not in accordance with their ideas of what it should be. There are those who say it is the inherent right of waters to rush downhill, and if anyone gets ruined thereby, it is so much the worse, but we ought not to interfere with Nature. There

1. An address to the Canadian Club, Montreal, Nov. 7, 1935.

are those people above the flood levels who say: "Because we won't be involved, though it is true that our neighbors will be destroyed and that the roads in the future will be blocked, it is no concern of ours".

What is in danger is the new principle of international law. I am going to cite a passage from a book on "Sanctions" just published by the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London. This book describes international law as it was related to war prior to 1914, or as generally accepted up to 1914:

To go to war, even as an aggressor, was technically no crime. Once war was declared, international law contented itself with defining the rights and duties of belligerents and neutrals, the rights alluded to depending in no way upon whether it was an aggressor or a victim of unprovoked or unjust attack. The result of war, as decided by the arbitrator... was not on a question of legal grounds or any other power; it was accepted by the world as final.... With the establishment of the League of Nations, the law of nations is placed on a firmer basis, one being the agreement that the disputes between nations, whatever their nature may be, shall be settled by pacific means, i. e., by agreement between the parties to the dispute or by some judicial process, and under no circumstances by war.

The proposal is that we are to reject that new conception of international law as to the obligation which one nation owes to another, and that we return to the old state of affairs. This is a matter of more than academic interest; it is a matter of vital personal interest to everyone in this room and in this country. We see all about us plans and projects, political and governmental, national and international, to do something to make this world a better place wherein to live, people toiling to bring about improved conditions of living, improved methods of promoting trade; and while all these propositions are in hand, they are nothing but castles in the sand in the face of an incoming tide if we are to have recurring war, that is, war under modern conditions, hyperbolic war (in Ferrero's phrase), a war without limitations and restraints, war without consideration of anything but victory—that is, a war that cannot be ended. That was the kind of war waged from 1914 to 1919; it was not ended in 1919; it is not ended to-day, because it has reappeared in the economic world. If we are to have a recurring succession of those wars, then civilization as we know it cannot endure or survive. Mr. Baldwin, speaking on more than one occasion with the authority and responsibility of his high office, has said that another war would accomplish the ruin of civilization; and we all know that he is right.

The one safeguard that we have is the League of Nations. Inaction in Ethiopia in face of the wanton aggression of Italy would have been fatal to the existence of the League, and that fact has come home to the peoples of the world and to governments of the world which hitherto have been indifferent, cynical or hostile. So there has been a rally to the League.

I am fully aware of all the criticisms that have been directed against the League. Unfortunately, being a product of human nature, being the outcome of deliberations in which national feelings, national ambitions and prejudices played some part, it is rather an imperfect instrument; but if you wait for perfect instruments in this world, you will never accomplish anything. Our Socialist friends—and I am thinking of the party in Canada which represents the Socialist point of view—in their last platform indicated that the League of Nations would have to be reformed before they could give it their support. There are those who say that you cannot do anything with the League of Nations until the nations agree to limit their sovereignty. I was speaking on a somewhat similar subject in the United States recently, and there came to me a man who said "When the League of Nations does something definite and settles this Ethiopian question, it will be time for us to consider its claims." I asked "Why don't you get in and help them to do it?" Then there is the idea that the League in relying ultimately upon force is thereby destroying its own ideals.

To people who present such arguments to me about the League, I make one reply which they generally find somewhat disconcerting. I retort: There is much in what you say in criticism of the League: but do you think that if you refuse to utilize the League and to employ the powers which it gives the nations, you can protect yourself in the future and enjoy complete liberty of action so that you can do as you please? What are the alternatives that the nation which declines to use the League must face rather than use it and make it more efficient as time goes on?

Well, the alternative to international co-operation through the League—or in a better organization if one can be found—is to submit not only to possibilities, but to certainties far more onerous, far more dangerous than membership in the League entails. The nations that refuse to co-operate with the League, and even attempt to destroy it, are likely to be carried by fate to inevitable ruin—I do not think that word is too strong—and it is because this has been recognized by the peoples and governments of the world that we find this last-minute, this very belated rally to the cause of the League.

There has been a great change within the last few months in the attitude of Great Britain, as officially expressed, towards the League,

as there has been, I think, also in Canada. This is another illustration of how powerful are events in forcing solutions of problems that previously have been theoretical. The British Government has systematically and persistently minimized its obligations under the Covenant. As long ago as 1919 there was a somewhat official interpretation of the Covenant which indicated that Great Britain had suffered no limitations of her rights, powers and jurisdiction, that rather suggested that the League was merely a more efficient agency for conference. That conception of the League has persisted down the years. If you want a perfect expression of this view, you can find it in the current *Fortnightly Review* in an article by Sir Edward Grigg, where in a series of suave paragraphs he eliminates the League almost entirely and reduces it to a polite debating society.

A Study Group in England recently gave some attention to this question. There were some very eminent men connected with it, and they brought in a report to the body to which they belonged. In their somewhat elaborate report I read this:

The British people accepted the guarantee and sanctions contained in Articles X and XVI of the Covenant, because they assumed that these pledges and the sense of solidarity to which they gave expression would in themselves be sufficient to prevent war in the future.

They further declared that peace can be maintained in Europe only "by means of an organization with obligations too rigid for British tastes or British parliamentary traditions"; therefore Great Britain, they held, could not belong to a League which would meet European conditions. They favored some sort of world League, but also a regional league which would attend to Europe. I think it was largely to combat that general acceptance in Great Britain of the idea that, after all, they were entirely free to do as they liked, and that the League was something of a debating society, that Lord Robert Cecil and his associates resorted to the device of the Peace Ballot. Their insistence upon taking this vote was very disturbing to those who held what might be called the official British view. You can confirm that very readily by reading the London *Times*, which was extremely displeased with Lord Robert Cecil's ideas:—it was so very improper to submit questions 5 and 6 to the judgment of the uninitiated and uninformed people who, when war comes, supply the cannon fodder! I think the extraordinary result of the Peace Ballot has had a good deal to do with the changes in British policy. When the Ethio-

pian difficulty arose, and when it became obvious that it could be dealt with only by the League in the terms of the original intentions of the founders of the League—because no one can read the Covenant and the literature which accompanied the drafting of the document which preceded it, such as General Smuts's pamphlet, and not understand that the very foundation-stone of the League was that if a nation is declared an outlaw, it would be dealt with by the only means with which law-breaking individuals or nations can be dealt with—and that the very existence of the League was at stake, the pressure of events swept away the isolationist attitude. Great Britain planted herself firmly with the purposes of the League and gave the League of Nations just what it had been looking for for sixteen years, a strong leadership towards keeping the peace of the world, even if it were necessary thereby to apply Sanctions—that dreaded word; even if it involved deciding who was the aggressor, which Sir Austen Chamberlain often suggested was beyond the wit of man to do. The British Government had no difficulty in detecting the aggressor, and no difficulty in recognizing that it was a time for Sanctions. So it was that the British rallied to the League, and the rallying came from most unexpected quarters. Mr. Winston Churchill (laughter) in support of this policy broke out into rhetoric. I wish I could match him as a speaker; but since I cannot do that, I will read something of what he said:

The League has passed from shadow into substance, from theory into practice, from rhetoric into reality, and we see now a structure almost majestic but hitherto shadowy, which has now been clothed with life and power, endowed with coherency of thought and concerted action. We are beginning to see a body which we hope and pray may restore a greater measure of security to the whole earth.

This is a little rhetorical, but a good deal better than the sort of thing we have had for years from Great Britain in regard to her obligations in this matter. And that speech by Mr. Churchill is only one of a series. There have been similar speeches by Sir Samuel Hoare; by Sir Herbert Samuel and other Liberals; also by Mr. Herbert Morrison, and Dr. Hugh Dalton of the Labour Party; so that there seems to be a body of unanimous opinion. To-day the British people are at one on this great question.

Events have had a precisely parallel effect in Canada, not so markedly perhaps, because we are farther away. The view in Canada, that while we belong to the League we ought not to take it too seriously, that our obligations were written in water, has been held, I think, by more people who were vocal than by any other

group. Here again the impact of the event has resolved the situation in the form of finding out the only possible road. As a matter of fact, my judgment is that all of our great problems, constitutional and others, in Canada, though their settlement is generally preceded by interminable discussion, are eventually settled by this—an event happens, and everyone sees that because of this event, there lies the road plain before us. So we have had the phenomenon of going through a general election, fought with great vigour, and in the spirit which has prevailed in all the general elections I have known, and no attempt to exploit the situation that we were threatened with war has been made. On the other hand, all the leaders preserved a reserve which was perhaps a little too reserved, because we would have been quite willing if they had been a little more heroic in some of the opinions they expressed about Canada's obligations on this issue.

Canada is right on this question. The statement by the Honourable G. H. Ferguson at Geneva is marked with a caution that makes one curious to know who drafted it; yet it has within its four corners an admission that we are a League Power, and that we will cooperate with the League. And then Canada voted for the Sanctions in common with fifty-one other nations, and the new Government has reaffirmed the position of the old with a little added emphasis.

There are two reservations in that document which Mr. King has put out; one is the reservation that it does not necessarily constitute a precedent—which is simply a flourish, not meaning anything, as so many things that look important in public documents often are. The other reservation is as to the rights under the League of Nations of our own nation. Technically we have complete freedom of action under Section 16 in the obligation of economic Sanctions, but morally we have none; morally we have no alternative if, in the judgment of the League of Nations, economic Sanctions should be applied. I do not think we have any option.

Military Sanctions, under Articles 16 and 10, undoubtedly are governed to some extent by geographical location and material interests; and with regard to them, I can understand a country exercising a considerable measure of independent judgment; but that too must always be subject to the facts implied in membership of the League of Nations, whatever our geographical location or material interest may be. Implicit in this obligation is the necessity of lending a hand, if needed, to prevent an outlaw nation getting away with the goods; and I should hope that there would be no Canadian who would deny that proposition. I think the

economic Sanctions carry the possibility, from which we ought not to shrink, of military Sanctions.

Mr. Baldwin made a statement on that point. Speaking in the House of Commons a year ago, he said, "There is no such thing as a Sanction that does not mean war or a possibility of war". Or, in other words, if you are going to adopt a Sanction, you must be prepared for war. That perhaps is not so directly applicable to us on this side of the world, but the moral obligation is there, and I, for one, as a Canadian, am not prepared to water it down in the least.

Now, there is another aspect to this development which is gratifying to me. There is a solidarity among the British nations, but they did not constitute an Empire Bloc at Geneva. That makes all the difference in the world; for, as you know, Great Britain is under a certain measure of suspicion with her new-found fervour for the League; and if, as has been suggested in certain quarters in Canada and Great Britain, the British nations had joined in making themselves a common body under the leadership of Great Britain, and in that sense had taken part in the League proceedings, misunderstanding would have been very general. No; there is a solidarity of the British nations, but it is a solidarity of nations that belong to the League, showing a devotion to the League which they share with some forty-six other nations; and that adds power to the League. If this great venture, this attempt to apply the Covenant, succeeds and establishes peace, it will help to solve some of these problems of the British Commonwealth, which are necessarily the problems of our new status, particularly that of our relationship with one another in the event of war. Mr. Winston Churchill has said; "Great Britain will never enter another war except as a League Power." The manifesto of the National Government in England, of which Mr. Baldwin is the head, says: "Future foreign policies of England will always be in harmony with those of the League." If this is so, all these inter-Imperial difficulties will tend to disappear.

If there is betrayal, as there has been in the past—but perhaps I should refuse to discuss that question. Let us assume that the League in this great test will prove triumphant, and that once and for all the rule will be made the judgment of nations. Then a wide prospect emerges of making the League something more than a power which simply keeps the peace. Peace does not mean simply cessation from hostilities; peace means a condition in which natural activities are allowed to develop and continue for the furthering of all good purposes. The League should and will develop in these

respects, provided it stops war and outlaws it. If it cannot do that, still the idea will not die. The Covenant embodies an idea that is bound to be realized in time; but between to-day and its achievement, if this present venture fails, there may lie ahead of us a century of turmoil, strife and savagery such as the world has never seen, because this would mean that the savage element in human nature would be on top; the primeval instincts of the cave-man and the savage, armed with the lethal weapons of the 20th century, would be in command.

These are the questions before the world to-day, and there is the issue. It does not seem to me there is any choice for the individual or the nation.