

# Organizing Canada's Political Life

## Rebuilding Democracy

By B. K. SANDWELL

IN spite of the last twenty years, the idea seems to be still strangely prevalent among the more optimistic citizens of ostensibly democratic countries that democracy is a sort of twentieth-century latest-model machine for carrying on government, which can be acquired and installed by any intelligent community, and which, once installed, is guaranteed to function without repairs or attention for an indefinite period—perhaps until a still later and better machine is invented by the illimitable ingenuity of science.

It is apparently believed by a great number of these optimists, for example, that all that is necessary is for the existing government of India to abdicate, and democracy would immediately be installed and set going in that Empire and would function to everybody's satisfaction. It is true that the more acute among these optimists will admit, when questioned, that democracy in India would have to be, for a time at least, democracy "on the Russian model;" and the fact that this is not what is commonly regarded as democracy by ordinary people in the democratic countries does not deter them, any more than it deterred the Webbs from asserting, in their latest book *The Truth About Soviet Russia*, that under the terms of the Constitution of 1936 "the USSR is the most inclusive and equalized democracy in the world."

It is important that we should bear in mind the fact that the concept of democracy which animates a very considerable number of citizens in the democratic countries is now such that they would be willing to regard the establishment of institutions closely resembling those of Russia as involving no breach

with democratic principles, in spite of the fact that those institutions are admittedly designed to allow no share in the government and administration of the country to any person not nominated by one of a certain recognized group of "public organizations and societies"—all of which are either direct Communist party organizations or societies in which it is easy for the party to maintain control. All political organizations opposed to the Communist party are thus debarred from any share in the government; more than that, they are debarred from existing. This, be it remembered, does not mean merely organizations opposed to the principles of Communism; many an old and long established democracy, and almost any newly established democracy, may find it necessary to prohibit organizations whose purpose it is to effect a fundamental change in the constitution. But this means organizations opposed to the particular method of practicing Communism which is accepted by the Russian Communist party, or opposed to the policies of that party in any particular—deviating in any respect from "the party line." This may be an admirable system of government; it may be an absolutely necessary system of government in a country inhabited by such people, and located in such a position, as Russia; it may be and probably is the only system of government which would have saved that country from succumbing to the German military power. But to describe it as democracy is to deprive that word of most of its significant content. It is to suggest that government by a small and tightly organized society is ruled by the "demos," the mass of the people. (That that rule is accepted and ardently defended by the "demos" has



nothing to do with the case; it may prove that it is very good government in the circumstances, but it certainly does not prove that the mass does the governing.)

Democracy, then, is essentially rule by the mass of the people. It is not the mere acceptance by the mass of the people of rule by any society, clique, group, class, hierarchy or individual. If rule is actually in the hands of any such society, group or individual, the result is not democracy. It is not democracy even though it be possible for certain individuals of the mass at any time to secure entry to the governing society or clique—as it is, by a process of education and conformity, in Russia. Democracy is seldom perfect, and it may in any given case be deficient in practice either in respect of admitting too few members of the community into the governing mass, or in respect of giving the supposedly governing mass an inadequate control over the machinery of government, or in both. In a community of a million adult members, for example, it might at first sight appear that a political system which gave only two hundred thousand the right to vote in the choice of representatives was inadequately democratic on the side of the size of the electorate. Nevertheless there are admittedly differences in the qualifications of different races, at particular stages of their development, for the task of self-government, and if the eight hundred thousand are only just emerging from a state of barbarism, it may well be inadvisable to try, at the moment, to be any more democratic than twenty per cent. But this is assuming that the voters in such a state do actually exercise a real control over the machinery of government. If they do not, there is not the slightest difficulty about admitting any number of them to the franchise; for the “democracy” not being a real democracy in point of power, can afford to be as ultra-democratic as it likes in point of franchise. This is what enables the admirers of the Russian polity to make such plausible claims for its democratic character because of the fact that it makes absolutely

no discrimination between individuals on account of race, color, religious belief, “previous condition of servitude” or any other quality. The social results of this tolerance are admirable, and the political results are negligible because the franchise confers no real power. That the franchise confers a very real power in the United States is amply demonstrated by the lengths to which the Southern States go to keep it out of the hands of their Negro majorities. These States are democracies in respect of the adequacy of the power exercised by the electors, but not in respect of the adequacy of the number of the electors—unless we admit, what those electors claim, that the Negroes are incapable of participating in a democratic system.

If, then, we desire to maintain a genuine democracy in Canada, it seems to follow that we shall desire to maintain a system in which a sufficiently large proportion of the adult citizens can exercise a sufficiently real power over the processes of government. We shall not be satisfied if they merely tolerate a government in the control of which they have no voice. We shall not be satisfied even if they have no wish to alter the government's policies, unless we know that their contentment with them is genuine, the result of responsible consideration and not of long-continued and accepted impotence. We shall certainly not be satisfied with a system under which any organization to effect political ends other than those desired by the government is prohibited, under which candidates for public office can be nominated only by organizations approved by the government, and under which a close society which picks and trains its own members is the sole real seat of power. Yet that is what is being held up to us as an acceptable form of “democracy” by an important element of our thinking citizens.

Let us admit at once that the thinking of this element has been formed during a period in which war, on the largest scale and in the most savage forms, has seemed to be the natural and unavoidable state of mankind at this stage of its develop-



ment; and that democracy is of all forms of government the least suited to show to advantage in such a period. Democracy rose to its highest development and its most widespread success during a period in which war was strictly confined in its spread by the absolute supremacy of one, in the main peaceable, power on the surface of the oceans. Worldwide warfare began when that power ceased to be able to maintain that supremacy. If worldwide warfare is to continue, in active eruption once every generation and in active preparation the rest of the time, it is extremely likely that democracy must be written off as impracticable. The more tyrannical government in general becomes, the more urgent it is that our own tyrannical government should at least be conducted by people of our own race and nation, and not by conquering foreigners; and the more necessary it is that it should have at all times that total authority over the individual and all his goods which makes for success in war but ruins democracy in peace.

But a properly integrated combination of democratic nations—if only there are enough of them—ought to be able to regain that supremacy on the sea which no single nation can now afford, and to use that supremacy in such a way as to make aggressive warfare even on land an extremely hazardous enterprise—indeed an enterprise which in the long run is bound to fail. It is, I think, only in such a world that we need concern ourselves about the survival of democracy, for it is only in such a world that it has any chance of surviving. And to posit a world of that kind is to posit conditions the very opposite of those which have led to the rise and apparent success of the numerous One-Party governmental systems which have negated true democracy in many parts of the world by denying the right to oppose the government. A world in which large-scale and desperate war is a normal condition, is a world in which democracy is impossible; it is a world in which the right to oppose the government is a luxury which no nation can afford; it is a world in which the

individual is easily induced to surrender that luxury in the hope that by the surrender he may keep his nation free even if he cannot keep himself free.

But even in a world in which peace is much more secure than in the middle of the twentieth century, it will still be difficult to maintain a truly democratic system without a great deal more attention to its workings and understanding of its requirements than we have shown in the past forty years. The functions of government are to-day immensely more extensive and complicated than in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the economic sphere we can no longer be content to have government merely "hold the ring" to ensure fair play in the constant adjustment of the relations of property, contract and labor as it is effected by the unimpeded operations of supply and demand. (There is some hope that we may eventually get back rather nearer to that happy state than we are at present, when we have succeeded in redefining the rights of those three factors; our present troubles may be largely due to an exaggerated concept of the rights of mere property in the form of capital, along with a failure to realize that the employment of property as capital—that is, as the greatly enlarged and extended equipment of tools with which labor works—brings with it certain responsibilities which do not attach to property in other forms. It may, for example, come to be considered preposterous that a corporation which has property rights in a motor factory, i.e., in the tool equipment which motor-building labor requires in order to build motors, should allow five thousand workers access to those tools for six months and then throw three thousand of them out on the street. If the worker-and-tool relationship were better defined, it might not be necessary for the government to be constantly interfering, or sitting ready to interfere, to secure its more equitable operation.) We can no longer be content to have the value of the unit of currency left to be determined by the ungoverned effects of conditions in the mining industry of a



certain metal, nor the volume of credit by the ungoverned effects of the changing moods of optimism and pessimism in the minds of the adventurers of new capital. In a word, *laissez faire* is out, and with it the idea that the least governed country is the best governed.

The difficulty about all this is not so much that the operations of the new kind of government require greater skill than those of the old; it is that they involve a much greater and more constant interference with the interests, or the apparent interests, of different groups and classes of the electors. It is not really essential that government should always be one hundred per cent right in its interferences, either in the matter of attaining a perfect maximum output of goods and services, or in the matter of effecting a perfectly equitable distribution of them when produced. *Laissez faire* never attained anything like that result; and the margin within which error in both respects is possible without any serious damage to the community is enormous. No; the real danger is that government may degenerate more and more into a clash of interests between powerful economic groups, in which the general good of the community may be lost sight of in the pursuit of selfish ends. *Laissez faire* had at least the appearance of allowing the government to disinterest itself in the relations of the different economic groups in its society, so that the results of the supply-and-demand process looked like the unguided operations of economic laws; they were a good deal less so than they appeared, because, whatever may have been the case within the boundaries of the country itself, beyond those boundaries the association between economic and political activities was always and inevitably very close; export and import trade, emigration and immigration, international finance, all had to be dealt with by government and all had a very direct effect and profound effect upon the interests of domestic economic groups. But to-day a great deal of the same kind of government activity is necessary even in purely domestic business, in the spheres

which it was theoretically the bounden duty of *laissez faire* to leave alone; and the consequent tendency to view political power as something to be used primarily to advance the interests of one's own economic group becomes very strong.

Fortunately the intensity of the group-interest which actuates the average member of the democratic mass electorate is not very strong, nor is it very rapacious. The average farmer thinks that farming has received something less than a square deal from government, and is probably right; but he does not want to use his unquestionably large political power to make a fortune for himself or his fellow-farmers. The average member of a trade union also thinks that organized labor has received something less than a square deal; but it is not very likely that he will ever use his political power as some of his leaders would like him to do, to secure for them the real control over the industrial process in which he participates. "Pressure groups" are dangerous when it is a matter of advocating isolated policies which have no very definite repercussion on other groups and so excite no vigorous opposition, but on the whole the ordinary pressures of the different economic groups and interests of a diversified democracy tend to cancel one-another out and to leave the government fairly free to pursue what it honestly regards as the best interests of the entire country.

It is extremely important that the new and enlarged interferences which government is now being compelled to make in the economic life of its citizens should be based as largely as possible upon well understood and generally accepted principles, and as little as possible upon *ad hoc* considerations applicable only to the particular case. Unfortunately these principles are at the moment very much in the making, and are a long way from general acceptance. For instance, while it is almost universally admitted that the workers in any industrial establishment must have a great deal more to say about the operations of that establishment than they have in the past, there is no agreement, not only on how



their views shall be reconciled with those of the management, but even on how they shall be organized to express those views. Once these principles are formulated the task of government will be not only much easier, but also much freer from group pressures.

If we can diminish the occasions for selfish pressures upon government to advance the interests of a group or class, by providing and accepting general principles which will cover most of the cases where the interference of authority is necessary, and if at the same time we can establish in the minds of the electors the moral principle that the obligation of the

ruler to rule in the general interests of the ruled is not one whit less when the ruler is the whole body of the citizens than when the ruler is a king or a hereditary class or a soviet, we may look forward with some confidence to the survival and strengthening of democracy, at any rate in a world in which peace is the norm and war a hateful exception to be avoided by any means short of gross injustice. It need hardly be said that these requirements involve a pretty high standard of citizenship, and do not at all justify us in thinking that democracy will maintain itself without any thought or care or sacrifice on our part.

## Dominion-Provincial Relations

By J. A. CORRY

BY the time war broke out in 1939, many Canadians had concluded that a considerable adjustment in the relations between the provinces and the Dominion was overdue. The Sirois Commission studied the question between 1937 and 1939. Their report provided an analysis of the federal system since Confederation and made far-reaching proposals based on that analysis. But as the report was made public just as the blitzkrieg opened in the west, naturally its recommendations were not fully studied and debated. Some of the financial proposals of the Commission have been adopted as temporary war time expedients on the understanding that the whole matter will be reopened after the war. Dominion-provincial relations, therefore, remain on the agenda as unfinished business to be dealt with in the post-war period.

Since the publication of the Sirois Report, the war has wrought many

changes in Canadian life and thought the enduring effect of which cannot now be measured. The war has also destroyed the structure of international relations which stood so precariously during the 1920-40 period and candour forces the admission that we know as little—or even less—about the future of relations between states than we did in the closing years of the last war. Thus we do not know what adjustments Canada will have to make to international conditions, whatever those conditions may be. Equally, we do not know how great the internal economic and social distortions will be at the close of the war and therefore cannot say how far we can reconstruct to a pre-war pattern and how far war will have permanently changed the Canadian social structure. Most important, we do not know how far war will have permanently affected public opinion on the appropriate role of government—a question with profound implications for the federal system.

Each of these present uncertainties will be conditioning factors of immense importance in Dominion-provincial relations. It is impossible to say what

EDITOR'S NOTE: J. A. Corry, Professor of Political Science at Queens University, has made a number of valuable contributions to the problem of Dominion-Provincial Relations. He was an advisor to the Rowell-Sirois Commission and is author of two reports, *The Growth of Government Activities Since Confederation* and *Difficulties of Divided Jurisdiction* which were published among the appendices to the Commission's report.