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A THREAT TO LEADERSHIP: C. A. Dunning and Mackenzie King

BY NOW THE STORY of the Progressive revolt and its impact on the Canadian national party system during the 1920's is well documented and known. Various studies, from the pioneering effort of W. L. Morton¹ over a decade ago to the second volume of the Mackenzie King official biography² which has recently appeared, have dealt intensively with the social and economic bases of the movement, the attitudes of its leaders to the institutions and practices of national politics, and the behaviour of its representatives once they arrived in Ottawa. Particularly in biographical analyses,³ a great deal of attention has also been given to the response of the established leaders and parties to this disrupting influence.

It is clearly accepted that the roots of the subsequent multi-party situation in Canada can be traced directly to a specific strain of thought and action underlying the Progressivism of that era. At another level, however, the abatement of the Progressive tide and the manner of its dispersal by the end of the twenties form the basis for an important piece of Canadian political lore: it is the conventional wisdom that, in his masterful handling of the Progressives, Mackenzie King knew exactly where he was going and that, at all times, matters were under his complete control, much as if the other actors in the play were mere marionettes with King the manipulator. His official biographers have demonstrated just how illusory this conception is and there is little to be added to their efforts on this score. But in the process of dealing with the major concerns of the period, some aspects of events and issues have been overlooked or only alluded to, largely because they are peripheral.

One such event is the half-hearted beginnings of an attempt on the part of a strange momentary combination of Eastern and Western Liberals to unseat King as leader of his party after the disaster of the general election of 1925. Charles Avery Dunning, Premier of Saskatchewan, was the instrument of sedition, and while there can hardly be any disagreement with Neatby's remark about the episode that it "scarcely merited the dignity of being called a plot",⁴ this attempt at

usurpation deserves some treatment mainly because it appears to represent the only occasion during his lengthy tenure when King was specifically threatened as leader of his party.

This brief study will attempt to place on the record some relevant evidence about the attitudes of the rebels and the difficulties confronting them.⁵

It does not appear to be an overstatement to assert that many of Mackenzie King's difficulties over his position as leader of his party came as a result of a conflict of interests between the low-tariff West and its natural enemies from St. James and Bay Streets. During and after the election of 1921, he attempted to effect a reconciliation between the two camps under the Liberal umbrella. He was unable to do so mainly because of the uncompromising attitudes on both sides, especially on the part of the Progressives. He was also hampered by the general insecurity of his position as leader arising out of a whole raft of peculiar conditions connected with himself personally or with ideological cleavages in various areas of the country, most notably Quebec.

The situation in Quebec was particularly uncertain for King. Two opposing forces vied for dominance within his party in that province. On the one hand, Lomer Gouin, Premier of the province since 1905, led the old-line conservative section centred in the Montreal business and commercial community. King was never certain of the support he could command from that quarter. Confronting this *bleu* wing was the new generation of Liberals headed by Ernest Lapointe. In large measure, this was a cleavage between urban and rural interests, and these leaders and the attitudes they represented were essentially identical with those opposing each other at the party's national convention of 1919 which had narrowly installed King as leader.

The results of the 1921 election in which the Liberals came within one seat of an absolute majority impelled King to attempt to lure the Progressives into his government. After lengthy negotiations, the best he could hope for was support from them on specific issues. This failure to bring in the Progressives meant that his cabinet was far less representative than he would have liked and that it was, in addition, overloaded with old-guard Liberals and protectionists.⁶ Almost from the outset, however, it was clear that the Progressives were split into two wings: Henry Wise Wood's radicals, to whom the entire apparatus of cabinet government was evil, and the moderates led by T. A. Crerar. In 1922, for personal and financial reasons, Crerar quit the leadership and returned to Winnipeg leaving Robert Forke

in charge of his group, which was mostly composed of agrarian Liberals whose major ambition was not much more than to break the hold of the eastern moneyed protectionist interests on the party.⁷ Crerar, along with John W. Dafoe, A. B. Hudson, who sat as an independent Liberal from 1921 to 1925, and former Winnipeg mayor and manager of the Grain Exchange Clearing House, Frank O. Fowler, and lawyer H. J. Symington, were the leaders of this brand of Progressivism which was centred in Manitoba. Called "The Winnipeg Sanhedrin",⁸ they concluded that the stand-pat policy of the Ottawa government as manifested during its first few years in office was mainly attributable to the Prime Minister's poor leadership, and they set out to supplant King by C. A. Dunning, the young Liberal premier of Saskatchewan.

In the fall of 1923, Crerar informed his friend A. K. Cameron, who was close to Montreal commercial circles, about the state of opinion in the West:

I cannot see that the Government is improving its position. It is in a state of decline which will continue. I understand Dunning has served notice on both Stewart and Motherwell, which is doubtless conveyed by them to their colleagues, that King need not count on any support from Saskatchewan. There is a good deal of talk among Western Liberals of revitalizing the Liberal Party, but they see no way of bringing it about. King's leadership is not making any appeal and I don't think it will.⁹

It is probably more than a coincidence that at the close of the year, Sir Lomer Gouin resigned from the cabinet, supposedly because of ill-health but really because of a disagreement with King over fiscal policy. This action pleased the Westerners, as did King's elevation of Lapointe one month later to Minister of Justice over Rodolphe Lemieux, who was pressed upon him by the Montreal wing.¹⁰ This marked the ascendancy of Lapointe to the undisputed leadership of Quebec, and his position in the party's federal power structure was concomitantly reinforced by the appointment of P. J. A. Cardin to Lapointe's old post of Marine and Fisheries.¹¹ At approximately the same time, King was negotiating with Crerar once again to try to bring him into the government. King was unwilling to meet all of Crerar's demands. With the failure of this attempt, Crerar, Dafoe, and Hudson concluded that not only had King missed an opportunity which would probably never return but that he was hopeless as a leader besides.¹²

King continued to try to placate the West. He permitted the news to leak back to Crerar that he was pleased with the results of their discussions. While Crerar was sceptical, he accurately predicted that King would make some attempt to reduce the tariff later in the year.¹³ When in the middle of May the government came out for a tariff for revenue, Walter Mitchell, the representative of English com-

mercial Montreal sitting for St. Antoine, resigned his seat, as did Herbert Marler of the same clique—another sign to the West that the party might yet be reformed. Finally, that autumn, on a tour of the West, King suggested to Dunning that he join the government, and while the Saskatchewan Premier was cautious, even his friends recognized that he relished the prospect.¹⁴

King did not readily give up in his attempt to shore up his support in the West by the inclusion of Dunning in his cabinet. However, by the late summer of 1925, his hopes were dashed by the Premier's final refusal to join the government. There appears to be no evidence explaining the reasons underlying Dunning's refusal. According to Neatby, King believed that Dunning had probably decided that no matter what the outcome of the impending federal election, his best tactic was to play it safe: if the Liberals did win outright, he would inevitably be called into the cabinet; if they lost, he would still be Premier of Saskatchewan. Furthermore, in the event of a minority government, Dunning's chances for the leadership might then be increased because he was the obvious successor should King falter. King's surmise is reinforced by the fact that Dunning took the added precaution of refusing to permit his Minister of Highways, James G. Gardiner, to go to Ottawa in his stead.¹⁵

There matters stood until the election of October 29, 1925, further complicated the distribution of House seats. The 1921 Liberal total of 117 was reduced to 101. The Conservatives more than doubled their representation from 50 to 116. The Progressive total was drastically reduced to 25 seats, but in the circumstances the party held the balance of power. As Crerar put it, "Whoever won that election—one thing was sure! King didn't!"¹⁶ The Prime Minister had personally been defeated in North York along with seven members of his government, all from outside Quebec.

The regional distribution of seats was of even greater significance to those dissatisfied with King's leadership. The Meighen-led Conservatives had won 68 seats compared to a paltry Liberal 12 in Ontario. The score in favour of Meighen's forces over the Liberals was 23 to 6 in the Maritimes while, on the Prairies, the Conservatives had substantially increased their share of support in spite of being still outnumbered four to one by Liberals and Progressives combined. On the other hand, the Liberals had captured 60 out of the 65 seats in Quebec. This last result was not, however, attributed to King's personal appeal but to "the memory of Laurier, the hatred of Meighen, and the fighting qualities of little Cardin."¹⁷ In effect, it was the outcome in Quebec which kept Meighen from his majority.

King had the choice of either resigning or continuing in office at the head of

a minority government with support from the Progressives. Almost immediately he approached Forke in order to find out what kind of backing he could hope for. After discussing the matter with Hudson and Crerar, Forke informed King that since he had not had the opportunity of consulting any of the other Progressives who had been elected, he was in doubt whether he could give King any assurances of support. However, as Crerar, Forke, and King all knew, there was hardly any question where the majority of the Progressives would stand: "If the situation sifts down to a choice between King and Meighen, the West will be for King."¹⁸ The only flaw in this reasoning, as Crerar himself recognized, was that the nine-member Alberta contingent was not as automatically willing as the Manitoba Progressives (as well as A. A. Heaps and J. S. Woodsworth, the Labour members from Winnipeg) to back King even on specific issues. It was more on the strength of his belief in his ability to carry the House on this basis than on any explicit commitment from Forke that King went to Lord Byng later in November and proposed that he continue as Prime Minister.¹⁹

King's decision to cling to office was a satisfactory one to the Winnipeg group. If King had decided to resign, Crerar felt that it was possible that Meighen would be able to form an administration of his own, although his difficulties would be considerable. Then, unless he was able to reach an understanding with protectionist Liberals, there would have to be an election within a year—but with Meighen, not King, making the appeal to the country. In such an event, Crerar was fearful that

under these circumstances Meighen would make a stronger appeal to Quebec than was the case in the election just finished. Many French Canadians are, perhaps, a little more prone than most English speaking Canadians to be on the winning side. At any rate I can tell you definitely that the Tories are counting on this. I spent a couple of hours last night with a gentleman who is very close to Meighen and close to the Tory organization, and he figures that if an election were held under these auspices they would get quite a number of seats in Quebec.²⁰

Implicit in this analysis was the conclusion that, in view of the regional distribution of party strength, King was not necessary to the party. If King were displaced, another leader would have a greater appeal in English Canada, and with Quebec returning a virtually "solid 65", the Liberals would be automatically assured of power.

While the Westerners were pondering the potentialities of the situation, the *bleu* wing of Quebec Liberalism centred in Montreal, and now looking to provincial Premier L. A. Taschereau for leadership, had similar thoughts of its own on the same subject. These conservative Liberals likewise felt that "King has no more

appeal to the English-speaking than Meighen has for the French",²¹ and they recognized that he could either resign or carry on at the head of a minority government. The line of action they favoured was to have King stay in office for a term and then have the Government go to the country under new leadership. Their candidate to replace King was elderly George Murray, who had retired two years before because of ill-health as Premier of Nova Scotia after twenty-seven years in office. According to their plan, King would be appointed High Commissioner in London. Murray, who was supposedly "persona grata to all sections of the country",²² would form a government in which the Quebec cabinet contingent would be evenly split between the new and the old guard (Lemieux and J. A. Robb on the one hand, Cardin and Lapointe on the other), while the more or less protectionist Ontario representation would have a low-tariff counterweight in Hudson, Crerar, and Dunning from the West. Those supporting this plan believed that, in an election, Murray could carry half the Maritime seats, maintain the same level in Quebec, win 25 to 30 seats in Ontario, and sweep the West with Dunning and Crerar in the cabinet. While they believed that King had to be deposed or disaster would be in store for the party, they recognized, however, that "the great difficulty . . . to be faced is, how to bring Mr. King to see the line of action that is so obvious to others outside. At a conference with one or two of his friends today it was pointed out very forcibly that Lapointe and Cardin were the men who must put this up to him, if it is to be done at all. Will they do it?"²³

This information, communicated to Crerar, Dafoe, Hudson, Fowler, and Symington, brought an immediate response that Murray was out of the question

not in any degree owing to lack of respect for Mr. Murray . . . but from the belief that putting this responsibility upon him after his retirement from Nova Scotia a few years ago on the ground that his health could no longer stand the strain of office would give a very unfavorable impression to the country. It could not be said he was taking the position temporarily with a view that some one else would succeed him a few years later. Hudson mentioned that this could leave only one impression with the country, viz.—that the Liberal Party was more concerned with its party fortune and preservation than with the welfare of the Dominion. He thought this could be used with telling effect when the next election comes off.²⁴

Some thought was also given to the idea of having King continue and then displacing him by either Graham or Robb, but it was decided that since both were closely associated with the conservatives in the party, this would have little appeal in the West.

In the back of the minds of the Winnipeg group was the notion of a Dunning-

Lapointe joint leadership somewhat of the order of the Baldwin-Lafontaine Reform Ministry of pre-Confederation days. Dunning was an especially likely candidate for such a duumvirate because, in contrast with King's poor electoral performance, Dunning was fresh from a resounding victory in the Saskatchewan provincial election held earlier that year.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly, however, that policy considerations rather than personalities were of the highest order of importance to the Winnipeg group and to Crerar especially. In a letter to Cameron written several months before, reporting on a meeting held by Manitoba Liberals, Crerar summed up his own attitudes and underlined Dunning's importance as a factor in his calculations to force a sharp re-orientation in the national party system:

The Manitoba Liberals had a meeting about ten days ago. It was neither large nor representative. They passed a series of resolutions dealing with Federal matters that were broadly along the line of the Progressive policies in the last Federal election. Along with this the prevailing sentiment at the meeting, so I am told, was for co-operation with the Progressives.

While I have had no direct confirmation of it, I think the situation in Saskatchewan and Alberta among the Liberals is much the same. I am told that Dunning is for this quite strongly.

. . . Personally I would like to see a movement in Western Canada along the lines of the Liberal Convention of 1917. By this I mean an effort to crystallize Western opinion through the medium of a Convention at which all classes would be invited to participate. I would like to see such a Convention define a courageous constructive programme on national questions alone, avoiding as far as possible anything of a sectional nature, elect a leader and declare emphatically for the maintenance of Confederation, and state as its definite policy a willingness to co-operate with all other parts of the Dominion in the carrying out of the programme thus laid down. I realize that great care would have to be taken to make the programme thoroughly national. Such a programme should deal with the railways, with immigration, wider markets, tariff for revenue, possibly some changes in the banking system, reorganization of Government service and expenditures with a view to bringing about reduction in taxation. Briefly, in other words, the slogan of the Liberals of sixty years ago in Britain, 'Economy, Retrenchment and Reform.'²⁵

Crerar spoke about the general situation to Dunning over the telephone on November 6 and asked him to come to Winnipeg. Dunning claimed he could not do so because he was tied down in Regina with government business. Crerar did not communicate the details of the news from the East over the phone, but decided that H. J. Symington, who was scheduled to go through to the coast by train, should speak to Dunning the following morning during the fifteen-minute stop in Regina and get his views in that way.²⁶

Symington's report of the following day's conversation demonstrates the difficulties involved in unseating King:

Have just left Dunning after a few minutes conversation. He was very clear on one point and that was that any move towards the elimination of King must come from the East, Lapointe, Cardin, etc. and that this was most important. We must not give even the appearance of conspiracy. Briefly, if they want King to withdraw let them arrange it and then come and talk. He agreed that King was a terrible load and that he should go but it must be the East who does it. He had already sent word to King through Senator Ross that he was prepared to go if needed, said that under the circumstances he could do nothing else. I suggested that before going in he insist on a meeting of provincial leaders and he thought that a good idea. He has heard nothing from King and . . . thinks that . . . we are in for a long period of opposition. He is doubtful if they [the Conservatives] can get into Quebec so long as Meighen is there but if they do, the Tories are in for 15 or 20 years.

He says Murray is impossible and that it is too soon for himself "yet."

Summarizing I would say

1. Dunning agrees King is impossible.
2. He agrees Murray is impossible.
3. He will not himself even hint at the removal of King but if the East would do it, it would be the best thing that could happen.
4. He thought C and all of us ought to be most careful about appearing to be plotting, leave it entirely to the Frenchmen.
5. He has agreed to stand by much to his regret but at present feels he can take no other position.
6. In the back of his mind, he will spend the next two years getting known in the East, so as to be the man when the time comes.
7. Quebec must be held if possible until that time arrives and therefore they must be the initiating parties of everything in the meantime.²⁷

It was clear that Dunning was eager to go into federal politics even at the cabinet level.²⁸ In the matter of leadership, however, it was equally clear that everything hinged on whether Lapointe was willing to co-operate. "Would he do it?" The answer was not long in coming. Since the election, Lapointe had been vacationing in Atlantic City with Robb, who, instead of Murray, was now being considered by St. James Street as the alternative to King.²⁹ When Lapointe returned, he immediately made a public announcement that he was remaining loyal to his leader.³⁰ He had no reason now to join forces with the interests that had so recently been eased out of dominance in the party. Then King, who had known what was in the air for over two weeks,³¹ added his own public statement to the record in response to the report in *The Grain Growers' Guide* of November 21 that the West was fed up with him and was looking to Dunning for leadership:

I have no intention of retiring from public life nor have I ever entertained an idea of the kind. No doubt the Tory Party in Canada would welcome nothing more than my retirement. Any intimation of the kind should be understood by the public as emanating, like so much else appearing nowadays, solely from that source, and as being only a part of a continuation of their campaign of misrepresentation and prevarication which became more general than ever in the recent election. Having failed in one direction, our political opponents, in seeking office at any price, are now driven to extremes in another. My advice to them and to all others who have any misgivings on this point, would be wait and see.³²

It soon became apparent, moreover, that some of Crerar's private calculations regarding the probability of opposition to King on the part of the Alberta Progressive contingent might be incorrect. It was also clear that in the ranks of the Progressives there was disunity. He wrote about the situation to Cameron:

The Progressives are not showing any unity of purpose. I think it likely that Jelliff, Fred Johnston and John Miller have already given assurances that King can count on their support. The other Alberta members met a few days ago and signified their willingness to co-operate with King, providing they get satisfaction for Alberta on the matter of rural credits, natural resources and the single transferable vote. The rest of the Progressives are more or less at sea. I suggested to Mr. Forke a few days after the election that he should endeavor to get them all together before they started off at tangents. This was not done. The situation is that Mr. Forke is without authority, unless possibly for the Manitoba men, to have any discussions with King.³³

For their part, the English Liberals in Montreal now recognized that King had decided to hold on to the end. This did not, however, diminish their opposition to him. Cameron noted:

As far as I can gather, he intends to hold on, either as Prime Minister or Leader of the opposition, but there is growing down here a very definite and strong opinion that he must go. This is particularly true on the part of English supporters of the party. As a matter of fact, I am convinced that Mr. King is not acceptable and will not be suffered to continue as the Leader of the English people of this country.³⁴

The French were not quite as certain as their English counterparts that they wanted King deposed so precipitately. Their attitude to the Saskatchewan Premier was also equivocal. At the end of the third week in December, Cameron reported:

the feeling here among the [French] leaders is it would be too much to swallow Dunning all at once. This view of course is held with reservations. Said reservations including the right to shift ground if it is found necessary to do so.

Taschereau feels that we must stick to King at this juncture. His words to me last week were that we must be patient with him. As you know, this is Sifton's opinion also.³⁵

It does not take much reading between the lines of the exchanges between Cameron and Crerar during that month of December to recognize the effect that Arthur Meighen's ill-fated speech at Hamilton was having on the calculations of the anti-King forces. It was becoming increasingly evident that there was no English-speaking candidate commanding a national constituency who was an alternative to the Prime Minister either within his party or in the opposition. Cameron had this sardonic assessment of the Conservative leader to offer:

As to Meighen—he is being roundly cursed by many sections of his Party; as to his Hamilton speech he is quite unrepentent. I understand he consulted with Sir Geo. Perley, Sir Ed. Kemp and Sir Robert Borden before making the speech and you and I both know him well enough to understand that once having taken the stand, he will maintain it. There is one thing about Meighen upon which you can always depend—he always throws away his hand with a full house.³⁶

Meanwhile, King was moving as quickly as he could to protect his position further. Refusing a constituency in Quebec for fear of focussing more public attention on the over-representation of that province in his government and hopeful of improving his acceptability to English Canada, he chose the Saskatchewan riding of Prince Albert as his new seat. This action prompted a rather prophetic remark from Crerar: "The fact that King is going into the House permanently fixes him, I think, as the Leader of the Liberal Party. It may well turn out in the end that Meighen's leadership is in more jeopardy than King's."³⁷ On February 15, King easily won the by-election. Five days later, he brought Dunning to Ottawa as Minister of Railways and Canals, an important portfolio as far as the West was concerned. Staying behind in Regina was James G. Gardiner, upon whose support King was certain he could depend. Gardiner recalled:

I could have come East instead of Dunning in 1926. Haydon had come out to see me. I told him that Dunning was his man. I told Haydon that if people were going to talk, they'd better talk down there than back here I never did anything in Saskatchewan without discussing it with King—and he never did anything in Saskatchewan without discussing it with me.³⁸

While there is considerable truth to this assessment by Gardiner,³⁹ what should not be overlooked is that King had many motives for bringing Dunning in—one of which was to placate precisely those Westerners who were dissatisfied with his own leadership. In such circumstances, Gardiner was an unacceptable alternative to Dunning. Gardiner's political methods were anathema to the Progressive movement, which at its foundation had intensely puritanical moral overtones.⁴⁰ As Crerar put it,

[Gardiner] is both ambitious and determined. It would be a great mistake to take him to Ottawa. He more than any other man has secured, and in large measure earned, the hostility of the Progressives in Saskatchewan.⁴¹

Gardiner was correct in assuming, however, that King had more than passing respect for his organizational hold on the province.

King was certainly not safe yet. But it is senseless to speculate on the outcome of these intrigues against him because the events of the next few months settled the matter irrevocably. The result of the imbroglio with Byng and the ensuing election saw the Liberals emerge with a comfortable majority in the House. So obvious and substantial was King's personal role in these events that he was finally able to rid himself of the protectionist old guard and thus forestall further attacks on his leadership from the West. The end of moderate Progressivism was marked by Robert Forke's acceptance of a portfolio after the election, and when he resigned in 1929, his place was taken by Crerar.

Even without the fortuitous intervention of the remarkable events of 1926, it is doubtful whether the Progressive strength was sufficient to bring about the change. It is clear that the Winnipeg group over-estimated the possibilities available to it, policy factors aside, as a note written to Dafoe early in 1926 by the *London Times'* Ottawa correspondent, J. A. Stevenson, demonstrates. Stevenson was convinced that since Robert Forke had always set great store by Dafoe's advice, he should tell Forke

to use his chance to get us rid of the incubus of Willie's soggy carcass; if they [the Progressives] will only say firmly they will cooperate with some other leader than Billy, Billy will get sick and go to Florida for his health. Now or never is the chance for otherwise he will get back via Prince Albert and sterilize the forces of reform for 20 years.⁴²

It was Lapointe, however, not Forke or Crerar or even Dunning, who held the key to the situation. And he refused to move against his leader. By 1921, the famous bond of friendship between the two had already been established. Although there is no evidence available to show Lapointe's feelings in the matter, King's high estimate of Lapointe is revealed in the following excerpt from his diary written as he was engaged in selecting his first cabinet:

I told him [Lapointe] I regarded him as nearest to me & wd. give him my confidence in full now & always. We would work out matters together. I regarded him as the real leader in Quebec and sent for him first of all He . . . is just & honorable at heart—a beautiful Christian character⁴³

By 1925, with Gouin gone, Lapointe was in a position to show that this trust in him was not misplaced.

While the immediate danger to King's authority had passed with the 1926 victory, Dunning was still being regarded as the heir apparent. However, with Gardiner at the head of the Saskatchewan provincial party, Dunning had lost control of his base of support. As early as September of that year, Crearer reported:

I had a very interesting two hour chat with George Bell of Regina yesterday. He refers to Gardiner as the "Mussolini" of Canada. I believe the official Liberal organization in Saskatchewan is against Dunning. I do not know whether King invited Gardiner to go to Ottawa or not, but it is significant that he went down with the Western Cabinet Ministers when King called them to conference.⁴⁴

Within the year, hope for change was a thing of the past with Fowler's report to Crearer after a visit to Ottawa "that the P.M. is at the moment quite firmly in the driving seat and is driving."⁴⁵

Dunning's long-range hopes of being chosen successor after King's retirement died more slowly. In the defeat of 1930, he lost his seat. He admitted to many friends that he felt the pull of public life,⁴⁶ but he decided to join the Eastern business world—an easy matter since he had finished out the term of the last government as Minister of Finance—to pay off some debts and no doubt to make himself even more acceptable in that quarter. The results of the election and the revelations of the Beauharnois scandal kept rumours of a change in leadership alive with Dunning's name in the forefront. One year after the election Grant Dexter wrote to Dafoe:

The resentment to King's leadership among eastern Grits is quite formidable. Dunning has been approached by many influential people with the idea of deposing King at a new national convention. His mind is quite clear in this regard. He would not split the party over the leadership even if he was sure of the support necessary to give him the leadership. He believes if you would support him on the prairies he could win a national convention, but that the results would be a party split which would take years to heal. King, he thinks, is still regarded as leader by the rank and file who do not know much about what has been happening.

He thinks, also, that it would be unwise to call a national convention until say 1933. He knows that Mackenzie King is opposed to a convention now or later and will secretly do all he can to block it.⁴⁷

However, while the press kept the rumours in the air,⁴⁸ King was ensuring that no convention would be called by founding the National Liberal Federation and placing Vincent Massey at its head. A policy meeting was held at Massey's Port Hope residence in 1933. Dunning, at the same time, was disappointing his Western support-

ers by his close association with Eastern business (he was executive-director of the Seigneury Club for a few years and then moved to the presidency of the Maple Leaf Milling Company in Toronto). In the circumstances, Dafoe was forced to advise Harry Sifton who, as head of the Ontario Liberal Association, had been opposing King since Beauharnois, that there was no alternative to the present chief:

Theoretically, the Liberals would be happier if they had a new leader who would be young, attractive, competent . . . etc. They would then be able to go before the public and play the usual confidence game, representing him as a man who would make the country rich, if not in a night, at least in a year or so. With King in charge a campaign of this sort is not possible, since both his virtues and his limitations are well known to the country. I do not regard any suggestions to change the leadership of the Liberal party at this time as within the range of practical politics. There is no practicable alternative excepting Lapointe, and the difficulties in the way of putting Lapointe at the head of the party cannot at this time be surmounted. Chief among them would be his refusal to entertain the proposition if it were put up to him.

I do not think the objection to King is related . . . closely to the Beauharnois episode It arises more from restlessness and a desire for some kind of new deal. These are the factors of the moment in politics, but their importance might easily be over-rated. A row in the party over leadership, particularly if it took the form of an attack upon King without any alternative name being mentioned, would probably do what is otherwise impossible, namely, return to power Mr. Bennett at the next election. I am very strongly of the opinion that the commonsense view of the situation is to accept the situation and make the best of it. I am inclined to think that upon the whole the Liberal party is fortunate in having a leader with as many qualifications for the job as Mr. King has.⁴⁹

King's return to power with an overwhelming overall majority of just under 100 in 1935 ended Dunning's hopes. The new cabinet, containing as it did few of the ministers of the 1920's, presented none of the alliances and animosities with which King had been contending through the previous decade. To the old stand-bys—Lapointe, Cardin, Dandurand, Rinfret, Crerar, and Dunning—were added C. G. Power, C. D. Howe, Norman Rogers, and J. L. Ilsley, young men who were chosen primarily for their administrative ability and to whom the old feuds and alignments were largely meaningless. The only exceptions were Ian Mackenzie of British Columbia and J. G. Gardiner, whose inclusion was politically inspired, although there was no doubt as to Gardiner's administrative ability. In effect, defeat in 1930 and then victory in 1935 permitted King to do what his two great predecessors as Prime Minister, Macdonald and Laurier, could not do: namely, renew his cabinet without endangering his position of pre-eminence; for, aside from Lapointe, he now ruled alone.

Nevertheless, when Dunning rejoined the administration in 1935, his hopes, while false, remained high. He still saw himself as King's successor and is reported to have remarked on several occasions to at least one companion: "You know, it's very hard to come to Ottawa with people calling you the Crown Prince."⁵⁰ It was clear, however, that his opportunity had passed. He retired from the cabinet as Minister of Finance in 1939 because of poor health.

The lot of pretender to the prime ministership or party leadership is a sorry one even in the best of circumstances. And the difficulties confronting Dunning and the Progressives, and their experiences in the process of "plotting", underline the problems involved in unseating an incumbent. In large measure, the factors in operation in this episode are general, for they appear to provide the basic limiting conditions for all such incidents.

Although there can be no denying that Dunning was "ambitious", it is clear that, at its base, the Progressives' dissatisfaction with King in this instance rested on general political or policy rather than upon personal grounds. In such circumstances, the incumbent invariably is in a superior position to his challengers because, in the course of mustering support against the incumbent, the challengers are forced to join hands with others who are in agreement with them, not on matters of policy, but simply in being opposed to the present office-holder. In fact, it is not unusual in these events to have groups joined together, as was the case with the conservative Liberals in Quebec and Dunning's supporters, who have diametrically opposite views on public policy. The incumbent also has means to deal with a situation of this sort which are not available to his opposition. He has merely to choose one of the policy alternatives put forward by a segment of the opposition and to proclaim his support of it in order to undercut the movement against him.

If the motive for opposition to the incumbent boils down solely to a matter of personality, the issue is invariably tied to the party's standing with the electorate. Defeat at the polls inevitably brings the question of a change in leadership to the forefront. By the same token, a leader or prime minister possesses no better answer to any kind of opposition to himself within his party than victory: King rendered all internal party opposition to his leadership a matter of purely academic concern forever with that triumph in 1926 and subsequent successes.

Finally, while it is well beyond the scope of this paper, it is not out of place to emphasize that the organizational practices of Canadian political parties, both in Parliament and in the country, always function in a manner which leaves no doubt

that the reins of power are securely in the hands of the leader and his supporters. The effect is to leave no avenue of opposition open and to provide no forum—either a caucus or party convention—in which any meaningful opposition can be expressed. In fact, the entire notion of opposition is illegitimate and, in effect, proscribed by the functional requirements of a political system resting on the concept of cabinet responsibility.

What is left for the opposition, then, is provincial politics. In fact, this has been where the real opposition has existed in Canada. But should a provincial leader aspire to national command and accept a position in an Ottawa government or on the opposition front bench as a preliminary step, he automatically plays into the hands of the incumbent, for in the process of leaving his province, he is immediately forced to give up his base of support. At the same time, to remain in provincial politics is often to preclude the achievement of national stature. No provincial premier has ever become prime minister. The counsel of prudence for an aspirant, therefore, is to sit tight in Ottawa, to follow the party line and thus to be “available” should the occasion arise when either defeat or old age render a change imperative.

Obviously, these loose guidelines are empirical, not theoretical. There are no grounds, especially in matters of this sort, for asserting that the outcome is predetermined or governed by immutable circumstances. However, the operation of these factors, both in the general Canadian past and in this particular instance of the Progressive insurgency of the 1920's, helps to explain the lengthy periods of office experienced by party leaders. This applies especially to the Liberals, who have had only six leaders since Confederation—a record of long-lived leadership without equal in any other Western democracy. Indeed, so substantial are the obstacles against successful insurrection and so loaded are the dice in the incumbent's favor that the wonder is that anyone should even bother dreaming of a revolt, much less attempting one.

NOTES

1. *The Progressive Party in Canada* (Toronto, 1950).
2. H. Blair Neatby, *William Lyon Mackenzie King, The Lonely Heights, 1924-1932* (Toronto, 1963).
3. For example, Ramsay Cook, *The Politics of John W. Dajoe and the Free Press* (Toronto, 1963); R. MacGregor Dawson, *William Lyon Mackenzie King, A Political Biography, 1874-1923* (Toronto, 1958); and Roger Graham, *Arthur Meighen: And Fortune Fled* (Toronto, 1963) along with Neatby's volume.

4. *Mackenzie King, The Lonely Heights*, p. 88.
5. What follows is based on evidence in the A. K. Cameron, John W. Dafoe, Lomer Gouin, A. B. Hudson, and Ernest Lapointe papers in Ottawa, and the C. A. Dunning papers in Kingston as well as upon extensive interviews with, among others, A. K. Cameron, T. A. Crerar, and James G. Gardiner.

The author wishes to take this opportunity to express his gratitude to Mr. Cameron and Senator Crerar for their generous permission to use the correspondence in the Cameron Papers. He would also like to thank the staff of the Public Archives of Canada for their kind assistance.
6. The chapter entitled "The election of 1921 and Cabinet Formation", in Dawson, *op. cit.*, pp. 348-376, gives a detailed and complete account of the negotiations with the Progressives and the formation of the cabinet.
7. In one of his numerous notes to his employer, Clifford Sifton, John W. Dafoe once neatly summarized Crerar's policy dispositions as follows: "The fact of the matter is that Crerar is nothing more or less than a Liberal of the type with which you and I were quite familiar prior to 1896." (Public Archives of Canada [P.A.C.], *John W. Dafoe Papers*, Dafoe to Sifton, November 10, 1920.)
8. See Bruce Hutchison, *The Incredible Canadian* (Toronto, 1953), p. 60.
9. P.A.C., *A. K. Cameron Papers*, T. A. Crerar to A. K. Cameron, October 12, 1923.
10. *Ibid.*, Cameron to Crerar, January 31, 1924.
11. For example, within a year after Gouin's resignation from the government, Cameron could report "... Cardin ... and Ernest [Lapointe] are on the very best of terms and are working into each other's hands with considerable success. The opinion here is that Cardin is steadily growing in strength. He is very active, full of fight and generally speaking, gains strength by way of contrast with what we have been accustomed to in the past." (*Cameron Papers*, Cameron to Crerar, December 27, 1924.)
12. *Ibid.*, Crerar to Cameron, January 28, 1924.
13. *Ibid.*, Crerar to Cameron, February 6, 1924.
14. *Ibid.*, Crerar to Cameron, November 15, 1924.
15. Neatby, *op. cit.*, p. 65.
16. Interview, Ottawa, December 12, 1960.
17. *Cameron Papers*, Cameron to Crerar, October 30, 1925.
18. *Ibid.*, Crerar to Cameron, November 3, 1925.
19. The attitudes and activities of the Progressives are described in detail in the chapter entitled "The Progressive Group in the Constitutional Crisis of 1926," in Morton, *The Progressive Party*, pp. 236-265.
20. *Cameron Papers*, Crerar to Cameron, October 31, 1925.
21. *Ibid.*, Cameron to Crerar, November 3, 1925.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, Crerar to Cameron, November 7, 1925.
25. *Ibid.*, Crerar to Cameron, August 5, 1925.

26. *Ibid.*, Crerar to Cameron, November 7, 1925.
27. P.A.C., A. B. Hudson Papers, H. J. S. (Symington) to A. B. Hudson, Regina, CPR en route. The letter is not dated, but it is clear from the *Cameron Papers* that this is the report of the conversation with Dunning on the morning of November 7, 1925, in Regina.
28. For example, Crerar remarked: "My own impression is that Dunning is ready and even anxious to get into federal politics. There is not only the appeal of the wider field but he probably feels that his abilities would carry him far, which I think is right. This a a perfectly laudable ambition. How far he will be able to adjust himself to the new conditions would still have to be demonstrated." (*Cameron Papers*, Crerar to Cameron, November 11, 1925.)
29. *Ibid.*, Cameron to Crerar, November 16, 1925.
30. *The Montreal Daily Star*, November 21, 1925, p. 3.
31. Neatby, King, *The Lonely Heights*, p. 88.
32. *The Montreal Daily Star*, November 23, 1925, p. 7.
33. *Cameron Papers*, Crerar to Cameron, November 27, 1925.
34. *Ibid.*, Cameron to Crerar, December 4, 1925.
35. *Ibid.*, Cameron to Crerar, December 22, 1925.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*, Crerar to Cameron, January 19, 1926.
38. Interview, Ottawa, January 8, 1961.
39. See, for example, Neatby, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-119, 172.
40. The classic description of the Liberal organization in Saskatchewan is Escott M. Reid's "The Saskatchewan Liberal Machine Before 1929", *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, II (February, 1936), pp. 27-40.
41. *Cameron Papers*, Crerar to Cameron, January 26, 1926.
42. *Dafoe Papers*, J. A. Stevenson to Dafoe, January 16, 1926. Stevenson was in virtually endless correspondence with Dafoe.
43. Quoted in Dawson, *op. cit.*, p. 362.
44. *Cameron Papers*, Crerar to Cameron, September 23, 1926; also see *Dafoe Papers*, Dafoe to Clifford Sifton, December 16, 1926. Within a few months of taking over in Regina, Gardiner was also reaching out for control of the Liberal organization of Manitoba. The Manitoba Liberals gave him a dinner after he had spoken at the University of Manitoba Convocation in the late Spring. At the dinner, he denounced any coalition with the Progressives, asserting that, while such a rejection would probably relegate the Liberals to the opposition for a time, this would have long-run beneficial results for the party. He also privately made some nasty comments about Dunning. Crerar reported this to Cameron and concluded: "I may say for your private information that this has been discretely conveyed to the P.M. If Gardiner were allowed to get his influence into Manitoba it kills the prospect of the Liberal party here for fifteen years. The hopeful thing is that the younger Liberals here did not fall in with his point of view, although some of the old die-hards claimed him as a sort of second Moses." (*Cameron Papers*, Crerar to Cameron, April 1, 1927).

45. *Ibid.*, Crerar to Cameron, April 1, 1927.
46. Douglas Library Archives, Queen's University, *C. A. Dunning Papers*, Dunning to A. M. Young, May 4, 1931.
47. *Dafoe Papers*, Grant Dexter to Dafoe, October 6, 1931.
48. For example, editorial in *Mail and Empire* (Toronto), June 10, 1932.
49. *Dafoe Papers*, Dafoe to Harry Sifton, March 20, 1933.
50. George V. Ferguson, interview, Montreal, November 18, 1960. Ferguson has written a brief account of Dunning's career. See his "Charles Avery Dunning," *Queen's Quarterly*, XLV (Winter, 1958), pp. 570-577.

(1) Post Mortem: Acute Alcoholism

Janet Lloyd

They found him dead in the gutter
 On a rain-swept dawn,
 Mackerel-eyed, mouth agape—
 Much the same in death as life.
 And the bottle of cheap wine
 Beside him. A luxury, no doubt.
 Nothing in his pockets but a knife,
 Tobacco, and a picture of some woman.

One less burden for the State to bear.

(2) Post Mortem: Cardiac Insufficiency

They found him dead by his pool
 On a rain-swept dawn,
 Poor tragic eyes open to the sky—
 Much the same in death as life.
 Beside him lay his silver flask
 of private stock. Nothing but the best.
 And in his pockets a tiny knife of gold,
 Cigars (Havana) and a portrait of his wife.

One more sorrow for the State to bear.