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CANADIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND THE WHIG INTERPRETATION: 1936-1939

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The political utility of history in Canada has been at least as obvious as it has been in other nations. Historical interpretation has frequently been used to justify past policies, to suggest present methods and even to define future purposes. Yet, curiously, this fact has received little attention. Professor Careless, in an illuminating article in 1954¹ undertook the difficult task of defining major schools of Canadian historical interpretation, and he produced an intriguing pattern. However, while he suggested some of the influences at work upon the writers of his four main schools, he did not stress any specific social or political influence of the opposing interpretations — other than an interaction amongst the historians themselves.

What have been the political effects of historical interpretation in Canada? Leaving aside French-Canadian historiography, where one need scarcely labour the point, they are observable in two phases. Prior to the first world war the writing of men like Kingsford, Parkin, Dent and Hannay worked chiefly to the advantage of the Conservatives — with their central themes of imperial unity and the struggles to keep Canada British in the face of American manifest destiny. After 1918 the old imperial theme was largely dropped. One might argue that from the 1920's the most effective function of Canadian historians has been the convincing of the majority of English-speaking Canadians of the validity of two major myths. The first myth is that Canada has enjoyed a steady, peaceful, constitutional evolution, as opposed to the violent, revolutionary and entirely undesirable development of Europe and the United States; that the only important revolutions to affect us were settled in England between 1660 and 1689, and in the United States in 1783. Thus, runs the first myth, Canadians can rest happily with the humdrum business of economic progress and mild assertions of national status. The second myth, proceeding logically enough from the first, is that Canada's greatest glory has been her ability to compromise. Murray and Carleton, Baldwin and Lafontaine, Macdonald and Cartier, Laurier and King, St. Laurent and Pearson are eulogized in this myth because of their compromising talents. The conclusion is that statesmanship in Canada, even more than elsewhere, must be displayed primarily in the ability to balance pressures — regional and racial, religious and economic.

Both of these myths are branches of the received, or whig interpretation of Canadian history. The first, that of peaceful, constitutional evolution is constructed by a consistent underplaying of the violence which actually has hovered close to the surface of our

¹J.M.S. Careless, "Frontierism, Metropolitanism, and Canadian History", *Canadian Historical Review*, XXXV (1), March 1954, 1-21.

whole history: the 1837 rebellions were abortive and inconsequential compared to the Durham Report and the long paper war that followed it; the Riel rebellions have become affairs or incidents; the industrial warfare of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has seemed scarcely worth the muck-raking effort to reveal it and has sunk comfortably out of view; the near civil war of 1917-1918, the Winnipeg strike, the prolonged industrial class war in Nova Scotia in the 1920's, and the series of engagements in the 1930's between provincial and federal police on the one hand and trade unionists or the unemployed on the other, merit scarcely a passing nod. By such an approach one can arrive at this whig formulation of the real theme of Canadian history:

Its essential drama does not lie in armed struggles in which the nation's destiny is at stake, or in political conflicts in which irreconcilable and contending forces press their quarrel to a decisive issue. It lies rather in the slow and tenacious advance from one step to another along the road to nationhood, the patient evolution of successive compromises in politics and government, the determined conquest of the physical obstacles to national economic development. In their very nature, few of Canada's crucial problems could be solved by violent methods. . . . ²

The above is really a statement of the second myth: Canada's great achievement has been the avoidance of violent strife and of the diametric opposition of principles or policies. Thus, a compromise nationality is said to be the result. In the context of political utility this myth declares that those Canadians who oppose compromise and seek clear-cut enunciation of political and social purposes are un-Canadian, while those who adhere to compromise formulae and shun precise discussion of policy issues are essentially Canadian — and statesmen to boot.

Perhaps the argument can be summarized in another way — by paraphrasing in Canadian terms a well-known English statement of the underlying assumption of whig history:

It is part and parcel of the whig interpretation of history that it studies the past with reference to the present. Through this system of immediate reference to the present day, historical personages can easily and irresistably be classed into the men who furthered progress and the men who tried to hinder it. Working upon this system the whig historian can draw lines through certain events, some such line as that which leads through Robert Baldwin and a long succession of whigs to modern liberty. The total result of this method is to produce a scheme of general history which is bound to converge beautifully upon the present — all demonstrating throughout the ages the workings of an obvious principle of progress, of which Quebec and the Liberals have been the perennial allies while minority parties and tories have perpetually formed obstruction.³

The whig case is usually defended in the name of Canadian unity — which amounts to another version of the second, or compromise myth. Unity, as the central theme of Canadian history, and as the

²Edgar McInnis, *Canada, A Political and Social History* (Toronto, 1947) p. vii.

³With apologies to H. Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London, 1950) pp. 11-12.

cardinal purpose of good policy, has been largely appropriated in the twentieth century by the Liberal party. Sir Wilfrid Laurier is reputed by his biographers, and by general historians discussing his career, to have made his most critical decisions in the light of this principle — and, indeed, to have subordinated all other purposes to it. Where he is mainly criticized, it is not for holding to this purpose, but for alleged failure to achieve it. Certainly this was the interpretation of Laurier accepted by his successor in the leadership of the party. Mackenzie King, in fact, appropriated the principle of Canadian unity so comprehensively that *Le Canada* could write that he was the living incarnation of the principle. Even those historians, with a few notable exceptions, who are highly critical of specific aspects of the King governments end up in the apparently inevitable position of justifying all in the name of unity. Two quotations will serve to illustrate the point. Professor Lower, after a discussion of the divisions of opinion in Canada immediately preceding the second world war, concludes that, "Under the circumstances, the supreme task of statesmanship was to avoid enunciating a foreign policy."⁴ Professor Mansergh, who has apparently imbibed from his chief Canadian sources the exported version of whiggery, arrives at much the same conclusion. King's policy, he writes, had "an air of indecision which misled even his friends, exasperated his opponents, and sowed doubts about his intentions in a wider world". But "the tribute can be paid his leadership that with a painstaking care that amounted almost to genius he fostered a unity of outlook which . . . brought a united people into a war against aggression on the side of Britain. . . ."⁵

Such is the generally accepted interpretation of Mackenzie King's foreign policy — at least on the basis of the interim reports. How does the same school interpret the opposition to King? The Government's chief thorn in the flesh in the area of pre-war external relations was J. S. Woodsworth, and here the pattern of interpretation is clear: Woodsworth was an impractical idealist heading toward, and perhaps even desiring his inevitable martyrdom. Here are the phrases: "He was a kind of political saint."⁶ Or, "It was the Munich crisis that revealed J. S. Woodsworth's dilemma most sharply . . . [while his colleagues in the C.C.F.] had been forced step by step to the conclusion that only collective military action by the rest of the world could stop the aggression."⁷ And, more specifically, "Woodsworth's work had been in this world, his whole life of labour, poverty, and daily suffering had been devoted to the salvation of human beings here and now, and it had all been in vain."⁸ Thus the whig interpretation argues that essentially King was right in helping to emasculate the League and in covertly endorsing Neville Chamberlain because he could thus avoid the issue of a Canadian foreign policy until events

⁴A.R.M. Lower, *Colony to Nation* (Toronto, 1946), p. 541.

⁵N. Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of External Policy, 1931-1939* (Oxford, 1952), p. 136.

⁶A.R.M. Lower, *op. cit.*, p. 513.

⁷Grace MacInnis, *A Man to Remember* (Toronto, 1953), pp. 244-246.

⁸Bruce Hutchison, *The Incredible Canadian* (Toronto, 1952), p. 255.

could coerce Canada, while Woodsworth was wrong in trying to force a declaration of policy from the Government and in finally refusing to vote for the address in September, 1939, because he thus threatened Canadian unity. Is this really a satisfactory interpretation of the years 1936-1939?

Perhaps the best way of answering the question is to define the main problems raised by the interpretation. They are, (1) Could Canadian unity have been maintained only by the King method? and, (2) Was unity preserved by implementing the doctrine of 'parliament will decide'? Let us attempt a selective examination of the period with these questions in mind.

In whig history these years represent the final statement of the supremacy of Parliament. And since all good whig history begins with the specific question of the relationship of the Crown to Parliament, let us begin with this problem, which in the Canadian case also involves external relations. In fact, the abdication crisis at the end of 1936 may be taken as a kind of symbol of the King method — because it is one of the subtlest, if most complete illustrations of what he meant by parliamentary decision.

In the United Kingdom, although Edward VIII signed the Instrument of Abdication on December 10, the action did not become final until the succession bill had been passed in Parliament and signed by the monarch on December 11. Throughout the critical period the British Prime Minister received Canada's views exclusively through Mr. King who was, of course, also Minister of External Affairs. Mr. King decided not to summon Parliament to express Canada's opinion in this matter (although this would have meant advancing the date by less than a month). Instead, with only an order-in-council as authority, he "requested and assented to" the British abdication and succession legislation. This action (as C. H. Cahan pointed out) had no Canadian statutory basis, and could only be justified by a very narrow interpretation of the British Statute of Westminster. Here King had, in effect, a choice between two procedures implied by the statute. He could follow that provided by the preamble which says that "any alteration in the law touching the Succession to the Throne or Royal Style and Titles shall hereafter require the assent as well of the Parliament of all the Dominions," in which case he would follow the United Kingdom example and obtain the prior consent of Parliament. Or, he could interpret the phrase "Dominion has requested and assented to", in section 4 of the statute, to mean that the Canadian cabinet could consent to a change in the succession, and obtain later endorsement by Parliament. It was, of course, the second procedure that King chose.

When the Canadian Parliament did assemble in January, 1937, the Government sought passage of an address of loyalty to George VI, and was at once criticized for its action by J. S. Woodsworth.⁹ Woodsworth charged that the Prime Minister had usurped the powers of Parliament, that the loyalty address should not be passed until after

⁹Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 1937, I, 4, 13.

the succession bill had been debated and passed, and that the oath of allegiance to George VI should not have been administered to the members. "Why," he asked, "should the Liberal party be in a position to decide who is to be King of the Canadian people?" Technically, he argued, if the Prime Minister could decide such matters as this, he could also declare war. Countering King's argument that there had been no time to call Parliament, Woodsworth said, "Surely if the King of the United Kingdom can be distinguished for legal purposes from the King of Canada, then the recognition of the King of the United Kingdom as King of Canada can wait until there is time to call parliament. If the selection of the King of Canada is of such minor importance, the question arises: why a King at all?" C. H. Cahan, for the Conservatives, also took exception to the procedure adopted, and although he did not agree with Woodsworth's emphasis on the divisibility of the Crown, he maintained that the order-in-council requesting and assenting to the United Kingdom legislation was invalid since it had no statutory foundation.

To the critics, Mackenzie King replied with a rather odd extension of his unity principle — but an extension that should reveal much to the historian. Prompt action, he declared, had been of the essence. "If there ever was a time in British history when it was of importance that the unity of the British Empire should be demonstrated to all the world, it was when a question affecting the crown itself was under consideration."¹⁰ During the debate on the Canadian succession legislation Woodsworth again arraigned the Government for failing to give the House full information on the part played by Canada in advising the abdication. "The Minister of Justice," he said, "has referred to the confusion that might have arisen if the cabinet had not taken action. That is nothing to the confusion that might arise if this house showed some independence and did not endorse what has been done by the government."¹¹

The explanation of King's policy in the abdication crisis is clear. The Statute of Westminster was open to his interpretation; and no doubt, from one point of view, it was highly desirable to demonstrate the unity of the British Empire. But how do these reasons square with King's declared central purposes throughout the period: maintenance of the unity of Canada, and supremacy of Parliament? To say that the unity of the Empire required fast cabinet action is a contradiction of every later statement he made, prior to the outbreak of war, on Canada's external relations; and it explicitly minimized the decisive powers of Parliament, if monarchical institutions were really to mean anything in this country. His policy at this point relied very heavily indeed on an extraordinary extension of prerogative right. It was an extension into the field of the constitution itself of what Harold Laski has called the "old and dubious tradition of secrecy" enshrined in foreign offices.¹² It may be true that even whigs concede a survival

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 39.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 82.

¹²H. J. Laski, *Parliamentary Government in England* (London, 1938), p. 245.

of prerogative power, but surely they must prefer that the use of such power should rest on the consent of at least the majority in the House of Commons. In this connection it is perhaps instructive to refer to the comment of an astute and well-informed Liberal M.P. who was later to become a member of King's Government. The comment appears in a letter written to J. W. Dafoe just two months prior to the abdication.¹³ The writer was voicing disappointment at the way in which the House of Commons was being treated. He had thought that after the election of 1935 there would be a return to what he termed "Liberal principles". Instead, he wrote, "Under a Liberal regime the Prime Minister states the foreign policy and the Cabinet Ministers state the policy for internal affairs without consultation with any of the members."

In the conduct of external affairs the Government's relations with the House were exactly what they were during the abdication crisis. The key to the period is King's frequently reiterated refusal to expound his policy or to permit the clarification of issues. The point might be illustrated by any number of quotations, of which the following is a good example. In 1936, Ian Mackenzie, the Minister of National Defence, made an unguarded reference during a speech in Toronto to his opinion that Canada must stand by Britain. In the Commons Woodsworth declared, "He was speaking not for himself but for the government. It is a catchy slogan. . . . Has Canada no opinion of her own? We ought to know that. Otherwise it is a case, as in the last war, of 'Ready aye, Ready' Has the Liberal government taken that stand? If it has not, I would like the Liberal government to say so." The reply was made by Ernest Lapointe, very briefly: "Does my honourable friend want to split the country right away?"¹⁴ On this question, contemporary sources normally widely divergent in their views were in complete agreement. In March, 1937, Professor Underhill wrote, "We are getting close to the condition of mass hysteria that will make all sane discussion of our national policy impossible."¹⁵ A year later *Saturday Night* observed that "for once the C.C.F. leader has a full legion of sympathizers" in his attempt to discover the Government's foreign policy.¹⁶ It is nearly true to say that whatever Canadian opinion on foreign policy that was expressed during these years was unofficial: in the press, journals, conferences, on the radio, and much more briefly at the end of sessions by the opposition in the Commons.

As a result, Canadian opinion on external policy was gauged far more on the basis of what was said and written outside the Commons than by what went on in the House. This was as true of the Government as it was of most commentators and later historians. It is, for example, largely on the basis of the non-parliamentary discussion that Canadian opinion in these years has been divided into the

¹³Public Archives of Canada, J. W. Dafoe Papers, October 9, 1936.

¹⁴Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 1938, III, 3214.

¹⁵*Canadian Forum*, March, 1937.

¹⁶Toronto *Saturday Night*, March 5, 1938.

over-neat categories of collectivist, imperialist and isolationist. There is little doubt that the Government charted its course on the basis of its estimate of public opinion rather than from any analysis of debate in the House — if for no other reason than that by far the most vocal group in the House on foreign policy was that led by Woodsworth. The Conservatives, to a marked degree, remained quiet, while the Liberal rank and file (save for one or two exceptional outbursts favouring neutrality) accepted whatever the Government said or refrained from saying. What evidence is available so far indicates very strongly that the Liberal caucus was not consulted. The conclusion is difficult to resist, therefore, that what Dr. E. A. Forsey has written concerning King's wartime policy and his method during the 1926 constitutional crisis is equally applicable to the area of pre-war external relations. That is, that Mackenzie King's basic creed was not really parliamentary democracy, but "plebiscitary democracy with a thin parliamentary veneer."¹⁷

The official line of Mackenzie King in external relations is not difficult to discover. After Ethiopia, at least, it was to withdraw from all commitments; and this held true right up to the summer of 1939. With respect to the League of Nations, J. W. Dafoe summed up the situation neatly in a letter in 1936:

The League of the future which Mr. King envisages will be a kind of recurrent conference with permanent organs functioning in the interim, at which there will be debate and more debate about world affairs. Mr. King's natural bias is in favour of procedures of this kind and in such an organization he would be apt to play a considerable role owing to his experience and his facility in making speeches of a certain kind. . . .¹⁸

On the question of Canada's obligation to participate in conferences dealing with violations of treaties to which she was a signatory, King was even more aloof. In 1936, after Germany's reoccupation of the Rhineland, King declared that Canada should keep out of the ensuing negotiations because she was not a signatory of the Locarno treaty. When J. S. Woodsworth pointed out that Versailles had also been violated, King replied that, "The attitude of the government is to do nothing itself and if possible to prevent anything occurring which will precipitate one additional factor into the all important discussions which are now taking place in Europe."¹⁹ He concluded with the observation that his first duty was to keep Canada united.

In passing, it is interesting to note that correspondence in the Dafoe papers gives the very definite impression that the official line of withdrawal in these years was strongly influenced by Messrs. Loring Christie and O. D. Skelton.²⁰ Dafoe himself maintained that the

¹⁷E. A. Forsey, "Mr. King and Parliamentary Government", *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, XVII (4), 451-467.

¹⁸J. W. Dafoe Papers, Dafoe to Escott Reid, November 10, 1936.

¹⁹Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 1936, II, 1333.

²⁰J. W. Dafoe Papers. See especially H. D. Hall to Dafoe, July 1, 1936; Dafoe to P. J. Noel-Baker, May 29, 1937.

advice of what he called "our own little foreign office" was one of the chief factors in producing the no-policy-at-all theme.

In any event, the line was maintained with care throughout 1937 — especially when Woodsworth presented his motion, "that . . . in the event of war, Canada should remain strictly neutral regardless of who the belligerents may be."²¹ Here King argued that it would be just as wrong to commit the country to neutrality as to automatic belligerency; in either case Parliament must be left free to decide. On this occasion, and during the debate on the increased defence estimates of that year²² King, Ernest Lapointe, and Ian Mackenzie all asserted vigorously that Canada was arming only to be able to defend her own shores, and explicitly denied that the Government was preparing for any war that might occur outside Canada. When asked by Woodsworth against whom the Government intended to use the bombing planes provided for in the estimates, Lapointe retorted, "Can there be anything more ludicrous than that question? . . . Can the honourable member cite any country in the world where, when they organize their defence, they broadcast to the world that they are arming against this or that country? . . . We have no enemies, I hope; in fact I know we have no enemies." The Minister of Justice then drove home his point by suggesting that Woodsworth was saying the same thing as the communists — a tack which was frequently favoured by Mr. Lapointe, and particularly so at this time when he was under heavy pressure from Woodsworth to disallow the Padlock Law.

Throughout the problems of non-intervention in Spain and China the Government's statements appeared more and more to confirm the no commitment line. There should be no embargo on arms to Germany, Italy or Japan after their respective aggressions, said King, because "we should wish at all costs to avoid making the present appalling situation on the two continents [in Europe and Asia] more embarrassing for the countries faced with it, in their efforts to work out a solution."²³ Time after time through the stages of the Czech crisis and the abortive Anglo-French negotiations for a defence pact with Russia, when pressed for a declaration of government policy, King elaborated the theme of no commitments. As late as August, 1939, the official line had not varied, and was distinctly re-drawn by King speaking at a banquet in his honour in Toronto, "One thing I will not do and cannot be persuaded to do is to say what Canada will do in regard to a situation that may arise at some future time and under circumstances of which we now know nothing."²⁴

There is no room, then, for doubt about the official policy of no commitments — defended in the name of Canadian unity and the supremacy of Parliament. Even the 1939 Thorson motion to clarify Canada's *right* to declare neutrality in a British war was opposed on the same grounds as those taken to defeat the Woodsworth motion of the previous year — Parliament must be left unfettered.

²¹Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 1937, I, 237ff.

²²*Ibid.*, 876ff.

²³Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 1938, II, 1407. Italics added.

²⁴Quoted in F. H. Soward, *Canada in World Affairs* (Toronto, 1941) p. 148.

Thus, when Hitler invaded Poland on September 1, the supremacy thesis was put to the test. But it was an ambiguous test. As Professor Brebner has written, "True to his promise Mr. King summoned Parliament for September 7 to discuss a declaration of war, with very curious results in terms of international law."²⁵ The results were curious — and for a very good reason. By the time Parliament met there was nothing left for it to decide; and an examination of the preceding three years suggests that King never intended that Parliament should have any real decision left to it. The conclusion that withdrawal from a positive League of Nations and from any other avowed policy meant in reality the conscious decision that Canada would be committed to the support of British policy wherever it led, is virtually unavoidable. Furthermore, the decision, clearly, was based upon an assessment of public opinion rather than any testing of the will of the Commons. Despite the elaborate explanations of why Canada should not declare either a prior decision or a right to remain neutral, all the evidence indicates that the Government did not believe that Canada did, in fact, possess the right of neutrality in a British-declared war. Finally, the indications of prior implementation of the commitment to British policy decisions are not slight. What is the nature of the evidence to support these conclusions?

In 1937, in the debate on Woodsworth's neutrality resolution²⁶ King carefully refrained from saying that Canada had anything more than the right of passive belligerency and, together with Lapointe, he accepted Laurier's well-known stand on this question. It was on this same occasion that King, for the first time, gave extravagant praise to British leadership and, as in the abdication crisis argued the dangers of weakening the unity of the British Commonwealth (using the correct designation this time). Partly because appeasement was foreshadowed at the 1937 Imperial Conference, and partly because the formula of emphasizing local defence was continued, King accepted British formulation of Canadian policy — in effect a common imperial policy. According to his own later statement he visited Hitler after the Imperial Conference specifically to tell the German dictator that, "if there was a war of aggression, nothing in the world would keep the Canadian people from being at the side of Britain."²⁷ It was, of course, precisely this kind of prior commitment that King denied, but whose existence was suspected by a large number of people. Woodsworth pressed vainly for greater use of the Commons committee on international affairs;²⁸ and, as Canada followed British policy step by step through the Spanish non-intervention, Munich and the recognition of the King of Italy as Emperor of Ethiopia, the lack of information about British-directed policy became increasingly irritating. Dafoe, writing from Ottawa, where he was undoubtedly better

²⁵J. B. Brebner, *North Atlantic Triangle* (Toronto, 1945), p. 318.

²⁶Canada, House of Commons *Debates*, 1937, I, 237ff.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 1944, VI, 6275. This unity of policy was known in advance to the British government according to (Sir) Anthony Eden. See N. Mansergh, *op. cit.* p. 125n.

²⁸See, for example, Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 1937, I, 701.

situated than any other editor in Canada to know what was really happening, noted privately just after Munich, "... we are going to see what is already under way — a permanent drive to induce Canada to tie herself in with Great Britain in armament and defence plans that will leave this country no option but to go the whole way when 'der tag' arrives. . . ."²⁹ A few days later, the same observer wrote "I find a growing feeling in circles on the inside here that King has been close to Chamberlain all through the piece, of which his visit to Hitler was the first outward sign"³⁰ And in November of 1938, Dafoe asserted that, "... the Chamberlain policy can be readily foreseen. It is to tie all the Dominion governments to his chariot wheels. Identification with his policies will involve preparation to support those policies which will mean joint programmes of defence I begin to distrust King." ³¹

As the defence estimates rose in 1938 and 1939, Woodsworth tried hard to wring an admission from the Government that its defence production and military-air training programmes were being worked out in consultation with Britain; but from the Minister of National Defence he never got more than the answer that "we have no more information than is in the possession of the hon. member who asked the question." ³² Yet the plans *were* made on the assumption of a united imperial war effort. As Ernest Lapointe finally revealed the position in March, 1939, Canada could not remain neutral in a major war involving Britain without "a civil war in Canada." ³³ This was confirmed by King on the day of the British declaration of war when he said, commenting upon the appeal for unity made by George VI, "Canada has already answered that call." ³⁴ In the week from September 3 to September 10, despite King's telephone denial of Canada's belligerent status to President Roosevelt, ³⁵ the Government's actions could be defended only on the assumption that Canada was at war. The enemy was defined, all armed services were put on a full war basis, enemy nationals were arrested, and trading with the enemy was prohibited by order-in-council. On September 7, the Governor-General's speech referred to "the state of war which now exists." ³⁶

In his speech during the debate on the Address in the emergency session. ³⁷ King announced that the momentous question of peace or war "is not decided yet." He then proceeded to eulogize the Government's past policy of close co-operation with Britain in munitions production and air-training — a policy well developed which would make Canada the arsenal of democracy. While he stated later in the same

²⁹J. W. Dafoe Papers, Dafoe to G. V. Ferguson, October 18, 1938.

³⁰*Ibid.*, October 23, 1938.

³¹*Ibid.*, November 5, 1938.

³²Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, 1938, IV, 3706.

³³*Ibid.*, 1939, III, 2467.

³⁴Quoted in F. H. Soward, *op. cit.*, 152.

³⁵Bruce Hutchison, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

³⁶Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, Special War Session, 1939, p. 1.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 19ff.

speech that approval of the Address would be the Government's authority for "immediate participation in the war" he left it plain for all to see that the only basic thing remaining to be decided was the question of an expeditionary force (and this, as it turned out, was not really decided by Parliament). As Woodsworth noted in that debate, the Commons was being asked to endorse a policy already fully implemented and to give the Government a blank cheque for the future. The final turn of the screw came in the immediately succeeding months. On the basis of a \$100 million War Appropriation Act, and without parliamentary direction, an expeditionary force was organized and dispatched, while innumerable orders-in-council were issued regulating the war effort. In January, 1940, the members of Parliament, expecting to examine and debate the Government's policy of the preceding months of war, were told that the Government would not go before the House, but before the people.³⁸ The policy foreshadowed in 1936, symbolized in the abdication procedure, and matured in the conduct of pre-war external relations, was now stratified. The civil war which Lapointe had professed to see lurking in any definite government statement of foreign policy had been avoided and Canada was successfully launched in the conflict at Britain's side.

Considering what happened to the status of Parliament behind the King-Lapointe smoke-screen it is surely worth asking two basic questions about all this whig mythology. First: was the unity of Canada worth the price of so sadly debased a Parliament: and, second: would that unity really have been dissolved had Parliament been taken into the Government's confidence in the formulation and execution of policy?

The first question would probably be answered in the negative by most Canadians: by French Canadians because for the majority of them the doctrine of unity has always seemed spurious; by English-speaking Canadians because of the long tradition of parliamentary institutions. But the second question is far more real and important. Did unity demand the King method? This, of course, is at the very core of the whig interpretation. Time had to be bought — bought so that Canada would still be intact when Britain declared war and events could coerce Canadian opinion. But what *were* the factors that operated to ensure that only three voices would be raised against participation in September, 1939? They are obvious. The key to Quebec was Lapointe. The key to the so-called neutralists was the C.C.F. Apart from these two forces who could have "split the country down the middle" had the Government declared its policy, say in 1938?

As for Lapointe and his French-speaking colleagues in the cabinet, there was never any doubt after 1937; indeed, it was Lapointe who came closest of all to announcing the Government's actual policy. Again, the position of French-Canadians in 1939 has been well put by Professor Brebner. Their leaders "knew that they must choose France

³⁸For a discussion of this, see E. A. Forsey, *op. cit.*

and Great Britain rather than the United States.”³⁹ Concerning possible neutrality in a major European war, how could this statement be less true of 1937 or 1938 than it was of 1939?

In the C.C.F. there was equally little doubt after 1937. The significant modification of the party's Foreign policy plank in that year, and the debate in the emergency C.C.F. National Council meeting in September, 1939, constitute firm evidence that that factor was constant from 1937 to 1939.⁴⁰ In short, it was not the divisions in the House of Commons, or in the nation that most threatened Canadian unity — it was the attitude of the Government toward Parliament. The refusal to declare its support of Chamberlain as a *Canadian policy*, the refusal to accept the Thorson resolution on the *right* of neutrality, the refusal to declare its decision to plan defence jointly with Britain, in fact its refusal to take Parliament into its confidence — these were the things that constituted a real threat to Canadian unity in the pre-war years. No historian of the period has done other than suggest that the overwhelming majority of Canadians accepted the general Chamberlain policy. The Government had only to declare itself, to establish the technical right of neutrality, and then defend itself on its well-chosen ground in the House. Refusal to do this made utter nonsense of the doctrine of parliamentary supremacy, was itself a cause of considerable disunity, and certainly debased Parliament.

Since Canadian participation in the second world war was a foregone conclusion, the question might well be asked whether the man who sought most insistently the use of Parliament for the clarification of Canadian policy made a greater contribution to the maturation of Canada than the man who subordinated Parliament to his personal (and inaccurate) interpretation of Canadian public opinion.

³⁹*Op. cit.*, p. 319.

⁴⁰Woodsworth House, Ottawa, C. C. F. National Council and Executive Minutes, 1937-42; C. C. F. National Convention Minutes, 1936-42. Correspondence in the Saskatchewan C. C. F. files (Regina) leaves no doubt that the C. C. F. leaders who defeated the Woodsworth-Farmer neutrality motion in the emergency National Council meeting in 1939 had concluded at least as early as September, 1938, that “it is already decided that if Britain declares war, Canada must accept the situation”, but that for various reasons “our best contribution will be economic.” (Letter of September 28, 1938). It was decided by these leaders at the time of Munich not to issue a statement to that effect “until we know whether it will be war.”