CANADIAN POLITICAL PARTIES

F. H. Underhill

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CANADIAN POLITICAL PARTIES

by

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"Now tell us all about the war,
And what they fought each other for."
"Oh, what they fought each other for,
I could not well make out;
But everybody said"', quoth he,
"That 'twas a famous victory."

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I. THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties are essential instruments in the working of democratic representative government.

As is well known, they began to develop in the British parliament long before the arrival of democracy. Then, with the rise of the modern electorate in the nineteenth century, party organization spread itself from parliament to the voters outside. If public opinion, upon which democratic government is supposed to be based, is to express itself in any coherent and intelligible form, the public must be able to make intelligible choices among competing candidates and competing policies. The function of parties in democratic societies is to frame the issues about which choices can be made. Party has become the method of organizing voters and politicians so that public policy can be carried on with the approval of the public—or, to speak more precisely, with the approval of the majority of the public and the acquiescence of the minority or minorities.

Before we turn to consider the history of Canadian parties, let us pause to indulge in a few reflections about the nature and function of political parties in general.

PARTIES IN THE PLURAL

First of all, it has been demonstrated to us in this last generation that political parties in the plural are essential for the preservation of free society. Whenever totalitarian regimes have established themselves, the first thing they have done is to crush all rival parties and to concentrate all the power of the state and all the instruments of political propaganda in the hands of one party. Free government means that minorities or dissident elements in the community must have the opportunity to protect their interests and express their views. And ultimately this means a freely existing opposition party or several opposition parties.

The acid test of freedom in a state is whether power and office can pass peaceably from one political party to another. “Her Majesty’s Opposition” is just as necessary to free government as “Her Majesty’s Government”. There is no need to argue this point any more. People who are still capable of believing in the freedom of the citizens of the so-called “People’s Democracies” are too innocent for politics.

TWO-PARTY OR MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM?

As to whether a system of two parties or one of more than two parties is preferable, there is not the same agreement in our western
world. All English-speaking countries have tended towards the two-party system, though Canada can hardly be said to have conducted her politics since 1921 in a two-party framework. In western European countries, except Britain, there has always been a multiplicity of parties. Perhaps it is only British and American snobbery that makes most of us think that a two-party system is proof of a greater political maturity in the communities that have it; but most students of politics in Britain, the Dominions and the United States are agreed on its superiority — though one sceptical Englishman has spoken of the two-party system as "that great Utopia of English-speaking political scientists".

It is superior not because there are only two sides to every question — there are usually more than two — but because a two-party system, however it may on occasion distort issues, enables them to be presented to the mass electorate in a plain "yes or no" form. As between a well organized government party and a well organized opposition party, every question gets thrashed out until it can be presented to the voters as a simple practical choice. Do you favour candidate A or candidate B, policy a or policy b? The voter then knows what he is voting for; and the successful party can be held responsible for its policies. In a multi-party or group system the voter is liable to be confused by a variety of competing claims; and the government may be formed as a coalition of groups after the election takes place. This is what ordinarily happens in France — with the result that the voter has difficulty in placing responsibility when things go wrong.

A solid party government with a cohesive majority is also likely to be more stable than a coalition of groups; it is often more courageous because of its secure hold on office, and it has the opportunity to be more far-seeing.

But a two-party system cannot be created simply by wishing for it. There must be in the community the conditions that make for two moderate parties, each with a broad national appeal.

**MODERATE PARTIES**

This is another important point about a two-party system. Because each party is aiming at a majority of votes, it must appeal more or less effectively to all sections in the community. This makes for moderation and for the avoidance of ideological, class or racial appeals. Small groups are apt to take up extreme positions because they know that their appeal is to a narrow body of partisans. In a two-party community the leader of each party is trying to find policies that will unite as many groups and individuals in his party as possible and will win

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1 We must never forget that famous American who declared that the reason for a two-party system is not that there are two sides to every question but that there are two sides to every office — an inside and an outside.
over as many as possible from the rival party. His language, his bearing, his whole appeal must be such as will remind his followers constantly of what they have in common, so that they will hold together in spite of class, racial or sectional differences among them. Thus the two-party system has acted as a great unifying agency in countries such as Canada and the United States which haven’t any very deep underlying unity to begin with.

But there is, of course, a bad side to this achievement of moderation by being all things to all men. A disillusioned English student of politics expressed it pithily when he remarked that the successful party leader is the man who can dangle the largest possible number of carrots in front of the noses of the largest possible number of donkeys. To hold a party together by bribing first one interest-group and then another is not an inspiring form of statesmanship. This is the besetting weakness of our great North American composite parties.

Here we come upon a paradox about the two-party system. It is likely to work best when there are more than two parties. What helps to keep the leaders of the two major parties from sinking into mere brokers among competing interest-groups is the constant springing up of new minor parties. These bring fresh ideas into politics; they ventilate the grievances of hitherto neglected groups; they reintroduce passionate sincerity and idealism into the political arena, even if these qualities do not penetrate into the smoke-filled rooms where party decisions are made. And, generally, they keep the major parties on their toes.

In a healthy democracy, however, minor parties come and go without upsetting the fundamental unity of the community. We need to understand that democracy will not work unless the things that unite the citizens of a given country are more important and are consciously felt to be more important than the things that divide them. British democracy is the best example of this. As a British leader once remarked, the voters in Britain can afford to fight vigorously and vehemently over their differences because they are all conscious that fundamentally they are united. If conflicts of economic interests, or racial or religious rivalries, divide a people too deeply, the democratic process of discussion and voting will not work. This means that in a healthy democracy the bulk of the people are grouped closely just to the right or to the left of centre, and that there are comparatively few extremists. Here is the condition that makes moderate parties possible.

This vital fact about democratic politics can be represented in a couple of diagrams. In a country such as Britain, if we believed what party politicians say about each other at election time, the political condition of the community would be represented as in Diagram A.
The Left and the Right parties would have hardly anything in common or any common meeting ground. Party controversy wouldn't be far removed from civil war. Actually, the division of opinion in a healthy community is as represented in Diagram B.

The bulk of the Left party and the bulk of the Right party are concentrated about the centre. Away out at the extreme right are a few Colonel Blimps, and away out at the extreme left are a few communist revolutionaries. But the great majority of those left of centre are not widely separated from the great majority of those right of centre; that is, they are all moderates. This is what makes it possible for politics to be carried on by the methods of discussion, adjustment and compromise.

It is impossible to over-emphasize the importance of all this. Compromise by party leaders is not necessarily unprincipled. It may represent the highest principle — the principle of keeping one's country as united as possible. A stiff attachment to doctrinaire ideas or to special interests may be the quickest way to split a community fatally. Parties should differ on real issues, or else politics becomes disgusting. But a happy country is one in which they do not differ on fundamental issues about which compromise is impossible. In a healthy democracy people should agree about ends but differ about means.

DEMOCRACY INSIDE THE PARTY

We started with the assertion that political parties are essential instruments in the working of democratic representative government. But a party in its own inherent structure tends to be an oligarchy. It consists primarily of a small group of insiders who are trying to persuade a great mass of voters to entrust them with political power. In modern times political parties have found it necessary to adopt at least a front of democratic practice, to devise a ritual of democratic
participation in their activities. The sincerity of these efforts varies from time to time and from party to party.

It was the Americans in the early nineteenth century, in the Jacksonian era \(^1\), who first tried to democratize their parties by making use of the party convention to choose candidates and draw up platforms. The intention was to take control of the parties out of the hands of pseudo-aristocratic oligarchies or of inner groups of professional politicians.

The party convention spread northward to Canada when the Upper Canadian Grits held a great convention in 1859. They held another in 1867 to adopt policies for the new Dominion of Canada. Their successors, the federal Liberal party, held another in 1893. Down to the death of Laurier the Liberals chose their leaders in party caucus; but in 1919 Mackenzie King was chosen leader in a party convention, and in 1948 Mr. St. Laurent was chosen in the same way. The Conservatives did not adopt the party convention for these purposes until 1927 when R. B. Bennett was chosen to succeed Arthur Meighen. Since then they have held several conventions. The N.D.P. with a highly-developed system of regular conventions, special conferences, lectures, summer-schools, study groups, has carried furthest in Canada this attempt to make the political party into a genuinely democratic form of association.

Most Canadian political scientists appear to be very sceptical about the effectiveness of the professedly democratic machinery in the two old Canadian parties. A famous Swiss student, a good many years ago, enunciated what he called the iron law of oligarchy in political party organizations, i.e. the irresistible tendency of parties towards oligarchical control. He based his conclusions upon a study of European socialist parties who had gone further than any North American party in their efforts to organize democratic mass movements. The iron law of oligarchy operates, of course, not merely in political parties, but also in churches, trade unions, sports clubs, social organizations of all kinds; in fact, wherever the apathy of the mass of the membership throws real responsibility into the hands of a few devoted workers and eventually throws real control into their hands also. This is the insoluble problem of democracy, which nevertheless we must always keep trying to solve.

One important question affecting the democratic quality of a political party is that of the method by which it finances itself. Modern elections, involving the effort to interest millions of voters and persuade them to go to the polls, cost more and more money; and the invention of radio and television has added to the cost. In Canada the N.D.P. has tried to preserve its democratic basis by financing itself, on the

\(^1\) Andrew Jackson, seventh President of the United States, 1829-1837.
model of the British Labour Party, through regular dues collected from its members. How the older parties finance themselves is a subject about which they have always been careful to preserve a decent reticence. Occasionally, as in the case of the Pacific Scandal of the 1870’s or the Beauharnois Scandal of the 1930’s, a flash of lightning across the political landscape reveals the danger of close connections between political parties responsible for making public policy and special-interest groups prepared to give them financial assistance. But the Canadian public has never shown more than a spasmodic interest in this subject, and Canadian law has not gone very far in regulating the way in which political parties collect or spend money.

PRESSURE GROUPS

Finally it is to be noted that another phenomenon has been pushing its way to the front of Canadian politics in the twentieth century, though it is not just a twentieth-century phenomenon. This is what Americans call the pressure group. Lobbying by pressure groups at Washington has become so highly developed that it is subject to elaborate legislative rules. The American system of division of powers between executive and legislature makes lobbying much more effective in Washington than it is in Ottawa or London, where each party is under firm centralized leadership.

But special interests have long understood the value of having their spokesmen in the national capital to see that cabinet and parliament do not neglect their views. Lobbyists for manufacturers, financial institutions, railways, bankers, miners, lumbermen, trade unions, farmers’ organizations, churches, consumer groups, and many other organized interests, are always to be found in Ottawa whenever there is legislation or policy under consideration that affects them. No government would dream of acting without making itself informed of the opinions of these interest-groups. But their part in politics and their methods of influencing political parties have not been studied so thoroughly in Canada as in the United States. Politics consists of the interactions of political parties, pressure groups and that imperfectly defined entity which we call the public.
II. THE HISTORY OF CANADIAN PARTIES
THE BRITISH BACKGROUND

We read about party struggles in the British parliament as far back as the seventeenth century. But as late as the reign of George III the British parliament was not divided into Whig and Tory parties with recognized leaders and policies. Cabinets were then not party cabinets under a party prime minister, but were coalitions of groups and individuals under the King. The government was still in a literal sense the King’s government. His Majesty’s Loyal Opposition did not exist. The tendency of historians today is to say that organized parties and party cabinets do not fully emerge till after 1832.

Party organization and the expansion of the electorate in successive Reform Bills went together. The decline of the influence of the Crown went along with the rise in power of party leaders whose control of the House of Commons was due to their having won the support of the majority of the voters outside. Gradually, as the nineteenth century advanced, a firm two-party system was built up in the country as well as in parliament, cohering about the two front benches in the House of Commons. By the 1880’s — but not before then— Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan could sing of that beneficent contrivance of nature which secured that

Every boy and every gal
That’s born into this world alive
Is either a little Liberal
Or else a little Conservative.

But even in the 1880’s, Gilbert and Sullivan to the contrary notwithstanding, there were minor groups, like the Irish party, who were not Liberal or Conservative. There was a Labour party just about to be born. And there were quite a few independents in parliament. (An independent is a man who cannot be depended upon, i.e. depended upon by the party whips.) Despite these exceptions, however, it was true by then that the dominant feature of British politics was a well organized two-party system. One party sat in the House, under the Prime Minister, to the right of Mr. Speaker. The other party, under the Leader of the Opposition, faced it in long rows of benches to the left of Mr. Speaker. Each party outside parliament was busily building up an efficient party machine in the local constituencies. Parties appealed to the country in periodical elections, each with its own party programme or “platform”. Elections were fought on “issues”; and one of the parties received a “mandate” to carry out certain policies. The modern party system as we know it was in operation.

Today in Britain this two-party system is even more deeply entrenched. There appear to be few little Liberals being born, but
the Labour party has taken the place of the Gladstonian Liberal party as the alternative to the Conservatives. There are no minor parties left, and no independent individuals in the House of Commons. Each party is a well organized army — far better organized than any Canadian or American party — fighting for political power. Everything that is done in British government, every statute passed, every policy carried out, results directly or indirectly from this unceasing contest between the two parties.

CANADIAN CONDITIONS

It has been necessary to dwell briefly upon this British party system because the British-American colonies before 1867 and Canada after 1867 tended to reproduce British party divisions. The British party system was part of the inheritance of the colonies, along with British laws and British parliamentary institutions.

Down to the end of the First World War Canadian politics was conducted upon this two-party system; and the Canadian parties called themselves by the British names, Liberal and Conservative. In the years just before 1914 it may have been difficult to state precisely just what Canadian Liberals were trying to liberate or Canadian Conservatives to conserve. In fact, ever since Confederation there had been critics who maintained that there was no natural basis in Canadian society for this pseudo-British way of dividing political opinion. But the two parties with their British names and their British cabinet system of running parliament and politics appeared to answer Canadian needs fairly satisfactorily.

On the other hand, the Canadian community differs in some essential features from the British. There is no class in Canada like the British landed aristocracy; and the Canadian farmer, owning and working his own family farm, has no real parallel in British agriculture. The existence of two main communal groups, the French and the English, is a unique feature of the Canadian community which makes any kind of political unity much more difficult than in a country which is racially, religiously and linguistically so homogeneous as Britain. In the twentieth century, also, new ethnic elements, non-French and non-English, have become part of Canada. But while Canada has these divisions which Britain lacks, class divisions have never become so deep or rigid here as in Britain. The British class system was the main reason in the nineteenth century why Britain had two main parties rather than several groups in politics.

The geographic extent of our country extending across a continent from Atlantic to Pacific is another distinguishing element in our Canadian society. It makes for sectional divisions such as hardly exist in a small crowded island like Britain. We have a federal rather than a unitary constitution because of these divisions within our Canadian
community. In most of these features we are more like the United States than like Britain. Like our American neighbours we are a new people whose chief work has been the filling up of great empty spaces with new white population, clearing forests, tilling new soil, building railways across virgin territory, developing newly discovered natural resources. All these factors affect the working of politics and the way in which political parties perform their function of organizing public opinion.

Our North American environment makes for fundamental resemblances between Canadian and American politics. Our cabinet system of parliamentary government makes for parties on the British model. And like most other Canadian institutions and habits, our Canadian parties show this constant interplay between North American environment and British inheritance.

**BRITISH AMERICAN PARTIES BEFORE 1867**

Parties in the British North American colonies began to emerge in the generation after the War of 1812, as the struggle to obtain colonial self-government developed. The Conservatives, the Tories, were the spokesmen of the leading families who surrounded and influenced the governor from Britain, the elite among the United Empire Loyalist settlers, the chief professional and business men, most of them members of the Church of England, strong in their anti-American feelings, tending to erect themselves into a colonial aristocracy, suspicious of the equalitarian tendencies of the frontier democracy all around them, equating democracy with the Jacobinism of the French Revolution or the unruly Jacksonian upheavals in the American republic. Their belief that in every healthy stable society there is a natural governing class, and that in their colony they themselves constituted this class, was most incisively expressed for them by Sir Francis Bond Head in his *Narrative* when he burst out against Lord Durham's criticisms of the Family Compact in Upper Canada:

It appears from Lord Durham's own showing that this Family Compact is nothing more nor less than that 'social fabric' which characterizes every civilized community in the world... 'The bench', 'the magistrates', 'the Clergy', 'the law', 'the landed proprietors', 'the bankers', 'the native-born inhabitants', and 'the supporters of the Established Church' [these were the social groups which Durham had defined as composing the Family Compact] form just as much a family compact in England as they do in Upper Canada, and just as much in Germany as they do in England... The party, I own, is a comparatively small one; but to put the multitude at the top and the few at the bottom is a radical reversion of the pyramid of society which every reflecting man must foresee can end only by its downfall.
Colonial Tories saw themselves also as the specially-appointed guardians of the British connection.

Reformers in the English-speaking colonies had much greater difficulty in organizing their efforts than had the Tories, who were already in power and whose centre of influence was the colonial capital. The Reformers tended to equate themselves with the British Whigs and Radicals who had ousted the British Tories in 1830 and passed the Great Reform Bill of 1832. But in isolated farms and little villages the pioneer settlers were not primarily interested in politics and were difficult to rouse. The exception was in Lower Canada where race, religion and language formed a bond of union that quickly gave the opposition in the legislature under Papineau an overwhelming majority. In the English settlements it is noteworthy how many of the early Reform leaders were journalists. The newspaper provided its publisher with the best instrument available for agitation, political education and party organization, and gave such men as Howe, Mackenzie and Brown their start.

Some of the Reformers, including Papineau, began to look to the example of the American Revolution. William Lyon Mackenzie in Upper Canada, just before taking up arms, issued a draft constitution on the American model for the state of Upper Canada. The chief idea of these leaders was to make all offices elective, so as to get control of Assemblies and Councils and impose their will on governors.

But men like the Baldwins in Upper Canada and Howe in Nova Scotia preferred British models. Already by the late 1820's the Baldwins were expounding what became famous as Responsible Government. Let the appointed British governor be instructed to carry on government in accordance with the advice of local advisers who could control a majority in the colonial assembly; the removal of irresponsible advisers would settle all colonial grievances.

The failure of the rebellions in 1837 and the acceptance of Responsible Government in the next dozen years is a turning point in Canadian history. British Americans, French as well as English, rejected the Jacksonian democracy which was sweeping over the United States, along with its manhood suffrage. They accepted the leadership of moderate Whigs or Tories on the model of Great Britain, where manhood suffrage and complete Chartist democracy were also rejected at this time.

There is not room here to follow out the party developments under Responsible Government in all the British American colonies. Generally speaking the British two-party system was copied as an essential part of British cabinet government. But it took time for the two parties to establish themselves. Let us concentrate on the party system in the colony of Canada after 1840.
Responsible government implies well-organized parties because everything depends upon a party being able to maintain a stable majority in a representative assembly. What impressed Lord Sydenham, the first governor under the Union, was the chaotic condition of local politics. He didn't think Canadian politicians capable of forming stable parties. So he made himself the centre around which a cabinet would cohere. It was the function of a new coalition between French and English Reformers to prove the governor wrong in his judgement. But it took them several years to do so. The LaFontaine-Baldwin coalition didn't quite become a party in their day, and it broke up quickly when they retired in 1851. Nevertheless it is one of the great achievements in Canadian political history. It was the beginning of organized party government.

The LaFontaine-Baldwin coalition was also the first example of what has become the most striking and distinctive feature of our Canadian politics — the bi-racial party which for the moment overcomes differences between French and English and brings them together inside one party to conduct a government on principles on which they can agree. This first example was followed by the Liberal-Conservative party of John A. Macdonald and George E. Cartier in the 1850's — a coalition of French Canadians under Cartier with Church support, the English Canadians in Montreal business and in the Eastern Townships, the Upper Canadian Tories led by the moderate Macdonald, and a good many Upper Canadian Baldwin Reformers.

This coalition gradually solidified into a party under the skilful leadership of Macdonald and Cartier. It managed to hold office for most of a period of forty years from the mid-fifties to the mid-nineties. Under Macdonald the Upper Canadian Tories learned to abandon their high-and-dry anti-democratic and anti-French Family-Compactism and to become part of a genuinely popular party. Under Cartier the French Canadians abandoned their opposition to Montreal business and joined in a programme of railway building and economic expansion. The function performed by this French-English Liberal-Conservative coalition was taken over by Laurier's Liberal party after 1896, and by the King Liberal party after the bitter cleavage over conscription in 1917.

Apparently French and English have discovered that the only effective way in which the deep racial differences in Canada can be overcome is through a bi-racial party of this kind under a sort of joint leadership: LaFontaine-Baldwin, Macdonald-Cartier, Laurier-Fielding, King-Lapointe, St. Laurent-Howe. Apparently also the Canadian community is incapable of supporting two effective bi-racial parties at the same time. So the political scene is apt to be dominated for a generation or more by one of these parties until it has exhausted its capacity for leadership, when another party of the same bi-racial composition takes its place in control of government.
It was through this technique of the bi-racial party that the French Canadians undid the conquest of 1763. It was thus that they achieved equality with the English Canadians. One hundred years after the Treaty of Paris they were sitting in the Canadian legislature as the major group in the governing party. This bi-racial party has become the main instrument through which they defend their interests as a minority within the Canadian community. It is their way of enforcing the principle of "concurrent majorities", enunciated by John C. Calhoun in the United States before the Civil War when he was trying to find a constitutional safeguard to protect the minority interests of the South in the American federal system. Since the 1840's the representatives of the French Canadians have sat in the legislature for the most part to the right of Mr. Speaker, i.e. they have formed part of the government. They protect their interests from within the cabinet rather than as an opposition party outside. No more striking proof of the French-Canadian political aptitude could be given than this success of theirs in always being in the government.

It is to be noted also that the policies adopted by Sydenham, LaFontaine and Baldwin, Macdonald and Cartier, and their modern successors, in order to overcome French-English animosities, have nearly always been the same. Whatever sentiments, ideals or interests may divide the two main communal groups in Canada, they have in common an interest in material economic expansion. "My politics is railways", said a prominent member of the Liberal-Conservative coalition in the 1850's. Confederation in 1867 was an effort to provide that each communal group should look after its own cultural interests in the provincial sphere, while the federal government should concentrate upon the great economic nation-building enterprises which they had in common. Macdonald and Laurier always tried to keep economic expansion before the minds of the voters as the best way of keeping their minds off the racial and religious differences which were apt to divide them so bitterly.

Over against the Liberal-Conservative government of the 1850's there emerged two opposition groups, the Grits of Upper Canada and the Rouges of Lower Canada. They combined for a moment in the summer of 1858 to form the Brown-Dorion government, and for a little longer in the early 1860's to form the Sandfield Macdonald-Dorion government. But they never quite coalesced into a solid party before 1867. Taking in allies from the Maritime provinces after Confederation, they were to become the Reform or Liberal party of Mackenzie, Blake and Laurier.

The Grits took their nickname from the hard gritty sand which was sought by masons to make good mortar in house-building. Their centre of strength was in the rapidly growing area to the west of Toronto. When George Brown joined them with his powerful news-
paper, the Toronto Globe, and gave them a vigorous crusading leadership, they took a decidedly anti-French, anti-Catholic colour, because Brown found himself thwarted by the solid French block in the legislature. The separation of Church and State, and Representation by Population, became their main demands. "Rep by Pop" meant increased power for the Grit sections of Upper Canada. Since these areas were mainly agricultural, Grittism meant also an attack upon the vested interests of Montreal big business—banks, industrialists, wholesale merchants, railway magnates—who supported the Liberal-Conservatives.¹

The other group on the left, the Rouges, never achieved in their community the strength of the Grits in Upper Canada. They were led by professional men who had absorbed some of the ideas of the revolutionary Paris of 1848; and their chief attack was upon the control of their French-Canadian community by the Church. The struggle which they initiated between liberalism and clericalism had its effect in preventing the growth of a strong Liberal party in Quebec for a whole generation after Confederation.

FROM CONFEDERATION TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Confederation was brought about, so far as the province of Canada was concerned, by a coalition of the Macdonald-Cartier Conservatives with Brown's Grits. The Rouge group refused to join in the movement. Before July 1, 1867, Brown had led most of his followers out of the coalition. Macdonald formed the first federal government by constructing a cabinet out of his own Conservatives, allies whom he had found in the Maritimes—some of these had been previously Conservatives and some Reformers—and a few Upper Canadian Grits. There were a few years of party confusion; but by the time of the second election in 1872 a straight party fight took place between a Conservative government and a Reform or Liberal opposition.

Macdonald held office continuously from 1867 to his death in 1891, except for the five years 1873-1878; and his party continued in office till 1896. In this Macdonald era the Conservatives earned their electoral success by their vigour and boldness in building up the new nationality of which the framework had been set in the British North America Act. They brought in to the new Dominion the Hudson's Bay territories in 1870, British Columbia in 1871 and Prince Edward Island in 1873. The Intercolonial Railway was built. And what was

¹ "With the Grand Trunk and the Bank of Montreal at his back, there is no telling how far the reckless financier of the present government [Alexander Galt] may carry his schemes. These institutions are the enemies of the people and of popular rights. They have special interests to advance in Parliament... It is time that we had a government above being the servant of railway and banking institutions." This is from an editorial in the Globe of August 10, 1867, in the middle of the first election campaign of the new Dominion of Canada.
at the time almost a fantastically ambitious project was launched — that of connecting the Pacific province with the East by a transcontinental railway. This was finally carried out, after the upset over the Pacific Scandal, in the 1880's. In his second term of office, Macdonald also inaugurated the "National Policy" of high tariff protection in order to build up a well rounded national economy. These adventurous and imaginative policies made the Conservative party the nation-building party of this first generation after Confederation.

Grits and Rouges combined in opposition after 1867, choosing Alexander Mackenzie as their leader. Their weakness was partly the old one of clerical opposition to them in Quebec and partly the difficulty of finding allies in the outlying provinces. When Mackenzie came into office in 1873 he was unfortunate enough to begin his administration just as a great depression broke upon the world. He was unable to make progress with the Pacific railway, and he passed up the opportunity to adopt a protectionist policy, thereby losing support among ambitious industrialists. Under Edward Blake, who succeeded Mackenzie as leader in 1880, the party, back in opposition, opposed the new C.P.R. syndicate and seemed to have little faith in the future of the country. They denounced the Macdonald government's close alliance with a great transportation corporation, and its habit of lavishing grants of land, forest and mining resources to speculative entrepreneurs. But they had no real alternative to this capitalist process of economic development. Blake, however, began to reorient his party's outlook in two fields: he tried to overcome the Brown anti-French tradition and sided with Quebec on the Riel issue; and he abandoned the Cobdenite \(^1\) anti-tariff ideas which were also an inheritance from the Grits, announcing his acceptance of a moderate tariff not too different from the N.P. He did not succeed in carrying his party with him in these two attempts, and it was left for Laurier to reap where he had sown.

This political alignment between two parties, which had established itself in the province of Canada before 1867, only took root very gradually in the outlying parts of the Dominion after 1867. Out in the far west the eastern Canadian divisions had really not much place. What the West needed was government assistance, and the voters tended to send government supporters to Ottawa. When Goldwin Smith visited the Pacific on the new C.P.R. line in the 1880's, he asked one British Columbia citizen what his politics was and received the answer, "Government appropriations". Provincial politics in British Columbia was not organized on a Liberal vs. Conservative basis till the turn of the century. In the Territories government was carried on by non-partisan administrations until the creation of the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905. But sometime between the

\(^1\) Richard Cobden (died 1865) was the chief exponent of Britain's Victorian free-trade policy.
1880's and the early 1900's one could say with confidence that every little Canadian boy and girl was now being born either a little Liberal or else a little Conservative.

The Macdonald regime began to disintegrate after the crisis over the execution of Riel in 1885. The old French-English bitterness flared up again, and the flames were kept burning by the Jesuit Estates Act in Quebec and the schools question in Manitoba. Macdonald's successors after 1891 showed little of his skill in manoeuvre and manipulation. When the Liberals under Laurier ousted the Conservatives from power in 1896, they took over into their party many of the Bleus, the moderate Conservatives of Quebec, thereby achieving substantial support in Quebec and making the Liberal party the party of French-English cooperation.

With this as his base of operations, Laurier now made his party a national party in the same sense that Macdonald's Conservatives had been. After burning his fingers badly by espousing Unrestricted Reciprocity with the United States in 1891, he reverted in the budget of 1897 to a policy of moderate protection. In substance he accepted the Conservative National Policy, modifying it by a preference to British imports. His government also embarked on an ambitious railway-building policy, with two new transcontinental lines; and thereby he built up an alliance of the Liberals with ambitious railway promoters of exactly the same kind as that of Macdonald with the C.P.R. And in the favourable economic conditions of the early 1900's the Liberals succeeded in something beyond Macdonald's achievements by bringing into the country a great stream of immigration. In the magnificent Wheat Boom days the Liberals seemed clearly the nation-building party.

Laurier's efforts to keep English and French working together in this exhilarating experience of economic expansion—the twentieth century belongs to Canada, he boasted—was thwarted by a new cause of cleavage between the two groups, the question of Canada's relations with the Empire. Beginning with the Boer War in 1899, the two races took opposite sides on this issue; and when the strain of the Great War of 1914 made itself felt, they divided in the bitter quarrel over conscription in 1917. The Liberal party itself broke apart in this crisis, and the 1917 election produced the worst of all possible political alignments in Canada, a government supported by a large majority of English Canadians and opposed almost unanimously by the French Canadians.

SINCE THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The coalition of Conservatives with English-speaking Liberals which Borden had formed in 1917 went to pieces after the war. Mac-
kenzie King, chosen Liberal leader in 1919, reunited the Liberal party as a party with substantial support from both racial groups; while the Conservatives, having offended Quebec in 1885 and repeated the offence in 1917, failed to recover their old position as a nation-wide party. In spite of the growth of French-Canadian nationalist movements in the depression of the 1930's, the Liberals maintained their hold on Quebec in federal elections steadily from the 1920's to the 1950's. This enabled them to remain in office from 1921 to 1957, with only a short break of a few weeks in 1926 and a longer one of five years from 1930 to 1935. By their success in winning votes in substantial numbers in all parts of Canada they proved themselves a national party in the same sense that the party of Macdonald and the party of Laurier were.

The new feature in politics since the end of World War I has been the rise of a number of protest parties. Down to 1918 Canadian politics had been run on a two-party basis. No third-party movements had ever got going with enough strength to challenge the two established parties, Liberal and Conservative. But beginning with the 1920's there broke out a series of political protest movements which destroyed the solidarity of the classical two-party system.

In the first post-war election of 1921 a Progressive revolt among the farmers of Ontario and the Prairie provinces sent to the House of Commons 65 members, who became at one bound the second party in the House. Prime Minister King did his best to woo the Progressives back into the Liberal party, from which most of them had broken away. The Progressives themselves were never quite sure what the function of their movement should be. The result was that they had pretty nearly disappeared by the end of the decade — though Alberta was ruled by the United Farmers of Alberta (U.F.A.). In the 1930 federal election it looked as if the old two-party system had been restored.

But the Great Depression after 1929 still further upset the orderly working of Canadian politics. In 1932 the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (C.C.F.) came into existence as a socialist party, gathering to its support the hardier Progressives on the prairies and a sprinkling of middle-class enthusiasts across the country. Whether it could win the support of the organized trade unionists, as the Labour party had done in Britain, remained for the next twenty-five years a question to be decided. In 1935 the Social Credit movement swept over Alberta, ousting the U.F.A. provincial government, and sending another minor party delegation to Ottawa. The depression also threw up a confusion of nationalist movements in Quebec, out of which finally emerged the
Union Nationale party led by Maurice Duplessis; after capturing the provincial government Duplessis declined to carry his movement into the federal sphere.

For a considerable time none of the new movements from the West — Progressive, C.C.F. or Social Credit — made any effective impact upon Quebec or upon the Maritime Provinces. Ontario, after having a farmers' government for a short time in the early 1920's, returned pretty well to the two old parties, though the C.C.F. at times succeeded in electing a substantial group to the provincial legislature. In 1944 the C.C.F. also captured the province of Saskatchewan, where it remained in power for twenty years; and in 1952 Social Credit added British Columbia to Alberta. In the federal sphere, however, neither the C.C.F. nor Social Credit has been able to grow into a nation-wide movement — this in spite of the fact that in 1962 the C.C.F. presented itself in a new incarnation as the New Democratic Party in a drive to attract labour and middle-class voters, and also in spite of the fact that Social Credit in the 1963 federal election won a block of seats in Quebec.

In 1957 the long Liberal domination of federal politics, which had lasted since 1935, was brought to an end by a revived Conservative party under a new leader, Mr. John Diefenbaker. Mr. Louis St. Laurent, who had succeeded Mackenzie King in 1948 as Liberal leader and Prime Minister, now retired. The new Liberal leader, Mr. Lester B. Pearson, was decisively beaten in a general election in 1958 at which Mr. Diefenbaker won the largest majority of seats ever attained by any Canadian political leader since Confederation.

In the 1962 election, however, the Conservatives only managed to hold on to office as a minority government. There followed two more general elections, in 1963 and 1965, which produced minority Liberal governments. By the middle sixties, therefore, it seemed that neither of the two major parties was able to win majority support from the Canadian electorate, and that none of the minor parties was likely to grow into a major party. The result was a general feeling of frustration. At the same time an increasingly dynamic French-Canadian nationalism in Quebec challenged the whole structure of Confederation. Furthermore, the steady urbanization of Canadian society — the drift of population, economic power and intellectual leadership to the big cities — was transforming the social basis of Canadian politics.

The centennial celebrations of 1967, which were very successful, may come to symbolize the end of one era and the beginning of another. At any rate, it was at this moment of crisis that the two major parties changed their leadership. Late in 1967 the Conservatives chose Robert Stanfield, the premier of Nova Scotia, to succeed Mr. Diefenbaker as their leader; and early in 1968, on the retirement of
Mr. Pearson, the Liberals in office chose Pierre-Elliott Trudeau, who became both the new party leader and the new prime minister.

New leaders — chosen by the new (American) technique of nationally televised party conventions in which the mass electorate could follow proceedings from moment to moment as excitedly and intelligently as if they were watching nationally televised hockey or football games. The new leaders faced a general election in June, 1968, without having been tested in the House of Commons. Was this a new era in politics, or should we merely make use of our new bilingualism and conclude that plus ça change plus c’est la même chose?
An understanding of the working of Canadian political parties since the 1840’s is best obtained by reading the various standard biographies of leading Canadian public men. Among those of special value are:


(2) The following books have sections devoted to political parties:

(3) The following are studies of particular political movements or of aspects of party politics: