

ROBERT CRAIG BROWN and RAMSAY COOK. — *Canada 1896-1921. A Nation Transformed*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974.

This new Centennial Series volume is splendid. Professors Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook have synthesized much of the new research on this period into a series of compact, lucid essays dealing with a great variety of topics such as emigration to the West, the reaction of French Canadians to urban and industrial life, and the intervention of the State in the economy during the first World War. Not only are French-English and imperial relations discussed in a most satisfying manner but for the first time in a general history the industrialist, the worker and the farmer take their places as important actors on the Canadian stage. Through previous studies we have known something of one or another aspect of Canadian life in this period. Now, because of the extraordinarily fine balance in the materials composing the book, the reader comes away with a sound perspective of a multi-faceted society in constant development.

The two dominant personalities in the book are Laurier and Borden. The authors' Laurier is a sharp operator dedicated to remaining Prime Minister and adept at getting out of tight corners. As they remark about his answer to a plea from a delegation of farmers in 1910: "Laurier's response was dignified, complimentary and evasive" (p. 160).

In this light it is curious that the authors accept uncritically Laurier's statement in 1917 that he rejected a coalition with Borden because he was afraid of handing Quebec over to the Nationalists. Could Laurier seriously have been worried about such a prospect? Laurier knew full well that the Nationalist leader, Bourassa, was only the editor of a paper with a very small circulation, with neither party organization nor finance behind him. He must have known too that in an election, Bourassa could never have won against a combination of the organization and press of both parties.

Brown and Cook are a little easy on Borden who, they claim, "never gave himself to politics. Its seamy but necessary side he found distasteful and left to more willing men" (p. 189). Yet Borden knew that Conservative money was helping Bourassa in the 1911 campaign on a policy of no naval commitment to Great Britain, a policy to which Borden was opposed for reasons of deepest principle. Meighen's dirty tricks, like the introduction of closure and the Military Voters Act, had Borden's sanction. Indeed a hatchet man like Meighen made it possible for his chief to seem slightly detached from the sordid political game. But Borden's comment in his diary that "our first duty is to win at any cost the coming election in order that we may do our part in winning the War and that Canada may not be disgraced" demonstrates a ruthless determination to win.

The Borden of this book is earnest, responsible and down to earth. Surely the portrayal here underestimates Borden's deeply emotional side which dominated his reaction in 1917 to heavy Canadian losses at the front. Canada of course had only two choices: to reduce her divisions or to conscript more men. But the authors do not question Borden's opinion that the choice of conscription was one of "military necessity" (p. 270). Yet at the time of Lloyd George's worrying about the attacks of U-boat on supply ships, a serious observer like O. D. Skelton had good reason to wonder whether Canada's war effort might not be strengthened by reducing her forces abroad in order to boost production at home. Borden's speeches in the conscription debate do not weigh these considerations. Rather than a rational explanation of how Canada could best help, they constitute an emotional plea to guard Canada's honour. Without doubt the heroism and the deaths at Vimy Ridge, only a few weeks previously, had influenced Borden's mood. Brown and Cook describe his reasoning thus: "The men at the front had to be re-inforced; to let them down would be a disgraceful betrayal" (p. 268). Disgrace, betrayal: this kind of rhetoric demonstrated visceral impulse rather than rational decision making.

Professors Brown and Cook argue that Canadian imperialists, wishing for an equal say with Great Britain in imperial affairs, were as "nationalistic as any other Canadians" (p. 31). Here the writers are defining "nation" the way John Dafoe did in 1913 when he wrote

that the chief characteristic of a nation was that it met "other nations on terms of complete equality." However that generation of Canadians also used the word "nation" in quite another sense. For example, Laurier wrote that his object "was to bring our people long estranged from one another gradually to become a nation" (p. 337). He meant the degree of solidarity engendered in the Canadian community by a feeling of common identity. But no Canadian imperialist believed that Canada should cease having an identity other than British. Robert Sellers must have spoken for a great number of them when he maintained that the issue raised by Regulation 17 was whether "this Canada of ours is to be British, and nothing else than British" (p. 259). In 1917 Newton Rowell proclaimed that in the struggle for democracy "now and for ever we are one and inseparable, Britain and her sons across the sea." Such imperialists considered themselves British rather than Canadian nationalists. By British, they meant a unique culture and value system and not a geographical entity. They felt that they belonged to a single community, which although living in a number of countries throughout the British Empire, enjoyed a "British" identity which set it off from lesser peoples. It is true that these Canadian imperialists wished Canada to have a status equal to that of Great Britain within the Empire yet they owed their allegiance not only to Canada but also the whole British community of which the Dominion was only one part.

Lastly the authors claim that under the pressure of war the government had changed beyond recognition "the *laissez-faire* style of economic life" (p. 240). This may have occurred during the war itself when men were conscripted, prices controlled, wheat sales regulated, railways taken over and strikes outlawed. But with the exception of nationalization of the railway none of this lasted. Once the war ended, businessmen demanded "normal conditions" (p. 325) the withdrawal of government from the economy (except for the tariff) and this is what in fact they got in the next two or three years. Though Brown and Cook suggest that the Union government was drawn into an "increasing range of activities" (p. 325), surely the crucial point is that by 1921 the major decisions affecting the living of most Canadians were again being made entirely by huge private financial and industrial corporations in response to their own search for profit?

Of course this was no different from the situation as it existed before 1914. What was new was that so many more Canadians were no longer prepared to accept the economic and social consequences of such unmitigated big business domination. The war dead and injured had left their mark. Many Canadians were convinced that there would be, indeed must be, reform. As the authors put it, "Only a better Canada, a regenerated Canada could fully repay those who had sacrificed so much in the war" (p. 295). Many expected that the Union government would be the vehicle of such reform. When that government seemed to falter, a considerable number of Canadians plunged into grass roots movements on their own: not only professionals and businessmen but workers and farmers as the phenomenal growth of trade unions and farm organizations testifies. A liberal like O. D. Skelton was upset by the upsurge of class conflict. But class discord was inevitable not because the industrial order was any different from what it had been before 1914 but because the experience of the war caused many people to question the fairness by which it distributed its goods. The acceptance of class and sectional animosities, the authors suggest, was "far closer to reality than the years of hope" (p. 320) before the war when the dominant mood had been one of "confident materialism" (p. 107) and when "material expansion became, for most, the measure of national and moral progress" (p. 4). What makes this such a striking book is the vivid detail with which the authors log the passage of the Canadian ship from this sunny pre-1914 era to a post-war atmosphere of turbulence and anger as many Canadians became increasingly concerned not only with how much was produced but also how it was shared.

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