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LETTERS

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The Present Position of Politics

IN CANADA,

WRITTEN ON THE OCCASION OF

THE POLITICAL CONVENTION,

Which met at Toronto, on 9th Nov., 1859.

BY ISAAC BUCHANAN,
M.P.P. FOR HAMILTON.

HAMILTON:

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1859.

LETTER I.

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE SPECTATOR.]

HAMILTON, Nov. 2, 1859.

SIR,—Circumstanced as I am, I do not feel at liberty to take measures to have delegates sent to the coming Convention, which as member of this city I have been called upon to do. As a mere preliminary meeting or opportunity for discussion, there is, of course, less objection to this gathering, but a Convention with the view of proposing constitutional changes should certainly be a Convention of the whole people of the Province through their delegates. The Hon. Wm. Hamilton Merritt takes even a more serious view of it, having given notice of the following motion in Parliament:

“That an humble address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that Her Majesty may be pleased to authorize His Excellency the Governor General to take immediate steps for the election, by the Parliamentary electors of the Province, of twenty-four delegates (twelve from each section of the Province), to a general Convention, charged with the preparation of a Constitution for the future Government of Canada, and for the submission of the same, when prepared, for the approval or rejection of the people of the Province, and subsequently of the Imperial Government.”

In the meantime there seems to me, at least, some danger that, to get quit of long protracted exertion and trouble, a general Federation of all the American colonies may be precipitated, for which we are not yet prepared. I desire, therefore, to reproduce for public consideration my view of a compromise to which a trial should be given, before entirely abandoning (as such a step could never be retraced) the hope of our still being able to work the British system of Government in a shape modified to suit the peculiar circumstances of Canada.

Though one of the first (when Colonel Tache called us Pharisaical Brawlers) to resent the then apparent intention of trampling on the feelings and interests of Upper Canada; I have since become satisfied that the Lower Canadians have in truth no desire to dominate over Upper Canada, and that the possibility of their doing so has flowed from so many Upper Canadians having supported the principle of the single majority in the hope eventually of getting the Lower Canadians under their feet in the continued operation of this principle. Nor have I now any doubt that the simple declaration by us that the present Legislative union of the Canadas

is Federative, and therefore that the principle of the double majority must hereafter be acted upon, would be found sufficient guarantee against *French domination*. I now also see that with a little good management and forbearance, we may avoid organic changes for the present at least. The evils we complain of arise in our circumstances.—I doubt very much whether even in England, Responsible Government, as practised here, can in every feature be perpetuated, but at all events, we, in Canada, evidently have not a *class* of men so independent in their circumstances and minds as it demands. I think, therefore, that we should restrict the responsibility of our Canadian Ministers to Executive acts, or the carrying out of the laws and the details of the Government, leaving to the people's representatives the whole responsibility of making the Laws.—Under our present system, two great practical evils have no doubt sprung up, and whether these have arisen from the system itself, or from the circumstances of this Province, they must be cured immediately. The first of these evils which we experienced was that Ministers, being obliged to sustain their majorities in every vote, have to ask too much of their conscientious supporters, and have to yield too much to their unscrupulous ones. This I think may very simply be cured by the members of Government appearing in the House, simply as members of Parliament, taking no particular responsibility of particular Legislative measures more than any other members.* The second evil has been, that a Ministry may attempt to retain possession of the patronage of the Province, without having a majority from both sections. And this also, I think is susceptible of cure, especially if we adopt the first reform proposed above, leaving the people's representatives the entire responsibility of making the laws. Under such arrangement the Ministry would go out of office only on a vote of want of confidence being carried against them (for which a call of the house might be made necessary) and to cure the second evil, all that would be required in addition would be that a re-organization of the Government should always be made whenever the Ministry was found to have against them a majority of the whole members from either section of the Province, absent as well as present.

* The other present functions, or peculiar duties of a Government, such as originating money Bills, would, of course, still remain with Ministers.

Nor do I see any great difficulty in making such an arrangement; responsible Government was established when the Parliament sat at Kingston in 1841, in a very simple way by Resolution of the House of Assembly—and any amendment of the system would naturally be arranged in the same simple way.

These my views, you are aware, I laid on the table of Parliament on 2nd April last, when I gave notice of the following amendment to the Hon. John Sandfield Macdonald's motion respecting the *Double Majority principle*:

"That our highly prized constitutional principle of Responsible Government has become in practice an instrument of the greatest legislative tyranny, and of the most flagrant Executive injustice. Members of this House, although representatives of large majorities of their constituencies, and although also coinciding in sentiment with a majority of the whole people in their section of the Province, as expressed through their representatives, being practically deprived of all influence in the legislation of the

Province, and of all influence over the patronage and other acts of the Executive Government in their respective localities: That until the principle of Representation by Population, without regard to a dividing line between Upper and Lower Canada, receives the sanction of the double majority, or of a majority of the representatives both of Upper and of Lower Canada, it is imperative to the well-working of Responsible Government that the Double Majority principle should be in practical operation so far, that if, on a vote of want of confidence (of which a week's notice shall have been given) there is found a majority of the whole members from either section (or thirty-three members from either section of the Province) against the Government, it will be the duty of the Ministers representing such section in the Cabinet to resign their offices, as no longer representing the public opinion of such section of the Province."

Yours Respectfully,
ISAAC BUCHANAN.

LETTER II.

[TO THE EDITOR OF THE SPECTATOR.]

HAMILTON, Nov. 9, 1859.

SIR—I send you some jottings which I had made for use at the Convention, if I could have been satisfied that the parties with whom it originated have only in view the breaking down, or modifying of a system whose operation has proved vicious, and not only the breaking-down of the present Canadian Ministry, who, to some extent at least, are mere victims of the system. I have been recommended to take this means of laying these views before the members of the Convention, seeing that every one knows I have no party bias, and seeing that there will be few present at the Convention who, like me, were Members of Parliament at the former great Constitutional crisis of 1841, and were of the grand old liberal party of that year which initiated all the great reforms which have been introduced into Canada. And I, myself, have this inducement to the publishing of my views that I am known not to be permanently in public life, but will leave it the moment my doing so will suit the interests of Hamilton.

I feel, therefore, that my views may be received with less prejudice than those of professional politicians, more especially as I have had the longest experience of the business and politics of Canada.

I am, Sir,
Yours respectfully,
ISAAC BUCHANAN.

PREAMBLE.

It seems to me that, passing over any consideration of the prudence or otherwise of calling this convention in the way it has been called, we should at once address ourselves to the vital questions which have lately forced themselves upon the Province, and call loudly for immediate action.

THE NECESSITY OF A CHANGE OF SYSTEM.

There can be few indeed who do not now recognise the necessity of a greater or lesser alteration of our system of responsible government. Indeed, the making the Upper House elective did away with any remaining hope of our successfully working the principle of responsible government as established in 1841.

The Americans, prior to their revolution, and the formation of the constitution of the

WHAT THE CHANGE OF SYSTEM SHOULD BE.

In my Parliamentary motion, I have indicated my view to be that before adopting the American principle of officers directly elected by the people, we should give another trial to a Responsible Government modified to suit the circumstances of Canada. I have no objections that to be a member of Parliament should be a necessary qualification for the heads of departments or Canadian Ministers of the Crown, but I think that these Ministers, though in Parliament, should not be held responsible for the legislation of the country. I think their responsibility should extend no farther than for their Executive acts, and they should go out of office only on a solemn vote of want of confidence being carried against them by a majority of all the members, absent as well as present, from their particular section of Canada. All which, I see, can be easily arranged in the same way as Responsible Government was established in 1841, viz., by Resolution of the House of Assembly.

THE NECESSITY OF OUR ADOPTING A PATRIOTIC POLICY IN REGARD TO THE EMPLOYMENT OF OUR OWN PEOPLE.

But political systems or forms of Government are, after all, *not* the most important considerations, for people will starve under a Republic equally as under a monarchy. Even if we could attain Representation by Population in Canada, or something that would suit the same purpose, we should only have attained a popular *machinery*, and the question would remain as to the object to which it will be applied. At present, however, neither our Ministry nor Parliamentary Opposition possess any very distinctive principles or policy—the practice of the Government being Protectionist while their principle is Free Trade as much as is that of the Opposition, the members of both knowing that they dare not avow the principle of Free Trade or at least dare not attempt to practise it. The time seems, therefore, to have come when individuals and parties should be no longer tolerated in usurping for church questions and abstract theories of Government the *first* place in our Provincial politics, and should be told that the question of the employment of a people is THE GREAT CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION IN EVERY COUNTRY, and one in importance far before all other questions, even those of forms of Government.

WHAT THE TRUE ECONOMICAL POLICY FOR CANADA IS.

Of old, He was said to be the greatest patriot who made two blades of grass grow where

United States, had found out that they had not a class of men capable of working the British system, so they at once disunited the Legislature from the Executive. They left to the representatives of the people the whole responsibility of making the laws, and they left to the Government only the responsibility of carrying out the laws, after these were made by the people. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at if British responsible government has been found by experience to be unfit for the circumstances of Canada. And this is still less to be wondered at when we see that, even in England, their once constitutional political parties, representing the great interests of the country and empire, are now no longer embodiments of principles, but only conspiracies of men, quite as void of any common principle as our political parties are in Canada, and which can only be allowed the name of constitutional parties by an excess of courtesy, which violates the truth. I have long seen the necessity for some change of system, and on 2nd April last I laid on the table of Parliament a notice of the following motion, which I give here as the best way of illustrating my view of our provincial position:

"That our highly prized constitutional principle of Responsible Government has become in practice an instrument of the greatest legislative tyranny, and of the most flagrant Executive injustice—members of this House, although representatives of large majorities of their constituencies, and although also coinciding in sentiment with a majority of the whole people in their Section of the Province, as expressed through their Representatives, being practically deprived of all influence in the Legislation of the Province, and of all influence over the patronage and other acts of the Executive Government in their respective localities: That until the principle of Representation by Population, without regard to a dividing line between Upper and Lower Canada, receives the sanction of the double majority, or of a majority of the Representatives both of Upper and of Lower Canada, it is imperative to the well-working of Responsible Government that the Double Majority principle should be in practical operation so far, that if, on a vote of want of confidence (of which a week's notice shall have been given) there is found a majority of the whole members from either Section (or thirty-three members from either Section of the Province) against the Government, it will be the duty of the Ministers representing such Section in the Cabinet to resign their offices, as no longer representing the public opinion of such Section of the Province."

formerly there was but one ; but in Canada production will take care of itself ; and he is the greatest patriot who can secure better markets for Canadian productions. Political economists, who get their knowledge from books, regard the people only as *consumers*, and try to convince them that their whole or their main interest is in *cheapness*, whereas the distinctive characteristic of the people is that they *labour*—that they are *producers*, and have therefore as their main interest more bidders for their labour, which means *more*, not less, *price* for the commodity. It is self-evident that if a man's production did not exceed his consumption there would be no profit, and his employment would cease ; and his production being therefore the larger quantity, he is more interested in the price of it than in the price of the smaller quantity—his consumption. But it is well for Canada that she can afford to throw theories to the winds, having a certain and unflinching barometer of her great interests. In her farmers, Canada has a great class, the prosperity of which secures the prosperity of all other classes ; so that the *true economical policy for Canada is to promote the prosperity of the Canadian farmer*. And how this is to be done is the simple political question of the Canadian patriot. Yet—to the shame of British statesmen be it said—a question so momentous to Canada was known to have had no consideration in England, when she, in 1846, diametrically altered her policy and repealed all the old distinctions between Canadian and American produce in her markets. The direct and immediate effect of this precipitate introduction of free imports (for it is not Free Trade) into the mother country was most disastrous to Canada, and was more likely to prove subversive of her loyalty than any thing that could have been anticipated ; for it left the Canadian farmer (on the North Bank of the St. Lawrence) only the English market for his produce in which he has to compete (after paying all freights and expenses across the Atlantic) with wheat of countries where labor and money are not worth one third what those are in Canada, while it gave to the American farmer (on the South Bank of the St. Lawrence) this English market to avail of whenever it suited him, in addition to the American market.—Happily the British Government saw in time the error committed in bringing about a state of things in which it would have been impossible to retain, upon British principles, the Canadas—British principles always involving the idea that the object of Britain in acquiring or retaining territory is to bless not to blight it. And Lord Elgin bribed the Americans by sharing with them our Fishery and

Navigation rights, to give us the Reciprocity Treaty, which, while it exists removes the Canadian farmer's cause of complaint. Now, therefore, the preservation of this Reciprocity with the United States is shewn to be not only the interest of the farmers and through them of all others in Canada, but of the British Government, as without it Canadians are left in a position to be much benefited by Canada being annexed to U.S. I speak plainly, viewing him the most loyal man who speaks most plainly at such a crisis.

And this Reciprocity Treaty can only eventually be secured and rendered permanent, by the British Government adopting the great principle of *decentralizing* the manufacturing power of the Empire—a principle which would aggrandise the British Empire and be an incalculable benefit to the working classes in England, Ireland and Scotland.—To preserve the Empire, Britain has to yield the selfish principle of *centralizing* which has ruined Ireland and India, so far as such countries could be ruined, and cost us the old American colonies. The principle of decentralizing the manufactures of the Empire is a principle which would secure for the Empire an enormous additional trade and influence.—Through the instrumentality of some one or other of her dependencies (which might be called England in America—England in Australia—England in India, &c., &c.) she could secure Free Trade for all her mechanics that chose to go to these favored localities, with countries that could never agree to Free Trade direct with England, without giving a death blow to their comparatively comfortable populations. For instance, England could never get Free Trade with the United States in manufactured goods, but no doubt the United States would be prepared to extend the Reciprocity Treaty with Canada, thus throwing down all interior Custom Houses between Canada and the United States, which done, the Englishman, by coming to Canada, and manufacturing his goods at our endless water powers, will be able to save the 25 per cent charged on the same goods going direct from England to the U.S.; and hundreds of mill-owners now in uneasy circumstances in England, would, under such an arrangement, immediately transfer to Canada their machinery and hands to the infinite benefit of the population thus removed, and to the aggrandisement of the Empire. And this is the main thing wanted by the Canadian farmer, *permanently*, as giving him a market on the spot for his roots and spring crops, thus rendering rotation of crops possible, while it would give him also that which is so valuable to him *in the present*

(until he gets his rotation of crops established), the superior market for his white wheat furnished in the United States by the Reciprocity Treaty.

To the United States, and more especially to the Western States, as making the St. Lawrence the great highway of America, free trade and navigation with Canada would give great development, would give, in a word, all the commercial advantages of annexation.

The natural policy of Canada is seen clearly therefore to be THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN AMERICAN ZOLVEREIN, such as exists among the German States. Under this the United States and Canada would neither of them levy any customs taxes on their interior frontiers, but only at the seaports from Labrador to Mexico—the same duties being levied and each country getting its share in the proportion of its population.

Let it be therefore resolved, that for our commercial system, the principle should be adopted by Canada of an American Zolverein, or, in other words, free trade with America, but not with Europe. AND THIS WILL BE A FAIR COMPROMISE BETWEEN THE VIEWS OF THE TWO CLASSES OF FRIENDS OF THE CANADIAN FARMER, ONE OF WHICH HOLDS THAT OUR FARMER IS TO BE MOST BENEFITED BY GENERAL FREE TRADE AND DIRECT TAXATION, AND THE OTHER BY KEEPING OUR MONEY IN THE COUNTRY THROUGH THE RESTRICTION OF IMPORTATIONS AND INDIRECT TAXATION.

This would terminate our present unprincipled position of political parties in Canada. By setting up a policy of Canadian patriotism we should have, as the opposition to us, whether government or parliamentary opposition, the foreign, or foreign trade, party ; and that the aims of such a party never has more than mere personal selfishness in view is clearly enough shown in this that while in England it is in favor of local manufactures because *there* they are manufacturers, here, in Canada, it would be against local manufactures because *here* they are merchants, and in fact represent an English local Faction instead of a great British Interest.

AS A PRELIMINARY, THE BALANCE OF THE CHURCH QUESTION, THAT STILL DISTRACTS THE PROVINCE, MUST BE REMOVED.

The bane of the British Empire is the fact that, though in British theory the peoples' question is the first thing, in practice it is not so. Of the Members of the English House of Commons, two-thirds are from Counties or constituencies where the Church question is the *first* question at the Hustings, and the question of the Industrial Rights and Privilege of the people has no influence at all on the elections. The peoples' question can,

therefore, never as a matter of fact be discussed, except in *appearance*, in England ; for nothing is seriously discussed in Parliament, except matters which affect the Hustings.—The ruling party in England was, therefore, prior to 1846, as now, the Church party, and the individuals of that party having thought only of their own interests, except to the extent to keep off outbreak among the people, had entirely lost the confidence of the masses in England, Ireland and Scotland.

This fact formed a fine vantage ground for the foreign party in England, or Manchester school, to propose and introduce ideas the very contrary to those held by this deservedly hated, because selfish class. The attempt was made, and free trade was introduced, not because it was the interest of the British empire, or even of England, but because it was opposed by the governing class, who were known to think only of themselves, and always to be against the people.

If Free Trade (and not only free imports) had been introduced into England, it might have suited the circumstances of England, tho' even this would not have suited for the Empire diversified as are its circumstances and interests ; and but for the most obvious providencies, among which is the obtaining of our Reciprocity Treaty with the United States, the disruption of the Empire would have been endangered ere now. Free Trade is the contrary *principle* to that of Empire ; for if England takes every dirty child off the street and treats him like her own child, her own child will not long feel towards her very differently from the dirty child. And not to extend remarks regarding the operation of Free Trade in England herself, I would just say that its comparative success has been entirely such as could not have been calculated upon. It could not indeed by possibility have occurred had the state of facts remained the same as when Sir Robert Peel's leap in the dark in Legislation was committed, and any *apparent* success has been caused solely (and Revolution has been prevented solely) by the providential discovery of gold in California and Australia. Even all this altogether unexpected success is, however, not enough to raise England above being the most artificial nation on Earth. She is now so much so that the delay in arriving of a couple of vessels with gold from Australia gives rise to monetary uneasiness in London.

For long in Canada we also had this odious Church question as the *first* question in our politics, thus preventing the vital issues of the Province being the simple issues at the hustings ; but happily the settlement of the Clergy Reserve question did away with this so far as Protestants are concerned.

And the first thing we should do is to drive the Church question, as it affects the Roman Catholic population, from the hustings, seeing that all experience has shown that if Church questions are allowed to go to the hustings at all, they will go there as the *first* questions in our politics, thus expelling from this, its natural place, the vital question of the country's industry. We dare not any longer shut our eyes to the fact that a great feature divides, and always will divide, the population of Upper Canada into two classes—those who believe that the eternal salvation of their children would be imperilled by the use in the school of our authorized version of the Bible, and those who will never submit to allow it to be banished from the school, but, on the contrary, will feel it their duty for ever to exert themselves to have it more and more blended with the education of their children. And surely, in these circumstances, it is doing the Roman Catholic population no more than the barest justice to allow them to get the amount which Roman Catholics are assessed, and a proportionate amount of the public school money, to support Roman Catholic schools—these endowed schools to be, of course, equally with the Protestant schools, open to public inspection. That any set of men claiming the name of Liberal party should continue to avoid settling this vexed question in this liberal way seems incredible. It would amount to party suicide. And church questions—out of the way, the population will not long submit to theoretical questions or questions as to forms of Government taking the first place in Canadian politics. The question of the plan in which we can best promote our Provincial industry is now seen to be the question of questions—to be indeed a question in importance far before any question of theories or forms of Government—and I mistake very much the temper of the public mind, if any man or set of men will ever again be tolerated in imposing upon the Province any other question as the **FIRST QUESTION IN OUR POLITICS.**

CONCLUSION.

It seems to me that the great thing which the convention has to avoid is precipitancy. With bodies of men, as with individuals a feeling of weakness is the cause of violent action to cover it; and the convention cannot in any more telling way evince confidence in itself than by avoiding the appearance as well as the reality of excitement, or precipitancy. Even if the convention separates without committing its members to any definite proposal, this would perhaps be its strongest position with the country, especially if the result of it has been to give the liberal party distinctive principles, sufficiently

liberal not to exclude the Roman Catholics as a body, and a patriotic policy in regard to Canadian labour. A constitutional opposition is the finest part of the British Government; it is indeed the feature in which the British Government differs from all others. An unprincipled Opposition is however a thousand times worse than an unprincipled government, as being without the restraints which office imposes; and the Canadian public should not allow itself to be any longer humbugged either by the Government or the Opposition, or by both united, in delaying action on the great subject of the **PEOPLE'S EMPLOYMENT.** We want practice not theory. We must no longer be fooled into the admission that political economy is a science, in the common understanding of the term. A science is a thing of fixed facts, whereas in political economy, circumstances are our facts! It should indeed be termed a science of circumstances; and while continuing to fly the British flag in all the British colonies, we should have a different political economy for each, to the extent their circumstances are different. And herein I see the great difficulty of a general federation of all the British American Colonies. Their circumstances and interests are different from ours, and so should be their political economy. Unless indeed bound together by an American Zolverein, such as I have proposed, we would have great difficulty in condescending on an industrial policy which would equally suit Canada and Nova Scotia.

The Canadas on the other hand have all their material interests in common. So that **THE FEDERATION OF THE TWO CANADAS, WITH THE ISLAND OF MONTREAL THE SEAT OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMON GROUND,** is all that the wildest should now contemplate.

Should the Convention, however, take up my Zolverein view, it will greatly smooth the way to federation of the Canadas *now*, and of all the British Colonies in America *eventually.* The great practical end of all our efforts is to ARRANGE THAT THE CANADIAN FARMER HAS NOTHING TO ENVY IN THE CONDITION OF THE AMERICAN FARMER, (from whom he is only separated by the River St. Lawrence,) either as a matter of the market for his farm produce, or of the untaxed price at which he eats the necessary articles which cannot be grown in Canada, such as tea, sugar and coffee.—And this great object can only be attained by our SUSTAINING THE RECIPROCITY TREATY, the only way to do which eventually, is, as I have explained, to carry Reciprocity farther, and get the Americans to join us in an American Zolverein, each country adopting the **POLICY OF UNLIMITED FREE TRADE WITH EACH OTHER, AND OF THE SAME PROTECTION AGAINST THE DEGRADED LABOUR OF EUROPE.**