

A Canadian Prescription for England

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NOBODY can say that the United Kingdom has had a quiet life since the War. We have seen the dismantling of Empire, and its replacement by a now meaningless Commonwealth. In Europe, there was the praiseworthy European Free Trade Association, followed by shameful retreat into a full-blown European customs union, known more officially as the Common Market, and more officially still as the European Economic Community. At home, Northern Ireland has been deprived of its Parliament, but has not been fully integrated into the United Kingdom, so that it is under-represented at Westminster, where its affairs are handled even more shoddily than are those of England, Scotland, and Wales. Mention of Scotland and Wales reminds us that we are on the eve of The Great Devolution Debates, the idea apparently being to give some form of home rule to Scotland, and perhaps later to Wales, without altering the representation of those two countries in the House of Commons, thereby underlining to the people of Northern Ireland that there is nothing which the English Labour Party will not

do for reasons of electoral self-interest.

Mr. Scot Young, born in Scotland, then an emigrant to Canada, and now established in England, has surveyed the scene, approves national sovereignty for Scotland, and, with less certainty, for Wales, side-steps completely the issue of Northern Ireland, and focuses his attention on England, in his new booklet, *Shire Power* (Liberal Bookshop, 20p).

Rightly reflecting resentment at the recent cumbersome reorganisation of local government in England with its swollen and costly bureaucracy, Mr. Young argues not for an English Parliament, not for regional assemblies, but instead for a return to the county system which not only the cricket enthusiasts amongst us have grown to know and love. Mr. Young wants the shires to rise again, with something of the power of the Canadian Provinces within a federal structure.

In dealing with financial arrangements, Mr. Young sees collection of taxes as a central government responsibility, believing that a formula for revenue sharing with the

shires (provinces) would have to be worked out by comparing past expenditures and the availability of public revenue. To offset the wide variance of wealth in different parts of the country, the author envisages a system of equalisation payments.

"The greatest disparity in wealth," he writes, "is encountered at the resource level in both surface and sub-surface values. One part of the country may be abundant in coal, whereas another may have oil or gas. Surface land values also vary widely good farmland against poor; highly productive commercial sites, as against low return areas. This situation left to provincial authorities would lead to inequity. It must therefore be one of the prime purposes of the central government to ensure that all people receive an equal share of the natural resources of Britain, including surface and sub-surface wealth. By far the best method of achieving this is through a constructive system of resource taxation by evaluating natural unimproved land value and collecting its annual worth A unique opportunity presents itself in the setting up of a provincial dimension to introduce this form of national taxation."

Whatever the merits of the shire proposals, here certainly is an excellent prescription. Keep on taking the tablets!