

FRENCH CANADA, A PLANNER'S MODEL

OLD-FASHIONED historians used to point to the outcome of the British resistance to Louis XIV's ambition as a vindication of our traditions. "Efficient dictatorship had to yield victory to the greater efficiency of freedom," says Ramsay Muir. Since the Protectionist triumph of 1931, however, and its logical development, our mentors seem to have changed their ideas.

On the authority of an Oxford expert, lecturing in the Third Programme, we are instructed to regard Colbert's Export Drive as "an example of what can be done by a country determined to achieve an export surplus." We are not informed at what specific mass meetings this determination was spontaneously expressed, or on what principle each peasant and artisan computed his "surplus." Possibly the officials gave him their services for this worthy purpose and there is no doubt that the State had a rich surplus. The super bureaucrat who exclaimed, "L'état, c'est moi," seems to have enjoyed an abundance and we are not told of privations among even the minor officials.

The recent publication of Tocqueville's *Recollections* reminds us, however, that a different interpretation of Colbert's efforts has been recorded by an historian regarded, until recently at least, as a model for painstaking research and unerring synthesis. Lack of space prevents our discussing that author's *Democracy in America* and *The Old Régime*, although both of these might have been written as warnings for the present generation. His note on French Canada, however, summarises part of his conclusions, and can usefully be transcribed here, bearing in mind that the first French settlement in America was established in the reign of our Henry VIII, forty years before Raleigh's abortive attempt in Virginia, and that by "Old Régime" is meant the characteristic pattern of French administration from the time of Richelieu to the Revolution.

"It is in the colonies," says Tocqueville, "that we can most easily determine the shape of the government in the mother country, for in the colonies its characteristic features are enlarged and stand out. To estimate the character and faults of Louis XIV's administration I must go to Canada, where its deformities can be seen as in a microscope.

In Canada there was an absence of that host of obstacles which events anterior to the old régime had evolved, and which conflicted openly or covertly with its development. The nobility was not very much in evidence, or at any rate not strongly entrenched; the Church was not so dominant; feudal traditions were lost or obscured; and the power of the judiciary was not firmly rooted in old institutions and customs.

Nothing hindered the central authority from giving free rein to its inherent tendencies and shaping all laws in accordance with its own spirit. In Canada there was not even the shadow of a local or provincial assembly; no authorised power of association existed; no individual initiative was allowed. Each intendant (or Regional Controller) wielded an authority far more absolute than that of his counterpart in France.

The administration meddled with many more things than in the mother country and, despite the eighteen-hundred leagues distance, tried to regulate everything from Paris. Instead of adopting the great principles which enable colonies to grow wealthy and populous, in its efforts to increase and distribute the population it

employed a mass of petty, artificial measures and arbitrary regulations.

Agriculture was obligatory; all disputes concerning land titles were withdrawn from the jurisdiction of the law courts and submitted to the judgment of officials only; cultivation must be carried on according to specific instructions; emigrants must settle in certain districts and not in others.

All this took place under Louis XIV, and the edicts were countersigned by Colbert. It seems like modern centralisation, as in Algeria (1856). Canada was, in fact, the image of what has been seen there. In both cases we are confronted by officials almost as numerous as the settlers; domineering, interfering, regulating, restricting, trying to foresee and manage everything, always understanding the interests of the planee better than himself, everlastingly busy—and useless.

In what is now the United States the English tendency to decentralisation was carried further than in England itself. Each community became an almost independent municipality: a kind of democratic republic. The republican element deep in the English constitution and character could come out into the open and flourish. In England (1856) the administration itself does very little and private people do to great deal; in America, the officials scarcely interfere with anything, and individuals, in voluntary association, do everything. . . .

And, as for the material consequences of the two colonial methods; we know that in 1763, at the time of its conquest (and after a hundred years of Colbertism) the population of Canada was about 60,000. The population of the British colonies was about three million!

Tocqueville is correct in stressing the independence of the New England colonies. There was in London a Council of Trade and Foreign Plantations which, although by no means so dominant as Colbert, endeavoured to regulate the trade of all the colonies and much of the home export and import trade. This Council (which afterwards became the Board of Trade) included able and honest men like John Evelyn and John Locke. We do not see any reason to suppose that the present Board of Trade is superior in its personnel; and yet the New Englanders, as Evelyn records, ignored all the Council's well-intentioned efforts.

It is curious to reflect that if the austere and pious New Englanders had not been such accomplished smugglers and black marketeers, if they had submitted to the Planners as the French Canadian submitted to Colbert (or the Englishmen to Cripps) then a modern English Socialist Government would not have been able to draw from America the doles which enable it to subsidise its attempts to usurp the functions of providence.

The disturbing aspect of the situation is that the Americans themselves seem to be losing their faith in the comparative freedom that made their nation great, and are declining towards those beliefs which kept French Canada so small—for no one doubts the natural courage, industry and intelligence of the French character.

The reason for the decline is not far to seek. The French Canadian allowed Colbert's Town and Country Planning Act to shut him off from those trades and those areas to which the trial-and-error, venture-at-your-own-risk methods of individual enterprise would have drawn him, and profitably. The vast storehouse of Nature

to the West was partially closed to him. The New England pioneer allowed no landlord or official to stand between him and Nature; he could apply all his intelligence in just those circumstances that bring all of it to bear, i.e., when all the risk—and gain—is a man's own. But when there are no longer pioneers on the verge of primeval yet fertile land; when all habitable land is occupied by men who claim to own not only the work of their hands but the unworked bounty of Nature, then the descendant of the hardy pioneer is born a pariah in his own country. He starts to listen to any creed, however

irrational or subversive, which promises relief from present conditions; power-seekers start to exploit his discontent; the nation starts to lose confidence in itself.

The future is to that country which will keep open the frontier which never alters its position, which will see that in the midst of every great city as well as in its remotest province, no barrier can be interposed between any of its citizens and any of its land. In that country the free spirit of the pioneer, confident in himself and the ideals of his country, will not decline.

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RATING OF SITE VALUES—THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Statement submitted by Mr. JOHN ORR to the Interdepartmental Committee on Site Value Rating

SITE value has come to be regarded as a peculiarly appropriate basis on which to levy rates. This view has arisen from the perception that, although the value of the site is closely associated with that of structures erected on it, the origins of the values are different. A site is an immovable subject. To shape it so that it may serve their purposes men must improve it where they find it. They cannot treat it as they do parcels of the produce which they detach from land, such as timber, minerals and various crops. Before a community grows very large the need for certain kinds of equipment of the area on which it chooses to live becomes urgent. These create the value of the site. The character which they all share is communal—roads, lines of communication between members of the same or other communities, water supplies, drains, lighting systems and other services which facilitate the steps which members take to satisfy their needs and ambitions.

In most countries the earliest attempts have been made to raise public revenue directly from holders of land. Contemporary accounts, or traditions, give more or less clear accounts of how they fared, and probably none of these equal in clearness and fulness than that given by the results of the experiments in England, and by the writings of those who were near the events which they described. In the year 1085, nearly 20 years after he had defeated Harold, and made himself King of England, William the Conqueror brought forward his most serious piece of legislation. It was concerned with the valuation of land and its taxation. He met his Great Council at Gloucester at the end of the year, and in the words of the Anglo-Saxon chronicler, he had "much thought and deep speech" with them about the land, how it was held and by whom. It was decided that commissioners were to go over all England to make enquiry by oath of the Sheriffs, of all the barons, and of the whole hundred, the priest, the reeve and six villeins of every township. This was the most widespread use of the jury system yet made.

Nothing is said about the opposition of the barons in the meeting of the Council. This expressed itself in violent resistance to the enquiry. William, however, took it seriously, and went up and down the country to expedite the work, which was completed in seven months. Another meeting of the Council was held on August 1st, 1086, at which all the landholders of substance attended, and swore the oath of allegiance to the King on the basis of information contained in the survey.

A tax of 6s. on the hide of land (120 acres) was imposed. Various estimates are made by historians of the amount raised by this tax. They agree that it was substantial.

But there was no permanence about the return. William died in 1087, and, as we know from recent history, it requires a strong central authority to maintain a valuation as well as to institute it. Under his successors and especially during the anarchy of Stephen's reign, the revenue derived from the Domesday tax was cut down to a small sum. Kings with an insecure position were unable to control barons who rebelled against this measure. Even Henry II, who restored law and order in the more general government of the country, failed here. At the meeting of the Great Council at Woodstock in 1163 he proposed to transfer to the Exchequer from the Sheriffs the small remnant of the tax which was still collected. Thomas Becket, now head of the Church, opposed him in an unseemly altercation, and with this the tax ceased to appear in the record of the receipts.

Bishop Stubbs tells us that "so long as all the taxation fell on land, Domesday Book continued to be the rate-book of the Kingdom." But including the many years of dwindling and depleted yield, the tax had a career of less than eighty years. Sir James Ramsay, in *The Revenues of the Kings of England*, offers an explanation while he criticises the action. "It seems odd," he says, "that the King should refrain from exacting a perfectly legal tax, without introducing any new impost to replace it. We can only suggest that, pestered with applications for remission, Henry thought the Danegold (tax) more trouble than it was worth, and that he preferred to fall back on arbitrary assessments and judicial penalties." The direction which legislation took was due to the barons more than to the kings. The arbitrariness of the assessments took different forms, such as imposts on wool, a poll-tax, levies of various proportions on the possessions of various classes. And after they had successfully resisted valuation and taxation of a regular and recurring nature, the landowners proceeded to systematize the enclosure of land. Gibbon, in the midst of his wide survey of this kind of history, makes the following reflection, "The desire," he says, "of obtaining the advantages, and of escaping the burdens, of political society is a perpetual and inexhaustible source of discord." This reflection was illustrated in the four centuries of English history which followed. Unemployment, begging, highway robbery and other evils increased, and these were attributed directly to enclosure. In the sixteenth century legislation became common to compel landowners to rebuild decayed houses and to restore land to tillage, but it was not "put in execution," and was ignored. In 1598, however, the Poor Relief Act was passed. But its extension and the final shape given to it in 1601 signified the intention of the legislators to make it work. Overseers were instructed "to raise by taxation of every inhabitant,