

The Role Of Sir Clifford Sifton In The Formulation Of The  
Editorial Policy Of The Manitoba Free Press, 1916 to 1921

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## Preface

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This thesis is the product of a good deal of energy, expended over the past year in about equal proportions of enigma, frustration, glimmerings of comprehension and satisfying syntheses. For each of these rewarding experiences, I have innumerable people to thank. To the Graduate Studies Department of the University of Manitoba, I should like to express my thanks for providing the financial basis of this endeavor by way of assistance Fellowships. More immediately, I shall never be able to repay the helpful advice and encouragement tendered to me by my thesis advisor, Professor W.D. Smith; to him must go much of the credit for any assets this work may have. I wish also to enunciate my gratitude to my typist, Mrs. Mandy Watson, for the speed and accuracy with which she brought this thesis into its final form. Mrs. Jean Birch, secretary of the History Department, must here be given credit for the countless ways she expedited my research and writing. And, of course, to Diane, my wife of only five months, I want to express my sincere appreciation for the encouragement and impetus that she has provided to this work. When these people, and numerous unnamed others, have received their due credit, there remains little but the responsibility for the errors of commission and omission that are to be found in this thesis. That responsibility I reserve wholly and completely to myself.

R.M.B.

## Abstract

Some attention has been given to the politics of John W. Dafoe and of the Manitoba Free Press, but there has hitherto been no thorough consideration of the influence which the owner of the paper, Sir Clifford Sifton, exerted on its editor and thereby on its editorial policy. This thesis is an attempt to fill this void. This has been done by comparing Sifton's views with those expressed privately by Dafoe and publicly by the Free Press in regard to federal politics, and especially the federal political parties, in the period 1916 to 1921. From this study it has been found that Sifton, by his advice, political analyses and occasional ultimatums, did in fact influence Dafoe, and thus kept the paper's editorial policy within the bounds of which he approved.

Approval Sheet

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

On November 18th, 1896, Clifford Sifton, a young Brandon lawyer, was sworn into the Privy Council as Minister of the Interior and Superintendent of Indian Affairs in the newly formed Laurier government. For Sifton this was the beginning of a long and varied association with federal politics, and the close of a brief but successful career in provincial affairs.

Clifford Sifton was not a native Manitoban, having been born March 10, 1861, and raised at Arva, Ontario, where his father, John Sifton, had business interests in a number of varied enterprises. After graduating gold medalist in his class at Victoria College in Coburg in 1880, Sifton joined his family, who by this time had moved to Winnipeg, and for two years studied law in the offices of S. C. Biggs. Upon his admittance to the Manitoba Bar, at the age of twenty-one, he set up private practice in the young but thriving town of Brandon.

For the first six years of his legal career, Sifton remained relatively aloof from public life, campaigning for his father in the provincial elections of 1883 and 1886, and speaking occasionally in support of prohibition, but not personally entering the political lists. It was not until the provincial election of 1888 that Sifton, upon the request of the Liberal association of North Brandon, agreed to carry their

banner in opposition to the Conservative hopeful, W. A. Macdonald.<sup>1</sup> Sifton's campaigning abilities were evident from the first, as he unexpectedly defeated Macdonald by the slim margin of forty-two votes.

For three years Sifton remained a back-bench, though by no means unheard, supporter of the government of Thomas Greenway.<sup>2</sup> In the course of those three years, the Greenway government, on the initiation of Joseph Martin, the Attorney-General, enacted the famous, or infamous, School Acts, which effectively ended the dual system of schools that had existed in the province for twenty years.<sup>3</sup> With this question, Sifton was to become intimately acquainted, as in May, 1891, he was offered and accepted the Attorney-General portfolio which Martin had found necessary to vacate. Throughout the five most vital years of the schools controversy, thus, Sifton was a member of the Greenway government, and with it staunchly defended the province's

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<sup>1</sup>W. A. Macdonald, a Brandon lawyer, Conservative, elected to the Manitoba Legislature for City of Brandon, 1892, defeated in federal election of 1896 in the constituency of Brandon by D'Alton McCarthy, later moved to British Columbia, appointed to the Supreme Court.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Greenway, born in Cornwall, England, March 25, 1838, and brought to Canada as a child. M. P. for Sourth Huron, 1875 to 1878, member of the Manitoba Legislature, 1879 to 1904. Premier of Manitoba, January, 1888 to January, 1898. M. P. for Lisgar, 1904-1908. Appointed member of the Board of Railway Commissioners. Died, October 30, 1908.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Martin, born September 24, 1852, called to Manitoba Bar 1882, M.L.A. for Portage la Prairie 1883 to 1892, Attorney-General in the Greenway government 1888 to 1891, Member of Parliament for Portage la Prairie 1893 to 1896, moved to British Columbia 1897, Member of British Columbia Legislature 1898 to 1903, Premier briefly in 1900, moved to England 1908, Member of British House of Commons, 1910 until his death in 1918.

rights against the interventionist designs of the Conservative government at Ottawa. It was, in fact, Sifton rather than Greenway who participated in the formulation of the so-called "Laurier-Greenway" settlement that followed hard on the heels of Liberal party's electoral victory of 1896.

It was after his participation in the schools settlement that Sifton entered the federal government of Wilfrid Laurier, as Minister of the Interior. He retained this portfolio for a period slightly less than nine years, in which time his most notable achievement undoubtedly was his policy of immigration which brought hundreds of thousands of settlers to the largely unpopulated west. In spite of this accomplishment, however, Sifton's name is probably better known for his deviations from the Laurier policy than for his adherence to it. The first of several independent positions taken by Sifton developed as a result of the educational clauses of the bills creating the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan out of the Northwest Territories in 1905. Sifton had not been consulted by Laurier as to the nature of these clauses prior to their introduction into Parliament, and he was quick to announce that his views were not in accord with those of his leader. To emphasize his position he resigned from the government, and in spite of the fact that this, combined with other opposition, forced Laurier to recast the clauses more to his liking, he refused to re-assume his portfolio.

Once outside of the cabinet, Sifton's interest in politics



abated somewhat. He continued to sit in Parliament, but devoted most of his energies to his personal business interests. This was due partly to the deafness with which he was becoming increasingly afflicted. In the federal election of 1908 he declared his intention not to run, but the threat of a Tory sweep of the West caused him to reconsider his decision, and he again won the constituency of Brandon. Until January of 1910 he refrained from participating in public life and pursued his own business interests. Then he accepted the chairmanship of the newly created Commission of Conservation, a position he was to hold continuously until November, 1918.

When he became chairman of the Conservation Commission, Sifton announced his intention to follow a strictly non-partisan attitude toward public affairs, as he believed this was necessary for the fulfillment of his duties. This avowal, however, lasted only a year, as in 1911 the question of reciprocity with the United States was thrust into the political arena. This he considered too important an issue to remain silent upon. As he had done in 1905, Sifton withdrew his support from the Laurier government and put the full force of his abilities in opposition to its proposed reciprocal trade agreement. And, also as in 1905, his opposition had its effect. Forced to submit the issue to the people, the Laurier government found Sifton's views vindicated, and reciprocity rejected.

Sifton declined to contest a constituency in the election

of 1911, undoubtedly because he could honestly support neither of the parties, but also because he continued to chair the Commission of Conservation. It was the affairs of this plus business matters that occupied his attention until the outbreak of war in 1914. After some initial reservations about the validity of Canada's participation in the war, he decided her presence in it was amply justified, and threw himself into the organization of the country's contribution.<sup>4</sup> One result of his efforts was the Sifton Machine Gun Battery. For this and his past contributions to public life, Sifton was awarded by King George V in the New Year's list of 1915 the title of Knight Commander of the Royal Order of St. Michael and St. George. Later in the same year, Lady and Sir Clifford moved to England, according to Dafoe, "for the purpose of affording a home for their sons and other young Canadians on their brief holidays from the trenches."<sup>5</sup> While Lady Sifton remained in England, Sir Clifford himself returned to Canada for the summer months, and thus was never completely out of touch with the political situation. He was, therefore, present in Canada in the summer of 1917, and played a leading role in the formation of Union government in October of that year. While he did not take an

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<sup>4</sup>On July 1, 1914, Sifton wired Dafoe, "Do not commit yourself on our participation in the war," Sifton to Dafoe, Telegram, July 1, 1914, Dafoe Papers, Box M73, hereafter abbreviated as D. P. M73.

<sup>5</sup>John W. Dafoe, Clifford Sifton in Relation to His Times, Toronto, 1931, p. 390, hereafter abbreviated as C. S.

active part in the election campaign of 1917, he did remain in the country to give his personal support to Union candidates.

Following the election in December, 1917, Sifton returned to England, where he resided until 1919. In the next ten years he only rarely voiced his opinions on the questions of the day, keeping in close contact with these affairs and with the men involved, but doing little to influence them publicly. From his correspondence it is evident that two questions were of particular interest to him, the first being Canadian nationhood, and the second, the interests of the west, as reflected especially in the Progressive movement. While his active participation in these two movements was slight, those who were involved frequently found themselves, willingly or otherwise, the recipients of his opinions and advice. Thus until his death on April 17, 1929, Sir Clifford Sifton retained the interest in political affairs that characterized his life.

In the course of his lifetime, Clifford Sifton acquired several business interests, but none was as important, at least for the historian, as the Manitoba Free Press. He acquired the paper in 1898, in conjunction with a business man, John Mather. It would appear that it was Sifton's intention to have a strong Liberal journal in the west. The provincial elections of 1898 had seen the Conservatives wrest power from the Liberals, and he apparently was concerned lest the same fate should befall

the federal Liberal party.<sup>6</sup>

When Sifton took over the paper, it was edited by A. J. Magurn. He, however, proved to be unsatisfactory, as he did not follow the policy guide-lines laid down by Sifton.<sup>7</sup> The result was that in January, 1901, a tentative offer was made to John W. Dafoe, who was then on the editorial staff of the Montreal Star. Several months later, this offer was confirmed, and on August 19, 1901, Dafoe assumed the editorship of the Manitoba Free Press.

In hiring John W. Dafoe as editor of the Free Press, Sifton was getting a man highly qualified for the position. Self-educated, Dafoe had begun his journalistic career as cub editor with the Montreal Family Herald and Weekly Star in 1883

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<sup>6</sup>Ramsay Cook, The Politics of John W. Dafoe and the Free Press, Toronto, 1963, p. 15. How Sifton was able to gain control of the Free Press is less clear, however. It was rumored at the time that he had acquired it through a deal with the Canadian Pacific Railway on the question of the Crow's Nest freight rates, although there has been no supporting evidence given to this effect. On the other hand, Chief Justice Mather referred in his personal diary to the fact that the C.P.R. had indeed taken over the property from its original founder and owner, W. F. Luxton. (W. F. Luxton, founder and first editor of the Manitoba Free Press, which he operated from 1872 to 1893) This reference was as follows:

Mr. and Mrs. H. Sutherland also at Alloways and they talked reminiscently of the manner in which W. F. Luxton now deceased had been ousted out of the Free Press which he had founded by the C.P.R. by acquiring stock he had assigned to Sir D. A. Smith (Strathcona) to secure a loan. (Chief Justice Mather's Diary, Volume 5, Begun July 1st, 1917, October 29, 1917, pp. 86-87)

<sup>7</sup>R. Cook, op. cit., p. 15.

at age of seventeen. After only one year of experience Dafoe had been sent by the Herald to Ottawa as its political correspondent, where, according to his own testimony, he became "a fighting Grit."<sup>8</sup> After a brief, but ill-fated stint as editor of the Ottawa Evening Journal in 1886, Dafoe accepted a position with the Manitoba Free Press. He remained in Winnipeg for six years, during which time the basis was laid for his interest in the problems and politics of the Canadian west. The opportunity for advancement led Dafoe back to Montreal in 1892, where he worked first on the Montreal Herald, and then in 1895, for the Star.

Upon his assumption of the editorial duties of the Free Press in 1901, thus, Dafoe's credentials were excellent. A wide and varied journalistic career, six years experience with western politics, and perhaps most importantly, a sincere regard for the policies of the Liberal party,--these together qualified him for the editorship of Sifton's Manitoba Free Press.

That this was indeed the case is proven, if by nothing else, by the forty-three years that Dafoe remained at the helm of the paper. As well, his appointment as the representative of the Department of Public Information on the Canadian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 testified to his journalistic ability. Dafoe achieved recognition outside his capacity

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<sup>8</sup> John W. Dafoe, Sixty Years in Journalism, Winnipeg, 1943, p. 3.

as a journalist too. One such honor was his appointment as Chancellor of the University of Manitoba in 1934, a position he held until his death ten years later. Another was his appointment to the Rowell-Sirois Royal Commission set up to study federal-provincial fiscal relations in 1937. Thus Clifford Sifton was amply vindicated in his choice of John W. Dafoe as editor for the Free Press.

Under the ownership of Luxton, the Manitoba Free Press had been independent of partisan ties, supporting neither party to the exclusion of the other. Under Sifton, and particularly after Dafoe became editor, however, the paper became an ardent Liberal partisan, provincially and federally. While it called itself a voice of the west, it most frequently found western interests to lie within the Liberal party policy. A deviation from this practice occurred in 1905, when the Free Press, after initially supporting the Autonomy bills for the creation of Alberta and Saskatchewan submitted by the Laurier government, swung around to oppose them because of their educational clauses, following the lead of Sifton. Thereafter the paper returned to support the Liberal cause, a position it retained for over a decade.

At the outbreak of war in 1914 the Free Press was quick to call for a cessation of partisan politics, and for the parties to cooperate to the utmost for the furtherance of the war cause. This did not mean that it remained uncritical of

the government of Sir Robert Borden, as it was vociferous in its condemnatory remarks on the munitions and supplies scandals that were revealed in 1915. In spite of these, however, the Free Press was opposed to a wartime election which might have brought the Liberals back into power, on the basis that such an election would detract public and governmental attention from the war effort.<sup>9</sup> The extension of the life of Parliament agreed to by both parties in February, 1916, thus met with the complete approval of the paper, it stating that "there ought to follow more open cooperation between the leaders of the two parties...."<sup>10</sup> At the beginning of 1916, therefore, the Free Press's attitude toward the Borden government was critical and unfriendly. At the same time, while the paper was sympathetic toward the federal Liberal party, it refused to endorse a war-time election that might have brought that party into power. Its main interest was that Canada's contribution to the war effort be fulfilled to the greatest possible extent, and it saw the cooperation of the two parties as the best means of ensuring this goal.

With regard to the editorial policy of the Manitoba Free Press there seems to have been no formal agreement between Sifton and Dafoe. Dafoe, in his biography of Sifton, recorded that

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<sup>9</sup>Manitoba Free Press, Sat., November 27, 1915, Thursday, December 30, 1915, hereafter abbreviated as M.F.P.

<sup>10</sup>M.F.P., Monday, February 10, 1916.

prior to his assumption of the editorship he had a series of interviews with Sifton at which time the owner "set out in detail his views on all the big public questions of the day."<sup>11</sup> Dafoe was therefore well acquainted with Sifton's opinions, but whether he was expected to translate these into editorial policy is a different question. According to Dafoe, Sifton was primarily concerned that "the Free Press must make the interests of its constituents its first concern. It was to be a steady, fearless and consistent advocate of the rights and interests of Western Canada with due regard to the larger interests of all Canada."<sup>12</sup> He went on to explain that Sifton believed that "those in actual charge of the paper were to be the judges of what those rights and interests were, and of how they were to be advocated; the responsibilities were theirs and with these responsibilities there went the corresponding and necessary powers."<sup>13</sup> This last point was clarified in regard to the Canadian Annual Review's conjecture in 1911, that because Sifton was campaigning against reciprocity and the Free Press was equally ardent in its support, Dafoe must have had "a term contract which included control of its policy."<sup>14</sup> Of this

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<sup>11</sup>Dafoe, C. S., p. 356.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. xxv.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Castell Hopkins, ed., The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1911, Toronto, 1912, p. 51.



speculation Dafoe stated:

That is an explanation that is far from doing justice to Sir Clifford. Nothing prevented him from taking possession of the Free Press and making it serve his will but his voluntary renouncement of power, in keeping with a general understanding, which was never reduced to a formula, as to the manner in which the paper should be edited and administered. Sir Clifford's relation to the Free Press was never that of simply an investor; he was always deeply interested in its plans, its methods and its policies, and in time these became his first interest. But in all his active participation he never forgot his self-denying ordinance, by which he left the last word upon policy to those responsible for the conduct of the paper. The Free Press, to his mind, must be the champion and advocate of the West's interests; and the final judgement as to the nature of that advocacy he left to the parties into whose hands he had committed the charge of the paper.<sup>15</sup>

But while Dafoe emphasized that Sifton took a "self-denying ordinance" in regard to the policies advocated by the Free Press, he also pointed out that Sifton nevertheless took a vital interest in them. As he noted:

This did not mean...that Sir Clifford was indifferent as to what the Free Press policies were. He played a great part in making the, in two ways--by suggestion and in consultation. I think I might say that with respect to all the large issues of the last thirty years, in one capacity or the other, the Free Press had the benefit of his services. It was my custom, when the responsible parties were approaching a decision as to policy with respect to some large issue, to send Sir Clifford a memorandum of the essential facts with all available data, and ask him to turn the matter over in his mind and give us the benefit of his judgement. In these cases he invariably made an intense study of all the facts, and gave us in brief and clear cut terms an opinion which was of the greatest value....<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Dafoe, C. S., p. xxiii.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. xxv-xxvi.

In view of the fact that the above quotations have been taken from an official publication of Dafoe's, it would be well to consider the views that he expressed privately on the matter. In a letter to Augustus Bridle, dated June 14, 1921, such an expression of views is to be found. Bridle had evidently written Dafoe asking him for information in regard to the Free Press and the policies it had advocated in the past four or five years. In the preface to this information Dafoe asked Bridle not to "make me and the Free Press convertible terms. I am the editor of the Free Press in the full sense of the words but I am not the whole works. Our major policies are the result of consultation and conferences with my associates in the ownership of the paper....Our outside director is Sir Clifford Sifton. He does not concern himself very directly with the paper but I have always found it expedient and valuable to get his views when any large question of policy has to be decided."<sup>17</sup> Here again then, it might be interpreted that while Sifton would inform Dafoe of his views on a particular policy, it was left to Dafoe, in conjunction with his associates, to make the final decision.

While Dafoe occasionally, and fairly clearly, enunciated his view of Sifton's relationship to the Free Press, Sifton

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<sup>17</sup>Dafoe to Augustus Bridle, June 14, 1921, D. P. M73.

himself was something less than vocal in doing so. In a letter to Judge Myers dated March 16, 1915, Sifton disclaimed taking any part in the formulation of the policies of the Free Press, stating "The editorial management is entirely in the control of Mr. Dafoe."<sup>18</sup> This disclaimer must, however, be considered within the circumstances that prompted it. Judge Myers had written to Sifton complaining of the fact that the Free Press was reporting all the slanderous charges that were being levelled against him in the Manitoba legislature, and was appealing to Sifton to prevent such charges from appearing in the paper. In view of this, Sifton's reply can hardly be considered a definitive pronouncement of his role in the Free Press management.

In a letter written shortly before his death, Sifton advised his son Harry to "regard it as a sacred trust to butress [sic] and strengthen these [newspaper] properties and enable you to hand them down as a great and powerful influence for the good of Canada," and adjuring him to "follow the policy that I have followed."<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately Sifton nowhere delineated the policy that he followed, and this must be deduced from other evidence.

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<sup>18</sup>Sifton to Hon. Judge Myers, March 16, 1915, Sifton Papers, C594 160399, hereafter abbreviated as S. P.

<sup>19</sup>Sifton to Harry Sifton, February 9, 1929, quoted in Dafoe, C. S., p. xxiv.

To find the policy that Sifton followed with respect to the Free Press and thereby establish his role in the formulation of its editorial policy, it is necessary to make a comparison of Sifton's views with those of Dafoe and with those expressed in the editorial columns of the paper. The attitudes of each of the above mentioned toward the federal political parties in the period 1916 to 1921 have been chosen for this comparison because they fill all of the necessary requirements for such a study. The correspondence between Sifton and Dafoe in this period is fairly complete and thus can be obtained the individual opinions and exchange of ideas between the two men on the various issues that arose. As well, both Sifton and Dafoe were vitally interested in, and acquainted with, federal politics in this period; presumably any influence Sifton might have had on the Free Press editorial policy would concern matters about which he had particular interest and knowledge. Finally, in this period the Free Press's attitude toward the federal parties was not constant. Traditionally a supporter of the Liberal party, it broke temporarily in 1916 with Laurier over the bilingual question in Ontario; then, in 1917, it broke away completely from Laurier and the Liberal party and threw its support behind Union government; and in the years 1919, 1920 and 1921 it deserted the Union government and gave independent support to the Progressive movement. This changing of editorial policy supplies an excellent basis for a study of this nature. By

comparing his views on the various issues with those expressed privately by Dafoe and publicly by the Free Press, Sir Clifford Sifton's role in the formulation of the editorial policy of the Manitoba Free Press can be determined.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FREE PRESS AND THE LIBERAL PARTY, 1916

In the spring of 1916 there arose an issue which briefly disrupted the association between the Free Press and the federal Liberal party, or at any rate, that portion of it which adhered to the leadership of Sir Wilfrid Laurier. This was the transferral of the schools question in Ontario into the federal arena via the resolution introduced by Ernest Lapointe on May 10, 1916.

The school question in Ontario was primarily a matter of language. Until 1912, there had been a bilingual system of education used in the separate schools of Ontario. However, in November 1910, upon the receipt of complaints from English speaking Roman Catholics that in a good many separate schools, French was used as the exclusive language of instruction, the Conservative government of James Whitney appointed Dr. F. W. Merchant as a one-man commission to investigate.<sup>1</sup> The report of Merchant, given in March of 1912, indicated that many of the charges levelled at the bilingual system of instruction had solid bases in fact. In many of the separate schools, English was only a

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<sup>1</sup>M. Prang, "Clerics, Politicians and the Bilingual Schools Issue in Ontario, 1910-1917," Canadian Historical Review, XLI, No. 4, December, 1960, p. 282.

subject, while French was the sole language of instruction. It showed, moreover, that a fair percentage of the teachers in these schools were barely qualified to teach English as a subject, let alone use it as a language of instruction.<sup>2</sup> As a result of these findings, the Whitney government, on March 7, 1912 issued a new Circular of Instructions, No. 17, to rectify the situation. The purpose of these Instructions was to ensure that every student in all Ontario schools, public and separate, would receive adequate instruction in English, but in doing so they greatly curtailed instruction in French, this being restricted to the First Form as a language of instruction, and thereafter, as a subject only.

The outcry from French speaking Canadians within and without Ontario was tremendous. Delegations to the Whitney government proved to be useless. The matter was submitted to the courts, but both the Supreme Court of Canada and the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council ruled, in 1915, that Regulation 17, as the Circular of Instructions came to be called, was intra vires.<sup>3</sup> As a result of these decisions, the French speaking minority then appealed to the Borden government to disallow Regulation 17 on the basis of Section 4 of Clause 93

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 304.

of the British North America Act, which granted the federal government the power to disallow provincial legislation on educational matters that were intra vires on the ground that they prejudicially affected the rights of the minority. This the Borden government refused to do.<sup>4</sup> As a last-ditch attempt to have their grievance rectified, the French minority then appealed to Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the federal Liberal party for the support of their cause, in May, 1916. The result of this appeal was the introduction into the House of Commons on May 10th by Ernest Lapointe of a resolution that read, in part:

...that His Majesty's subjects of French origin in the Province of Ontario complain that by recent legislation they have been to a large extent deprived of the privilege... of having their children taught in French; that this House... would, while fully recognizing the principle of Provincial rights and the necessity of every child being given a thorough English education, respectfully suggest to the Legislative Assembly the wisdom of making it clear that the privilege of the children of French parentage of being taught in their mother tongue be not interfered with."<sup>5</sup>

The vote on the resolution caused a split in the Liberal ranks, as Laurier and the bulk of his party supported it while a small group of English Liberals from the Western provinces opposed it. The government refused to accept the resolution, and except for five of its French speaking members, opposed it, with the result that the motion was defeated by a vote of 107 to 60.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 305.

<sup>5</sup>Canada, House of Commons Debates, 1916, Vol. IV, p. 3676.

<sup>6</sup>Frang, op. cit., p. 306.



Rumor that the federal Liberals were planning to introduce some measure into the House of Commons, in support of the French minority in Ontario had been circulating throughout the month of April. Dafoe, in an editorial on April 15, 1916, announced explicitly what the attitude of the Free Press would be if such an event came to pass. There he stated that the traditional policy of the Liberal party had been that there should be no federal disallowance in a field that was entirely within the jurisdiction of the provinces, as education was, and that any "Liberal member, high or low, who would advocate a policy of disallowance to deal with the Ontario educational situation would be a renegade to one of the most clearly defined principles of Canadian Liberalism."<sup>7</sup> He foresaw disastrous results if the federal party took any such action, stating that "the Dominion Liberal party, as it now is, would be disrupted...."<sup>8</sup>

In its editorial of May 12th, the Free Press laid the blame for the introduction of the Lapointe resolution into Parliament squarely on the shoulders of Laurier. The result, it predicted, might be "calamitous" for the Dominion as a whole, and must be "disastrous" for the Liberal party, as Laurier would find little support for his position outside of Quebec.<sup>9</sup> It

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<sup>7</sup>M. F. P., April 15, 1916.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>M. F. P., May 12, 1916.

warned that "there will be no yielding at any point to these Nationalist demands, which have now so unaccountably received the blessings of the French Liberal chiefs....They are not going to be allowed to impose their will upon the rest of Canada."<sup>10</sup> The editorial of May 13th entitled "Consequences" pursued a more radical line of thought. There, the possible consequences of the Lapointe Resolution were outlined. The paper predicted that the Liberal party's predominance in Quebec would be strengthened, which was not desirable, as "the over-representation of one element in the party conferences has had at times an unfortunate effect on policy...."<sup>11</sup> It foresaw that there would be a negligible effect in the Maritimes, but that in Ontario the Liberal's strength would be drastically weakened.<sup>12</sup> As for the West, the Free Press stated that if the Liberals representing that section of the country continued to be independent of the Eastern party, their support would increase tremendously.<sup>13</sup> It called upon Western Liberals "to decide that they will rely upon themselves--and thus do their own thinking, formulate their own policies and provide their own leaders."<sup>14</sup> This was undoubtedly

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>M. F. P., May 13, 1916.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

the most radical departure in policy that the Free Press had taken in the fifteen years that John W. Dafoe had been its editor; it was, however, short-lived. For the next two weeks the Free Press was strangely quiet on the question, no reference being made to it in its editorial columns whatsoever. Explanation of this silence can only be conjecture. It might be assumed, however, that the paper preferred to wait and see if any attempts were made by Laurier at a reconciliation with those English Liberals who were antagonistic toward him. This assumption is based on an editorial of May 29th, shortly after Laurier's journey to Toronto for this purpose, entitled "Smoothing Things Over." In that editorial the Free Press recognized that Laurier had to some extent regained the support of the Ontario Liberals, but repeated its condemnation of the action that made such reconciliation necessary.<sup>15</sup>

In light of the events of 1917 that resulted in the formation of Union government, and of the Free Press's attitude toward them, this episode of the Lapointe resolution takes on a new significance. It might, in fact, be considered a dress rehearsal, or a play in miniature of the larger drama that was to engulf the political alignments only a year later. Because of the resemblance of these two not-unrelated events, it would be well to clarify, as far as possible, the positions of both

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<sup>15</sup>M. F. P., May 29, 1916.

Sifton and Dafoe and the Free Press, as a basis for the analysis of the more important events of 1917.

The first editorial comment by the Free Press on the possibility of the federal Liberals introducing the Ontario school situation into Parliament came on April 15, and was unfavorable to say the least. This was three weeks before there is any written evidence of Sifton's opinion on the matter. It would seem, therefore, that Dafoe alone must be held responsible for the attitude expressed in the editorial columns of the Free Press. Before this assumption is hardened into an historical fact, however, it would be well to investigate the circumstances that led Dafoe to his opinion on the matter. It must be remembered that Ontario was not the only province to be concerned about the bilingual system of education in 1916. On March 10th of the same year, exactly two months before Lapointe introduced his resolution into the House of Commons, the Liberal government of T. C. Norris in Manitoba repealed the bilingual clauses of the Laurier-Greenway settlement of 1897, thereby making English the only language of instruction in the Province. Moreover, Dafoe had been so vociferous in calling for the repeal of this clause that he was labelled by Thomas Cote, in a letter of March 27, 1916, "the father of the new school legislation."<sup>16</sup> Dafoe thus had a genuine interest in the question of federal action

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<sup>16</sup>Thomas Cote to Dafoe, March 27, 1916, D. P. M73.

in regard to the bilingual situation in Ontario, for if Parliament took action there, the probability that it would also interfere in Manitoba was large indeed. The fruits of the campaign carried on by the Free Press were also in jeopardy.

The Free Press's campaign for the repeal of the bilingual clauses in the Education Act was really begun on November 20th, 1915. Then it stated, in heavier black type than usual, presumably indicating a statement of policy, "In the opinion of the Free Press the time is ripe, and more than ripe, for the abolition of the bilingual clause and the substitution therefore of very specific and definite clauses governing the teaching of a second language in the public schools."<sup>17</sup> The attitude assumed in the editorials for the next months was moderate in tone, suggesting for example, that special consideration must be given to the French, for "this is their country quite as much as it is the country of the English-speaking Canadians."<sup>18</sup> This patronizing attitude, was replaced at the beginning of March by a harder line. According to the Free Press, "the experience of Ontario confirms the judgement of the Norris government in deciding that in dealing with the bilingual problem in Manitoba, it was useless to offer our French-

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<sup>17</sup>M. F. P., November 20, 1915.

<sup>18</sup>M. F. P., January 24, 1916.

Canadian fellow-citizens any compromise."<sup>19</sup> The next day the paper stated that "it would be a political impossibility to deny to other and more numerous nationalities any concessions made to the French."<sup>20</sup> In so pronouncing, it offered the argument that Manitoba had belonged to Britain since 1670, had never belonged to France, and therefore was not to be bound by the special concessions granted the French in the Treaty of Paris in 1763; besides, he added, "there are no treaty rights as to language in Canada."<sup>21</sup>

The Free Press's last word on the subject came in an editorial two weeks after the defeat of the Lapointe resolution. Under the headline of "The Language Question in the West" he maintained that here would be less trouble in the West over bilingualism than there had been in the East, for "in the West we must either stick to one language, or go on not to bilingualism but to multilingualism. This country must be either English-speaking or polygot."<sup>22</sup> From an attitude of moderation and compromise toward the French in Manitoba, it thus swung over to a position advocating unilingualism as the only language policy for the province.

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<sup>19</sup>M. F. P., March 1, 1916.

<sup>20</sup>M. F. P., March 2, 1916.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>M. F. P., May 26, 1916.

The interesting point about the Free Press's campaign for the repeal of the bilingual clause in the Manitoba Education Act, and about the change in tone and content its policy underwent throughout the course of the campaign, is the fact that the initiator of the campaign was Clifford Sifton, who from the first advocated a policy of unilingualism for the province. On May 18, 1915, Sifton wrote Dafoe that:

The whole bilingual question so far as possible ought to be wiped out. It is a mine of trouble and faction fighting. The American principle is the only safe one; to stand firmly and make no compromise. Now that the political fight is over in Manitoba, I would like to see the Free Press take an uncompromising stand upon this question and fight to the finish wherever it arises.<sup>23</sup>

Again on July 30th he stated:

I recommend particular and constant attention to the Bilingual question, and constant vigilance respecting the situation [of] anti-national movements. The opposing of these anti-national movements will be, in my judgement, one of the principle reasons for the existence of the Free Press for some time to come. Note particularly the attempt which is being made in Ontario to endeavor to get the use of French language recognized in schools as a constitutional obligation. I need not say that I presume you will speak out with no uncertain sound in regard to the position in Manitoba.<sup>24</sup>

Thus it is clear that Dafoe knew very well Sifton's views in regard to bilingualism in Manitoba; the campaign for its eradication was apparently undertaken at his instigation, although not immediately along the lines he suggested. There

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<sup>23</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, May 18, 1915, D. P. M73.

<sup>24</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, July 30, 1915, D. P. M73.

can be little doubt that the bilingual agitation in Ontario, the revelations of malpractice in bilingual schools by the Manitoba Minister of Education Dr. Thornton, and the determination of the Norris government not to give special concessions to the French population in Manitoba all contributed to Dafoe's belated adoption of the policy of unilingualism; but at the same time these factors may be viewed as having confirmed in Dafoe's mind the wisdom of Sifton's advice, tendered to him almost a year previously, that "the American principle is the only safe one." Viewed in this light, Sifton's opinion on the bilingual question must certainly be considered to have been a formative factor of Dafoe's, and thus of the policy advocated in the Free Press.

If the thesis that Dafoe knew, and eventually adopted as policy of the Free Press Sifton's attitude toward bilingualism is accepted, it would seem also that he would have a pretty accurate estimate of Sifton's estimate of the federal Liberal party's attitude toward the French minority in Ontario. Sifton, it will be remembered, had termed the opposing of anti-national movements as "one of the principle reasons for the Free Press," and it is apparent that he classed the French agitation in Ontario as such an 'anti-national movement.'<sup>25</sup> It would seem evident, therefore, that opposition to Laurier's

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<sup>25</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, July 30, 1915, D. P. M73.



support of an anti-national movement was the only logical outcome of Sifton's, and by now, Dafoe's opinion on the bilingual question.

There is, as well, further and more direct evidence that the Free Press's radical departure from its traditional support of Laurier and the Liberal party was made with the approval, and perhaps, also on the urging, of Sifton. In the week prior to the introduction of the Lapointe resolution into Parliament, Dafoe had been in Ottawa, where, he reported to Sifton, he had learned of Laurier's intentions, and had attempted to "head it off."<sup>26</sup> His personal assessment of the situation was that "if the whole party follows Laurier the party is gone; if only the French follow him Laurier is gone as a national leader."<sup>27</sup> What is more revealing, however, is the fact that in the same letter, Dafoe told Sifton that he had "to leave for home tonight; and shall therefore have to forego the further talk I hoped to have with you. However I think I know your mind on most of the big issues that may arise."<sup>28</sup> From this it is evident that Dafoe had met with Sifton, probably in Toronto, before proceeding to Ottawa, and had discussed with him the

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<sup>26</sup>Dafoe to Sifton, May 7, 1916, Sifton Papers, Dafoe Correspondence, Reel C-734, hereafter abbreviated to S. P. D. C.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

'big issues' of the day, one of which most certainly was the bilingual question in Ontario. This hypothesis is supported by the telegram which Sifton sent to Dafoe in reply to his letter of May 7th; it was:

Regret news exceedingly if event transpires your only course is to protest vigorously and continue traditional policy for United Canadian Nationality regardless of party interests.<sup>29</sup>

Here again, we have Sifton supporting a 'United Canadian Nationality' which may validly be interpreted as the antithesis of the 'anti-national movements' which he so vigorously denounced in 1915.

Sifton's view of Laurier's attitude on the bilingual question was communicated more clearly to Dafoe in a letter on May 11th. There he called the episode "a preposterous exhibition for a man of Laurier's age," adding that "the quicker he gets out of leadership the better for the country at large."<sup>30</sup> He went on to predict that Laurier's action would result "sooner or later in a complete upheaval in Canadian politics, and I am sure I hope it will. The present party organizations are illogical and absurd."<sup>31</sup> He concluded by advising Dafoe not to compromise himself "in any respect in the interests of the

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<sup>29</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, May 8, 1916, S. P. D. C. M734.

<sup>30</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, May 11, 1916, D. P. M73.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

Liberal party," because "it is quite useless to try to pull them as a party organization out of their trouble."<sup>32</sup>

Two days after this letter was written, Dafoe editorially laid the responsibility for the bilingual debacle on the shoulders of Laurier, who, he intimated, had acquiesced to the demands of the Nationalists of Quebec. This editorial Sifton praised in a telegram, saying "your article on the Bilingual situation is excellent. It fits the case. Keep on."<sup>33</sup> On the same day he wrote Dafoe about an article by his Ottawa correspondent, Chisholm, which Sifton labelled an "elaborate apology for Laurier and the imputation of dishonesty on the part of the government," stating that he saw "no reason" for it, as "Borden's attitude was first rate and his speech good [and] Laurier's attitude was that of a school boy and his speech twaddle."<sup>34</sup> Finally, on May 13th, Dafoe did "keep on" as Sifton advised, coming out with the demand that the Western Liberals pursue their own independent line of action.

Throughout the bilingual episode, in 1916, thus, the editorial policy advocated by the Manitoba Free Press was exactly that counselled by Sifton. The fact that Dafoe had conferred

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, May 12, 1916.

<sup>34</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, May 12, 1916, D. P. M73, P. P. 6.  
Chisholm,

with Sifton either in the last week of April or the first week in May on the major issues of the day, added to the letters and telegrams which Sifton sent to Dafoe in the second week of May during the peak of the bilingual crisis, would indicate that this was by no means coincidental. By his advice and encouragement, Sifton played a very important role in the formulation of the Free Press's editorial policy with respect to the 1916 bilingual issue.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FREE PRESS AND THE FORMATION OF UNION GOVERNMENT, 1917

The bilingual episode of May, 1916, proved to be a prelude to the events of 1917 that resulted in the formation of Union government. In many respects the two incidents were similar. Laurier again took a position, this time on conscription, which was demanded by his French speaking colleagues but which a number of his English speaking followers refused to support. Once again the Liberal party was split on a question that aroused racial animosities. In 1917, however, the results of this split were more far-reaching. It opened a permanent breach within the Liberal party that was not to be completely closed until a decade later. It brought about an election in which all the racial prejudices of both French and English speaking Canadians were capitalized upon. Finally it resulted in the House of Commons being divided primarily upon racial rather than party lines, which at the same time reflected and reinforced the state of the country. It is the attitudes of the Free Press and of Sifton towards these events that will be studied in this chapter with a view to determining if and how the two were interrelated.

The momentary alienation of the Free Press from Laurier and the greater part of the Liberal party during the bilingual episode in May 1916 in no way involved an enlargement of its

sympathies for the Conservative government of Sir Robert Borden. The paper's remarks about Borden and his colleagues were as vicious and damning after that incident as before it. It described the Borden administration as "a group of mediocrities" lacking "in the instinct of national leadership and constructive capacity."<sup>1</sup> Borden himself was termed an "uninspiring personality... lacking in the characteristics of a leader."<sup>2</sup> Above all it accused the government of rampant partisanship in its handling of the war, and of subordinating the national interest to its own.<sup>3</sup> Thus while the Free Press had commended the government for its handling of the Lapointe incident, it did not alter its generally critical attitude toward Borden and his colleagues.

While the Free Press's evaluation of the Conservative government did not change as a result of the bilingual episode, there can be no doubt that this incident did affect its attitude toward the Liberal party. In the seven remaining months of 1916 it made only three editorial references to Sir Wilfrid Laurier.<sup>4</sup> None of these proposed Laurier as a desirable alternative to Borden as national leader; all were defences of the Liberal leader against Conservative charges that he was not supporting

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<sup>1</sup>M. F. P., July 26, 1916.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>M. F. P., October 24 and November 28, 1916.

<sup>4</sup>M. F. P., June 27, August 11, and November 2, 1916.

recruiting in Quebec. Moreover, the Free Press never suggested that it was in the best interests of the Canadian people for the Liberal party to assume the reins of government. On September 19th, for example, it stated that:

The Conservatives have suffered and the Liberals have gained to date because, upon the whole, the Liberal programmes are the more progressive. But it would be a great mistake for the Liberal leaders to assume that they are the darlings of the Canadian people. As a matter of fact, they are on trial; and they will in turn be visited by condemnation if, in the language of the day, they do not make good.<sup>5</sup>

This point was expressed more clearly on November 29th. There the Free Press maintained that the Canadian people were sincerely disappointed with the Borden government; "but", it continued, "they doubt whether any alternative party Government with its inevitable concentration of interest and purpose on things of relatively no importance, can supply the inspiring and resourceful leadership which the country must have if it is to escape great evils and dangers."<sup>6</sup> Therefore by the end of November, the Free Press could no longer be called a 'Liberal organ' in the traditional sense of the phrase.

In view of the Free Press's cooler attitude toward the Liberal party and its complete frigidity with regard to the Borden administration, it was not surprising that its editorial allegiance was directed along more independent lines. This

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<sup>5</sup>M. F. P., September 19, 1916.

<sup>6</sup>M. F. P., November 29, 1916.

independence was tentatively exhibited in the paper's demand, first made in May in the light of the bilingual incident, that the western Liberals should "do their own thinking, formulate their own policies and provide their own leaders."<sup>7</sup> On July 15th, the Free Press indicated this was no spur-of-the-moment rejection of eastern leadership, but was meant for serious consideration by western politicians. It stated, in reply to the accusation by the Toronto News that the western Liberals were leaderless, that:

Western Liberalism to the eye of the political machinist may have an appearance of disorganization at the moment; but in reality it was never more alive, nor has it ever held greater promise of usefulness to the people of Canada. Organization and leadership will emerge when their need appears; that is to say, before the next Dominion contest..."<sup>8</sup>

A month later it warned editorially that western Liberals should be prepared for an election, because:

...with our enlarged Parliamentary representation, the Canadian West should be a factor of moment in the next Parliament if the members elected are truly representative of Western desires and principles. Such steps should be taken as are necessary to guard against an election surprise before the necessary preparations are made to place in the field candidates who will fittingly represent Western interests in the next Parliament.<sup>9</sup>

At this point, thus, the Free Press appeared to be placing the support it withdrew from the federal Liberal party behind its

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<sup>7</sup>M. F. P., May 13, 1916.

<sup>8</sup>M. F. P., July 15, 1916.

<sup>9</sup>M. F. P., August 17, 1916.



western wing.

The closing months of 1916, however, did not see the expansion of this editorial support for western Liberalism by the Free Press. Instead it began to advocate the formation of what it termed a 'national government', that is, one composed of the best elements of both parties, to ensure a maximum war effort by the Canadian people. This demand was first made on November 29th when the paper asserted that "ever since the war began they [the Canadian people] have wanted a National Government that would make the prosecution of the war its first business."<sup>10</sup> Such a government, it maintained, on December 11th, would have avoided the partisanship which in the two previous years had subordinated "the public safety and requirements of efficiency to selfish materialistic considerations of politics."<sup>11</sup> On January 2nd, 1917, it pointed out that of all the British Dominions and the nations in the Grand Alliance, Canada was the only country that "still tolerates a Government organized along party lines and devoted primarily to the furtherance of party interests."<sup>12</sup> The Free Press stated its position clearly several days later:

We shall not have done our share as a nation until every

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<sup>10</sup>M. F. P., November 29, 1916.

<sup>11</sup>M. F. P., December 11, 1917.

<sup>12</sup>M. F. P., January 2, 1917.

Canadian does his bit. A united National Government is important; united action by the whole country is more important. The former is fundamental because it is the only way of affecting the latter.<sup>13</sup>

The question of the extension of the life of Parliament, or, alternately, an election, was the occasion for the reiteration of this demand. The paper stated that a national government would be the best way to avoid an election which "would bring to the surface all the cheap tricks of the partisan, the specious flag-waving, the mutual recriminations that might poison public life in Canada for a generation," and also ensure that the life of Parliament would be extended.<sup>14</sup> The lessening of recruiting, which by this time was becoming apparent, was attributed to party government, and national government advocated as the only means of rectifying the situation.<sup>15</sup> These arguments were repeated over the course of the next three and one half months; to review all such editorials would be unnecessary repetition. Suffice it is to say that the frequency and the urgency of the Free Press's demand for the formation of a national government were sufficient to designate it basic editorial policy.

As if to emphasize the need for national government, the Free Press in the first four months of 1917, augmented its criticism of the Borden administration. All the ills of the

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<sup>13</sup>M. F. P., January 6, 1917.

<sup>14</sup>M. F. P., January 13, 1917.

<sup>15</sup>M. F. P., January 17, 1917.

country, economic, political, military or moral, were attributed to the Conservative government. The failure of recruiting, and especially recruiting in Quebec, was shown to result from the lack of effective French representation in the government, and particularly from Borden's unholy alliance with the French Nationalists of that province.<sup>16</sup> The failure of the federal government to adopt prohibition of alcoholic beverages, in spite of the fact that seven of the nine provinces had instituted that policy, was, the Free Press declared, "to be expected from a Government not national in character."<sup>17</sup> So too, wasteful spending and the high cost of living had their source in the Borden government.<sup>18</sup> Editorials of this nature were intended to exemplify how necessary it was that the partisan Borden administration be replaced by a non-partisan, national government.

In May, 1917, the Free Press, with the rest of Canada, was confronted by the announcement of Prime Minister Borden that the government was intending to institute a selective military service plan, because voluntary enlistment was failing to provide the number of men commensurate with Canada's war obligations. Prior to this announcement the paper had

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<sup>16</sup>M. F. P., January 12, 1917.

<sup>17</sup>M. F. P., January 17, 1917.

<sup>18</sup>M. F. P., March 10, and April 25, 1917.

periodically discussed conscription; it had consistently taken the position that there was insufficient public support for such a plan. Almost a year previously the Free Press had first outlined this position as follows:

Before there can be conscription in a democratic country there must be a social and military organization sufficiently perfected to direct and apply all the forces thus brought into play and a public opinion all but unanimous as to the necessity for action so drastic. We have neither of these precedent conditions in Canada; nor is there the slightest likelihood that we shall secure them before the close of the war.<sup>19</sup>

This attitude was repeated occasionally throughout the remainder of 1916. The Free Press thus treated conscription as a theoretical issue, so far removed from the realm of political possibility that there was little value even in discussing it.

After it began to call for the formation of a national government, the Free Press's view of conscription remained essentially the same. On January 27th for example, it declared that "a partisan Government will not or cannot successfully employ--and...no thoroughly National Government should require to employ--..." the selective service system.<sup>20</sup> Thereafter it did not comment directly on conscription, but an editorial on recruiting on February 22nd, suggests that its attitude was undergoing a change. In that editorial the paper commented that "recruiting has come to a standstill and the acutest crisis

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<sup>19</sup>M. F. P., June 15, 1916.

<sup>20</sup>M. F. P., January 27, 1917.

of the war is approaching."; while it went on to blame the Borden administration for this state of affairs, thereby suggesting that a national government ought to be formed, it did not assert that this alone would remedy the recruiting situation.<sup>21</sup>

The assumption made above that the Free Press's attitude toward conscription in the first months of 1917 was undergoing a change is borne out by its comments on Borden's announcement of conscription. In its editorial of May 21st, entitled "Compulsory Service In Sight", the paper noted that voluntary service had failed to supply the necessary recruits for Canada's overseas forces, and that if the country wished to remain a principal in the war it was necessary for other means of recruiting to be employed; that is, it took at face value Borden's justification of conscription.<sup>22</sup> While it continued to blame the Borden administration for the failure of recruiting, it admitted that even a national government would probably not revive the "spirit of enthusiasm and self-sacrifice" necessary for the success of voluntary enlistment, adding "it would, in any case, have taken time; and time is one factor that we can no longer be indifferent to...."<sup>23</sup> The editorial went on to

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<sup>21</sup>M. F. P., February 22, 1917.

<sup>22</sup>M. F. P., May 21, 1917.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

explain that the entrance of the United States into the war had greatly increased the possibilities of a successful conscription programme in Canada, as "it will be possible for each country to decline to become the refuge for the slackers of the other."<sup>24</sup> Finally, while giving its approval to the principle of conscription, the Free Press made it explicit that this was not a sanction of the Borden administration; rather, this was one more important reason for the formation of a national government, for "the Government at Ottawa must cease to be a party organization; it must be a Win-the-War Government and nothing else...."<sup>25</sup>

The assertion of the Free Press that the adoption of conscription necessitated the formation of a national government was repeated over the course of the next week. On May 22 it asked rhetorically:

Who can doubt that if the Cabinet at Ottawa were composed of Liberal politicians, instead of being composed, as it is, of Conservative politicians, it would be as difficult for such a Government as for the present Government to put into operation a system of conscription?...

And who can doubt that with politicians of one party (it does not matter which party) in power at such a time there would be attempts at the making of political capital?<sup>26</sup>

The only way to ensure that conscription did not become a question of patronage was, in the view of the Free Press, to put behind it a united national government. This it repeated

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> M. F. P., May 22, 1917.

on May 28th and 29th.

Contrary to what one might expect, the Free Press did not greet Borden's overture to Laurier in regard to the formation of a national government on May 29th with terms of praise, in spite of the fact that this was what it had been demanding for over a week. Instead, in its editorial of May 31st, it suggested that this overture indicated that Borden had introduced conscription out of political rather than military motives. It maintained that if Borden had really been sincere about the welfare of the country, he would have negotiated a national government before announcing the necessity of conscription.<sup>27</sup> "The circumstances suggest", it asserted:

that Sir Robert made his plunge in conscription in the expectation that it would be a good stroke of party tactics-- either ensuring a continuance of power for his party Government without the trouble of an election, or, if an election could not be avoided, giving them an issue which would put tens of thousands of Liberal electors up against the hard choice of voting for a Government which they distrust and despise or appear to oppose a policy which the experience of Great Britain and the United States shows to be necessary-- if the full powers of modern democracy is to be applied in war."<sup>28</sup>

The following day, June 1st, this interpretation of Borden's motives was reiterated.

On June 2nd, however, the Free Press returned to its demand for national government, maintaining that whatever

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<sup>27</sup>M. F. P., May 31, 1917.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

ulterior motives Borden may have had, it was essential that the two parties bury their differences and come together to ensure the success of conscription. The initiative in bringing about a national government lay with Borden, it asserted, but if he offered fair and reasonable terms to Laurier or any other Canadian, there could be "no refusal without recreancy."<sup>29</sup>

This was essentially the content of the paper's June 4th editorial, when it commented on the failure of the politicians to find acceptable terms of union. "If politicians in this crisis cannot trust one another", it warned, "it should be obvious that the country can no longer trust the politicians....A General Election might result in the elimination of a few of the gentlemen who cannot be trusted..."<sup>30</sup> On the following day, the Free Press, to facilitate the negotiations between Borden and Laurier, suggested that Laurier's demand for a referendum on conscription might be fulfilled without delaying conscription by including it on the registration forms.<sup>31</sup> This would have the added advantage of securing the registration of anti-conscriptionists who might otherwise fail to do so, for in order to vote against conscription they would have to register. The powers at Ottawa, however, failed to consider such a means of

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<sup>29</sup>M. F. P., June 2, 1917.

<sup>30</sup>M. F. P., June 4, 1917.

<sup>31</sup>M. F. P., June 5, 1917.



compromise, as on June 6th Laurier communicated to Borden his refusal to join with him in a national government.

The failure of the negotiations between Borden and Laurier elicited, on June 8th, the condemnation of the Free Press. There it declared that Borden's overture to Laurier "was not a bona fide attempt to bring about a condition of national amity, but a daring manoeuvre intended to accentuate the state of disunion into which the country has fallen, as a preliminary to a party contest."<sup>32</sup> This condemnation was somewhat modified by its counsel to its readers "to let the situation develop before reaching conclusions one way or the other...", that is, not to be too quick to place the entire blame on Borden.<sup>33</sup> On June 12th, nevertheless, the Free Press itself did so, declaring that either by "a blunder or a calculated effect" Borden had "torpedoed" Laurier.<sup>34</sup> At the same time the paper admitted that as a result of Laurier's refusal to join with Borden in support of conscription, "the Liberal party, as affording an alternative to the Conservative party as a possible agency of government, has been eliminated for the period of the war."<sup>35</sup> The editorial concluded by urging those Liberals in the House

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<sup>32</sup>M. F. P., June 8, 1917.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>M. F. P., June 12, 1917.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

of Commons who favored conscription, to break with the stand of their leader and support the Military Service Bill.<sup>36</sup>

The Free Press, thus, while it professed to understand Laurier's position, and to detest the circumstances which brought it about, refused to follow the Liberal leader. The editorial of June 12th was only the first of a number which advised the conscriptionist Liberals to abandon Laurier and to support compulsion. On June 13th it warned that "if the Western and Ontario Liberals desire to speak for their constituencies they will, with some exceptions, vote for the bill before the house."<sup>37</sup> On June 18th and 19th the paper advised such members not to support the Laurier amendment for a referendum preceding the institution of conscription, for this was in effect 'hoisting' the original bill; the result, it declared, would be to force an election in which the Liberal party would be branded anti-conscriptionist, and in the English speaking provinces at least, would be completely overwhelmed.<sup>38</sup> As it became clear from the debate on the Military Service Act that a number of English speaking Liberals intended to go against Laurier, the Free Press predicted that "we are probably on the eve of revolutionary

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>M. F. P., June 13, 1917.

<sup>38</sup>M. F. P., June 18, 19th, 1917.

political changes in Canada."<sup>39</sup> This independent stand by some of the Liberals, it praised on June 29th, describing it as putting "principles before politics."<sup>40</sup>

It is significant that, while the Free Press refused to endorse Laurier's position, it treated the Liberal leader in tones of moderation. On June 12th, for example, it stated:

It is impossible to regard the situation as it affects Sir Wilfrid Laurier without mixed feelings of indignation and regret. Either by accident or design he has been torpedoed by a submarine...Laurier's cooperation in inducing the people of his province to accept compulsion was plainly highly desirable. But Sir Robert Borden went about the business in a manner which made it difficult to secure this cooperation and rendered it all but worthless if he did secure it.<sup>41</sup>

The editorial continued to suggest that Laurier might be forced out of public life as a result, leaving Bourassa in control of Quebec. "No greater calamity", it declared, "could overtake Canada at this critical time. From this Canada will be saved if Sir Wilfrid remains in public life, as he undoubtedly will."<sup>42</sup> By June 30th, the Free Press had reached a different conclusion about Laurier's influence in Quebec, but it still offered no outward condemnation of the Liberal leader. As it stated:

The authentic voice of Quebec today is that of Bourassa.

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<sup>39</sup>M. F. P., June 23, 1917.

<sup>40</sup>M. F. P., June 29, 1917.

<sup>41</sup>M. F. P., June 12, 1917.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

He has been stating his views with perfect frankness. He says Quebec is against the war. Laurier is at best a moderating, nor a controlling power in Quebec. If he came into a coalition government he would leave Quebec behind him. This is why the problem now before the people of Canada must be solved, if there is any solution, without the assistance of Laurier or of Quebec.<sup>43</sup>

Laurier, this editorial would suggest, simply had no choice about the position he assumed.

Having asserted that 'the problem before the people of Canada must be solved without the assistance of Laurier or of Quebec,' the Free Press did not, as might be expected, immediately follow up with its evaluation of the form that solution should take. Instead it concentrated on the more immediate question of getting the Military Service Act passed in the House of Commons. Its editorials in this regard were essentially the same as those described above; the English speaking Liberals must not follow Laurier but must vote with the government on this issue. It was, therefore, with great satisfaction that it commented upon the defeat of the Laurier amendment and the passing of the Military Service Act on July 6th. The independent stand taken by twenty-six English Liberals who voted for the measure was praised as "an augury of the better days that are at hand."<sup>44</sup>

After the revelation of the split in the Liberal party,

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<sup>43</sup>M. F. P., June 30, 1917.

<sup>44</sup>M. F. P., July 7, 1917.

as evidenced by the vote on conscription, the Free Press began to enunciate its views of the future course to be followed by the conscriptionist Liberals. This was the content of the editorial of July 12th entitled "The Responsibility Of The Liberals." In a brief review of the first three years of the war, the paper maintained that the responsibility for the failure of voluntary enlistment fell mainly on Borden, who had insisted on meeting the situation with a party government.<sup>45</sup> Borden's belated offer to Laurier with regard to the formation of national government, and Laurier's refusal, had shifted this responsibility however. "Today", it stated, "...responsibility is shared by the Liberals of Canada and it is necessary for them individually to take stock of the situation and to determine what should be done..."<sup>46</sup> For the first time the Free Press was censorious of Laurier's action, stating that "Sir Wilfrid's insistence upon his own point of view without much regard for the feelings of a strong element in his own party makes inevitable a political revolution."<sup>47</sup> It went on to advise the conscriptionist Liberals to "get together in a new organization and under new leadership or they, in the coming election, will be crushed like eggshells between the Tory party, reinvigorated by a vigorous

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<sup>45</sup>M. F. P., July 12, 1917.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

war policy and the anti-compulsion party, which may profess to be the Liberal party, led by Sir Wilfrid Laurier."<sup>48</sup> With the formation of such an organization, it argued, it would be possible for Borden to offer the conscriptionist Liberals terms for a coalition which they could either accept or reject, which ever was most beneficial to the country. The alienation of the Free Press from Laurier and his anti-conscriptionist Liberal following was from this date complete.

Having withdrawn its support from Laurier, the Free Press launched a propagandistic campaign against the anti-conscriptionist Liberals, and in support of any element that favored the adoption of conscription. Convinced that an election was a certainty, it stated on July 14th that the issue was clear and simple; "are we going to stay in the war or are we going to sneak out of it?"<sup>49</sup> Its attitude toward Quebec and Laurier hardened. That province, which it described as "the laggard among the Canadian provinces", was "not to be permitted to determine the measure of Canada's devotion to the war cause."<sup>50</sup> On the following day it asserted that Laurier could have made an agreement with Borden whereby a national government would be formed that would launch a united appeal for voluntary recruits;

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> M. F. P., July 14, 1917.

<sup>50</sup> M. F. P., July 16, 1917.

only if that appeal failed would conscription be resorted to. This Laurier refused to do, and thus the failure of the negotiations for national government must fall on his shoulders.<sup>51</sup> On July 23rd the Free Press castigated the Ontario Liberals for their endorsement of Laurier's leadership. This, maintained the paper meant that "they are prepared, in obedience to the prompting of party, to give their consent to the principle that the extent and character of Canada's continued contribution to the war shall be determined by the wishes and desires of the Province of Quebec." <sup>52a</sup> (M. F. P., July 23, 1917.) It further called upon the 26 Liberals who had refused to join Laurier in opposition to the Military Service Act, to give a lead to the conscriptionist Liberals in Canada.<sup>52</sup>

On August 7th and 8th the western Liberals held a convention in Winnipeg to determine their future course of action. Apparently in preparation for this convention, the Free Press reiterated its call for a union between the two conscriptionist elements, the Conservatives and the 'war' Liberals. "Those who want a Canadian army to guard the graves of the Canadian dead in Flanders must come to an understanding soon if the nation is not to suffer a disaster that in many respects may prove irreparable..." warned the Free Press on

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<sup>51</sup>M. F. P. July 17, 1917.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52a</sup>M. F. P. July 23, 1917

August 4th.<sup>53</sup> On August 7th it further declared that:

It is within the power of the Western Liberal Convention, ...to bring about a union of political forces for the remainder of the war,...if it will give a lead to public opinion.<sup>54</sup>

With regard to the results of the Convention itself, the Free Press was somewhat equivocal. In its editorial of August 9th, headlined "Western Liberals Adopt Conscription" it took the position that the resolution:

That the imperative duty of the Canadian people is the continued vigorous prosecution of the war by the maintenance in unimpaired strength at the front of our fighting forces and the taking of all steps necessary to secure the required reinforcements for this purpose.

was "explicit in identifying the Western Liberal party definitely and unmistakably with the policy of conscription."<sup>55</sup> It is apparent that this editorial was written before the Convention had passed the resolution confirming its allegiance to Sir Wilfrid Laurier as Liberal leader. This resolution stated the paper the following day, made "the Western Liberals an integral part of the Liberal party of Canada, of which Sir Wilfrid is the leader."<sup>56</sup> Such a state of affairs elicited from the Free Press a damning attack on Laurier and his Liberal following. "In Russia", it stated, "they have chosen a Dictator to make war.

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<sup>53</sup>M. F. P., August 4, 1917.

<sup>54</sup>M. F. P., August 7, 1917.

<sup>55</sup>M. F. P., August 9, 1917.

<sup>56</sup>M. F. P., August 10, 1917.



In Canada we are asked to choose a Dictator to take Canada out of the war."<sup>57</sup> Its demand for a non-partisan government was given in clear and unmistakable terms.

It is time for the people to shake off their party shackles; to cease to be Grit or Tory; to be Canadians and nothing else; they want an end to political rancour; they want unity of feeling; they want vigorous prosecution of the war; they want a national government NOW.<sup>58</sup>

The demand for a national government of conscriptionist Liberals and Conservatives thereafter became the main subject of the Free Press's editorials. Whereas it had previously accused Borden of playing politics instead of considering the welfare of the nation, these motives the Free Press now attributed to Laurier.<sup>59</sup> Even its previous objections to Borden's leadership abilities, or lack thereof, were modified, as on August 23rd it asserted that "a union government under Sir Robert Borden is far preferable to no union government at all."<sup>60</sup> The rumor in Ottawa in the last week of that month that the conscriptionist Liberals and Conservatives were deadlocked over the leadership question evoked the sharp response that:

The Western Liberals can no more take the responsibility of wrecking the whole proposition [of union government] by refusing to consider Sir Robert Borden under any circum-

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>M. F. P., August 20, 1917.

<sup>60</sup>M. F. P., August 23, 1917.

stances than the Conservatives can take the responsibility of blocking the movement by insisting that Sir Robert Borden is the only man in Canada capable of leading a union government.<sup>61</sup>

By September 6th the Free Press had come to the conclusion that a union government would be formed before the inevitable election. On that date, in an editorial entitled "Declaration of Intention" it elaborated its future policy as follows:

...the Free Press declares that it will not take the responsibility of assisting in the election of any Liberal candidate--however high his position in the party, however emphatic his protestations as to war policy--if he seeks the suffrage of the people solely as a party candidate without the endorsation of a union convention...For the duration of the war the Free Press is out of party politics. It knows only Canada and her perils, and it recognizes only one duty--that of serving the country with whole-souled devotion.<sup>62</sup>

Having declared its intentions, the Free Press adhered resolutely to them. The remainder of September and the first week of October were given over to the call for union government. The Laurier Liberals were further castigated for their anti-conscriptionist, and in the view of the Free Press, their anti-war stand. Yet it criticized just as vigorously the war, Liberals and Conservatives for their failure to join in union government. The paper in these weeks was indeed out of party politics.

Needless to say, the announcement on October 12th that

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<sup>61</sup>M. F. P., August 29, 1917.

<sup>62</sup>M. F. P., September 6, 1917.

a union government comprised of an equal number of war Liberals and Conservatives had been formed drew forth the whole-hearted approval of the Free Press. "The personnel of the new Government," it stated, "is a guaranty that Canada is to have an administration that will be disinterested and capable...It will be a united government, devoted whole-heartedly to the great task of the war, which will give a united nation far-seeing, high-minded and patriotic leadership."<sup>63</sup> The successful conclusion to the cause which the Free Press has adopted as its own was thus received with very considerable gratification.

The period between the formation of the union government and its successful reelection on December 17th was, at least for the purposes of this thesis, somewhat of a denouement. The editorial policy of the Free Press was established; all the energies and resources that it had devoted to bringing about the formation of union government were organized to ensure its success at the polls. The welfare of the nation at home and abroad were equated with union government, while Quebec and the Laurierite Liberals were termed quitters, determined to withdraw, or at any rate, fail to continue Canada's contribution to the war effort. In this cause the Free Press was tireless; in the months of October, November and December seldom a day passed without an editorial either praising union government or condemning

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<sup>63</sup>M. F. P., October 12, 1917.

the anti-conscriptionist position of the Liberal party. The results of the December election met with the entire satisfaction of the paper. On December 18th its editorial "Saved" pungently described this satisfaction. "Canada," it asserted, "was saved yesterday from shame, from national futility, from treachery to her Allies, from treason to the holiest cause for which men have ever fought and died."<sup>64</sup>

In shortly over the period of a year, thus, the Manitoba Free Press abandoned its traditional support for the Liberal party and placed its allegiance behind the Union, national government. This change in allegiance was not to be a momentary dissatisfaction with the policies of the Liberal party but was to continue for several years. It is vitally important, therefore, that the relevant factors which brought it about be investigated, and as far as possible, determined. For this determination on such a significant and readical departure from traditional editorial policy will undoubtedly provide a solid basis for an evaluation of the role of Sir Clifford Sifton in the formulation of the editorial policy of the Manitoba Free Press.

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<sup>64</sup>M. F. P., December 18, 1917.

As has been demonstrated, the bilingual issue of May 1916 had a marked effect on the editorial sympathies of the Manitoba Free Press. While it remained critical of the Conservative government, its attitude toward Sir Wilfrid Laurier and his Liberal following was considerably less sympathetic. At the same time the paper exhibited more independent leanings, initially, in July and August toward the western wing of the Liberal party, and then in November more radically toward a national government. It is the source of these antagonisms and sympathies that first must be established.

The source of the Free Press's critical attitude toward the Borden government is most easily identifiable. That paper had traditionally been in the opposite camp to the Conservative party. The Borden government, moreover, had done nothing to win its support. The Free Press viewed Borden's handling of the war with distain; partisanship, patronage, war supplies and munitions scandals, mishandling of recruiting--all these faults it saw in the Conservative government. Hence given no reason for change, the paper's editorial approach to the government remained after May as it had been before--highly critical.

The lessening of the Free Press's affections for the federal Liberal party can be understood by a study of the personal correspondence of Sifton and Dafoe. Dafoe explained his personal views on the matter to George Wrong in a letter on December 12th, 1916:

I despise this Government...and I see what a tempting target for editorial broadsides their record offers. But I greatly doubt whether it is worth getting rid of the present ministers at the cost of a general election, and their replacement by the alternative party government. No Liberal Government made up of the public men in sight could give the people of Canada what they want; a leadership so plainly disinterested and competent as to command their whole-hearted support.<sup>65</sup>

That the bilingual episode was largely responsible for Dafoe's reservations about the Liberal party was indicated in his letter to George Graham on July 30th, 1917. There he stated:

I have had no doubt in my own mind since the bi-lingual flareup in May 1916 as to whether the Liberal party was tending. That was a wanton affront to English Liberal sentiment made for no other purpose than for the strengthening of Laurier's hold on Quebec, although he already had as much support from that Province as was desirable, taking a longer view of what constitutes the real interests of the Liberal party.<sup>66</sup>

Sifton too had grave reservations about Laurier and the Liberal party. In May 1916 he had written Dafoe that "the quicker he [Laurier] gets out of the leadership the better for the country at large", and had further suggested that the Free Press not be compromised "in any respect in the interests of the Liberal party."<sup>67</sup> Six months later Sifton's attitude toward Laurier and his return to power had not materially changed. Then he wrote Dafoe:

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<sup>65</sup>Dafoe to G. M. Wrong, December 12, 1916, D. P. M73, George M. Wrong, Professor of History at the University of Toronto, 1894 to 1927. Active in public affairs, especially the Imperial and foreign policy.

<sup>66</sup>Dafoe to G. P. Graham, July 30, 1917, D. P. M73, George P. Graham, Ontario journalist and Liberal politician, Minister of Railways & Canals, 1907-11, 1923-26, Minister of Militia & Defence, 1921-23, appointed to Senate 1926.

<sup>67</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, May 11, 1916, D. P. M73.

I regard the return of Laurier without control of his actions and policy as fraught with possible disaster. He himself if uncontrolled loses his head completely and he has some very weak men close to him who have learned nothing in the last 20 years. I feel so strongly about this that I may go home in January to see you and others about it...<sup>68</sup>

The views of Sifton and Dafoe on Laurier and the Liberal party were therefore pretty much the same. There can be little doubt that the change in the Free Press's attitude resulted from this similarity.

It would appear, moreover, that it was primarily this distrust of Laurier that resulted in the Free Press suggestion, given in May, July and August, that the western Liberals organize themselves into an independent body. This proved to be only a temporary request, as in late November it was replaced by the demand for national government. This more radical departure from traditional editorial policy too can only be understood as concomitant to and arising from Dafoe's reservations about Laurier and his critical evaluation of the Borden administration.

By the end of 1916 Dafoe had arrived at the conclusion that a Liberal government would undoubtedly be as partisan and incompetent as the Borden administration was proving to be.<sup>69</sup> His chief concern was that Canada's war effort be maintained at its maximum level, and he believed that the continuation of a party government, Conservative or Liberal, stood in the way of

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<sup>68</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, November 11, 1916, D. P. M73.

<sup>69</sup>Dafoe to G. M. Wrong, December 12, 1916, D. P. M73.

this goal. It was, therefore, in the interests of Canada's war effort that Dafoe placed the Free Press behind the growing movement for national government. In so doing Dafoe acted out of the same interests that concerned Sifton. While Sir Clifford appears to have had no direct influence in this facet of the Free Press's editorial policy, he too was vitally concerned about Canada's war effort. This was evidenced in his letter to Dafoe on January 14th, 1917, with regard to the rumor that the Liberal party intended to force a federal election:

I fear that the Liberals are going to force an election. I will now predict that if they do it will mean the ruin of the Liberal party and I think deservedly so. I did all I could, and it was something, to keep Borden from springing an election on the opposition. It would have been nefarious. It is just as nefarious for the Liberals to force an election now...I expect to be home in April. I would almost go now if I thought I could prevent the catastrophe.<sup>70</sup>

For Sifton thus, it was vitally important that a federal election be avoided, for this would distract public and governmental attention from the war effort.

The reason that Dafoe and the Free Press arrived at the conclusion that a national government was required to replace the Conservative administration while Sifton continued to support the Borden government would appear to be that for the better part of 1915 and 1916 Sifton was in England. There he was largely out of touch with Canadian domestic affairs, and as a result his evaluation of the Borden government was somewhat higher than

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<sup>70</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, January 14, 1917, D. P. M73.



Dafoe's. For the same reason he was less aware of the strength of the Win-the-War movement which was developing by the beginning of 1917, and of its demand for a national government. As the result of his isolation from the tempo of political affairs, Sifton found little fault with the government's war effort and was most concerned that it should be maintained at its present level.

As indicated above, it was the question of conscription which was the immediate cause of the political crisis of the summer of 1917. The initial reaction of the Free Press to Borden's announcement that a measure of compulsion was necessary for Canada's war effort was favorable. It accepted at face value Borden's justification of it. This is interesting in view of Dafoe's personal conjecture on the possibility of conscription given six months earlier. Then he had written Sifton:

I have some reason to believe that some very daring spirits in the Conservative party are trying to induce the Government to adopt a measure of conscription for the purpose of bringing the trouble in Quebec to a head with a view to a dissolution at that particular moment. So daring a stroke might save the Government, with the consequences that the domestic peace of Canada might be seriously threatened.<sup>71</sup>

Yet no suggestion of any such motives was to be found in the Free Press's first editorial on Borden's proposal. On May 21st it accepted the necessity of conscription, and for the next week it deemed this necessity as one more powerful reason why

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<sup>71</sup>Dafoe to Sifton, October 17, 1916, S. P. D. C. C734.

a national government should be formed. Then, on May 31st, it reversed its position; Borden's overture to Laurier with respect to national government which, in fact, was the realization of its demand of the previous ten days, was described as proof that his motives were political rather than military.

The abrupt change in the Free Press's attitude toward Borden's motives can only be attributed to the influence of Sifton. According to Dafoe, Sifton had returned from England in the last week in May and "upon the day following his return to Ottawa...had an interview with Sir Wilfrid Laurier at the latter's suggestion; and during the critical ensuing ten days he was to some extent in the confidence of the Liberal leader and his advisors."<sup>72</sup> Laurier distrusted Borden's motives, and Sifton, in his confidence, came to share this distrust. This he communicated to Dafoe on May 26th, stating:

There is a very unsatisfactory atmosphere and I can only describe it as an atmosphere of general incompetence on both sides together with a good deal of weak vanity and desire to promote party interest, (on the part of the Govt. party.)<sup>73</sup>

Two days later Sifton was more explicit:

The situation here is very complicated. I think you would change some of your views a little if you were here, not as to what is desirable, but as to what is possible. It is very much complicated by the apparent desire of a controlling element in the Govt. to play the party game

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<sup>72</sup>Dafoe, C. S., p. 400.

<sup>73</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, May 26, 1917, D. P. M73.

with the object of isolating and destroying Laurier.<sup>74</sup>  
The Free Press's reversal of form on this point thus can only be understood as the result of Dafoe's acceptance of Sifton's interpretation of events.

In regard to Borden's offer to Laurier on national government Sifton also had very definite views. As has been seen, he regarded Borden's adoption of conscription as a political manoeuvre designed to destroy Laurier. Borden's overture to Laurier on May 29th tended to confirm this interpretation for, as he stated on June 5th, if Borden had met with Laurier before announcing conscription, "possibly the policy could have been worked out satisfactorily."<sup>75</sup> He continued:

As it stands now it appears to be quite impossible for Laurier to go in on a policy for conscription. The opposition to conscription in the French Canadian population seems to be intensely strong and the opposition in labor circles is also very strong.<sup>76</sup>

At this point thus Sifton very definitely was in sympathy with Laurier's position.

At the same time, according to Dafoe, Sifton did not want an election, and "in particular he did not want an election upon so highly contentious a question as conscription."<sup>77</sup> Yet he

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<sup>74</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, May 28, 1917, D. P. M73.

<sup>75</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, June 5, 1917, S. P. D. C. C-735.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Dafoe, C. S., p. 401.

was "definitely of the opinion that no Government can be formed which will succeed in carrying out an effective scheme of conscription without either a referendum or a general election, and it does not seem at all clear that it would carry either on a referendum or on an election although there would be a better chance in case of the latter. The victory, however, would be at the cost of arraying the English speaking Provinces against Quebec."<sup>78</sup> For Sifton thus there were several reasons why a national government could not result from the Borden-Laurier negotiations. First and foremost, Laurier could not accept the terms of Borden's offer, conscription, because of the opposition to it in Quebec and in the labor circles. Therefore to pave the way for Laurier's acceptance of conscription there would have to be either a referendum or a general election; but he was not sure that either of these would result in the endorsement of conscription. If they did not, Canada's war effort would be seriously impaired. And if they did, the country would be split domestically, which would also have an adverse effect on the war effort. Moreover, while he recognized the difficulty of and sympathized with Laurier's position, he also realized that if the whole Liberal party opposed conscription, the measure, with the aid of the French Conservatives, would be defeated. This too would result in an undesirable election on conscription.

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<sup>78</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, June 5, 1917, S. P. D. C. C-735.

There was, therefore, only one way to resolve the situation. As he later stated, Sifton came to the conclusion early in June, that "the English speaking Liberals in the House ought not to follow Sir Wilfrid on this question.../[Instead] they ought to organize themselves and repudiate the stand taken by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and at the same time announce their intention of supporting conscription and supporting the government in its war policy."<sup>79</sup>

While Sifton was pessimistic about the possible results of the Borden-Laurier negotiations, the Free Press was much more expectant. On June 2nd it called upon the two leaders to bury their differences and form a national government. When these negotiations failed, however, it tentatively, on June 8th, and then more concretely on June 12th, adopted the attitude that Borden had not intended they should succeed. Here again it would appear that Sifton's views were formative in the paper's attitudes. On June 7th Sifton wired Dafoe "Think you should come here first train."<sup>80</sup> Inasmuch as Dafoe recorded that he spent most of June in Ottawa, and as there was no further correspondence between the two men until June 27th, it would appear that he did go immediately to Ottawa.<sup>81</sup> There Dafoe

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<sup>79</sup>Quoted in Dafoe, C. S., p. 404.

<sup>80</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, June 7, 1917, D. P. M73.

<sup>81</sup>Dafoe, C. S., p. 404.

apparently was persuaded of the correctness of Sifton's interpretation of events and adopted it as editorial policy of the Free Press.

Even more significant than its attitude toward the negotiations between Borden and Laurier was the policy the Free Press followed with regard to the future course of those English speaking Liberals who favored the adoption of conscription. As demonstrated above, the Free Press throughout the rest of June was insistent in its demand that these Liberals break with Laurier and vote for the Military Service Bill in the House of Commons, in spite of the fact that it believed Borden was using the issue to 'torpedo' Laurier. Again it adhered to the course of action advocated by Sifton.

Equally significant was the fact that the Free Press did not advocate anything more than conscriptionist Liberal support for the Military Service Bill, namely the fusion of that element with the Conservative party in a national government. Such a demand would have been entirely consistent with the Free Press's past assertions that national government was necessitated by Canada's war effort. Its failure to do so may have been because it believed the result of the Borden-Laurier negotiations demonstrated the Conservative party's unalterable opposition to national government; but this opposition had never daunted the paper's demand in the first five months of 1917. Again it may have been because it was unsure of the strength of the

conscriptionist element within the Liberal party and therefore waited until the vote on the Military Service Bill to indicate it. This is a more plausible answer, inasmuch as shortly after that vote the Free Press did initiate its demand for the fusion of conscriptionist Liberals and Conservatives. On the other hand, the answer to this question may also have lain in part with Sir Clifford Sifton.

Because Dafoe was in Ottawa for most of June he had no correspondence with Sifton, and therefore the exact views of the two men are somewhat difficult to determine. Fortunately, Dafoe has recorded fairly clearly Sifton's attitude on this question:

When he [Dafoe] left for Winnipeg [circa. June 25th] Sir Clifford was still hopeful that the situation could be met without an election. He also hoped that a coalition government would not be necessary. He knew that coalition governments are never so effective or formidable as they look; and he knew also that the political group that makes the sacrifice in joining a coalition government is usually compelled to keep making sacrifices, often to the point of political extinction. He hoped that the Liberal members in favor of conscription would organize themselves into a definite group, and, as such, negotiate with both Laurier and Borden. He thought that they might be able, by a show of strength, to induce Laurier to agree to an extension of the life of Parliament; in that case they should, in his opinion, give an independent support to the Government, which would enable it to carry out its war policies.<sup>82</sup>

Assuming that Dafoe has correctly reported Sifton's views, there seems to be a very valid basis for identifying Sifton as an important influence on the Free Press's editorial policy

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<sup>82</sup>Dafoe, C. S., p. 404.

throughout the month of June.

There would as well seem to be good reason to designate Sifton as a formative factor in the Free Press's decision, on July 12th, to advocate the union of the conscriptionist Liberals and Conservatives in a coalition government. As has been seen, Sifton believed that if Borden had negotiated with Laurier before announcing the necessity of conscription, a national government could have been formed, but that Borden's method of handling the situation had ruled out this possibility. However, according to Dafoe, he continued to hope that Laurier would join Borden on the condition that conscription would not be enforced until a united drive for voluntary enlistment had been undertaken.<sup>83</sup> When Laurier refused to do this, Sifton attempted to persuade him to grant an extension of the life of Parliament. In this case Laurier would keep faith with his colleagues in Quebec by not being responsible for conscription, but at the same time would keep the country from a war-time election; the conscriptionist Liberals, moreover, would be able to vote for the conscription bill but remain within the Liberal party on other matters.<sup>84</sup> This too Laurier refused to do. Finally, the failure of N. W. Rowell in the last week of June, to persuade Laurier to join the government provided conscription

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<sup>83</sup>Dafoe, C. S., ff. 402.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 403.



were not immediately enforced, convinced Sifton that under no circumstances would Laurier support conscription, and that, moreover, the Liberal leader intended to force an election on the issue. The realization of these facts caused Sifton to conclude "that a fusion at the earliest possible moment of Liberals and Conservatives who were of one mind about the war afforded the only avenue of escape from the threatened collapse of Canada's war effort."<sup>85</sup> The date of Sifton's arrival at this conclusion can be approximated as June 28th, for on that date he wried Dafoe, who had returned to Winnipeg only a few days earlier:

Necessary for you and Calder to be here for consultation not later than Tuesday. Telephone him and arrange. Matters of pressing importance which will not wait. Answer.<sup>86</sup>

The 'matters of pressing importance' to which he referred were outlined in his telegram of June 30th which read:

Subject for consideration coalition with English Liberals equal terms.<sup>87</sup>

By the end of June, thus, Sifton had definitely concluded that a fusion between the conscriptionist Liberals and Conservatives was necessary.

At the same time there is evidence to suggest that Dafoe personally had come to this conclusion before he had left Ottawa,

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 404.

<sup>86</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, June 28, 1917, D. P. M73.

<sup>87</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, June 30, 1917, D. P. M73.

that is, before Sifton. He later stated that before leaving Ottawa he had "expressed to Sifton his doubts as to whether there was any workable solution short of a union between conscriptionist Conservatives and Liberals, and a submission of the issue to the electors;"<sup>88</sup> Sifton himself later indicated that this was the case. In a letter to Dafoe in the first week of August with regard to the strategy the conscriptionist Liberals should use in order to get the convention of western Liberals to adopt a resolution favoring coalition government he stated:

Your issue this morning was most excellent. Keep up your courage. I am rather following you in this but you are right and I'll back you all the way.<sup>89</sup>

Yet it is significant that Dafoe's personal opinion was not reflected in the editorial policy of the Free Press at this time. It continued only to advocate that the conscriptionist Liberals should vote for the Military Service Bill. While it seems definite that the vote on that bill on July 6th in which 26 Liberals supported the government measure was in part responsible for the timing of the Free Press's demand for a coalition between the conscriptionist Liberals and Conservatives, Sifton's belated adoption of that policy must also be viewed as a causative factor. Dafoe recorded that once Sifton had come to the conclusion that

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<sup>88</sup>Dafoe, C. S., p. 405.

<sup>89</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, no date, 1917, written from C.P.R. train, obviously in first week of August, D. P. M73.

such a government was necessary "his resourcefulness, his sagacity, his political experience and his courage were put unreservedly at the disposal of the cause of Union government."<sup>90</sup> One facet of this campaign was undoubtedly persuading Dafoe that the Free Press should similarly devote its energies.

The nature of the Free Press's editorial campaign throughout July further substantiates the conclusion that Sifton's attitude had an important influence on Dafoe. As demonstrated above, as late as June 30th the paper treated Laurier with moderation, suggesting on that date that he was "at best a moderating, not a controlling power in Quebec," and that "if he came into a coalition government he would leave Quebec behind him."<sup>91</sup> In July, however, this moderation was replaced by tones of condemnation. The failure of the Borden-Laurier negotiations, which it had previously blamed on the Conservative leader, were attributed to Laurier. His opposition to conscription was equated with quitting the war and thereby bringing national disgrace to the Canadian people. Under no circumstances, it declared, could Liberals who supported Canada's war cause recognize the leadership of Sir Wilfrid Laurier. This was exactly the position assumed by Sifton. The fact that the Free Press altered its attitude two weeks after Sifton's views

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<sup>90</sup>Dafoe, C. S., p. 405.

<sup>91</sup>M. F. P., June 30, 1917, see above.

changed, during which time Dafoe was associated with him in Ottawa, can only be ascribed to the owner's influence.

By mid-July both the attitude of Sifton and the editorial policy of the Manitoba Free Press with regard to the necessity of a coalition of the conscriptionist Liberals and Conservatives were pretty well defined. The objectives of Dafoe and Sifton had always been the same, namely the maintenance of the maximum war effort, but from May through to the end of June their views as to the possible means to be used for this purpose differed. Having agreed on these means, as they had by the beginning of July, both Sifton and Dafoe devoted their energies to its fulfillment.

Throughout July, August and September, as exemplified above, the Free Press was tireless in its support for union government. Privately, as well, Dafoe was intimately involved in the behind-the-scenes activities that looked to the formation of this government. Sifton's energies were mainly devoted to the cause in this way, although he too campaigned publicly. The affirmation of the leadership of Sir Wilfrid Laurier by the Ontario Liberals at a convention in Toronto on July 20th initiated Sifton's public appearances. This endorsement of Laurier revealed his strength within the Liberal party, even in Ontario, and convinced Sifton that an appeal to the people was necessary to force the English Liberals to abandon him. On July 23rd he wrote a public letter to Senator Bostock, the

Liberal leader in the Senate, adjuring him not to permit the Liberal party to shelve the Military Service Bill. The value of this letter is in the similarity between its views and those expressed in the Free Press. "The issue", he stated, "is simple. Either: (1) We put our whole strength into the war; or (2) We abandon our men at the front and dishonor our solemn obligation...If anything in this troubled world can be absolutely clear, it is clear today that we can grapple with this situation in one way, and in one way only, by the formation of a union war government, administered on non-partisan lines, who [sic] will straightway appeal for a mandate to the people of Canada and can consistently be supported by every element in the population that is loyal to the cause."<sup>92</sup> The resemblance between this and Dafoe's editorial assertion ten days earlier that the issue was clearly "are we going to stay in the war or are we going to sneak out of it?", is unmistakable.<sup>93</sup>

The results of the Ontario Liberal convention prompted Sifton to undertake a tour of the West in preparation for the western Liberal convention to be held at Winnipeg on August 7th and 8th. It consisted of speaking engagements at Winnipeg, Regina, Moose Jaw and Calgary from July 30th to August 2nd. His evaluation of the sentiment of the western provinces was

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<sup>92</sup>Quoted in M. F. P., July 24, 1917.

<sup>93</sup>M. F. P., July 14, 1917.

pessimistic, as he wrote Dafoe:

With regard to political matters I cannot say anything encouraging. I had good meetings and good receptions and I have a dozen new invitations to speak which I cannot accept. But the anti-conscriptionists took possession of the meeting to elect delegates at Regina and sent a solid deputation to oppose conscription and coalition...Most of the information I get is to the effect that Alberta is against conscription.<sup>94</sup>

While he did not attend the conference, Sifton enunciated his opinion about the course the conscriptionist Liberals should take in a letter to Dafoe a few days previous.

Have the resolution for Union Govt. submitted in unmistakable form, no vague gloss or coin phrases. Organize the debating forces and fight it to a finish. Let the talk be absolutely plain and put the Laurier forces exactly where they belong if they fight. If necessary force a recorded vote. Some of them will think a good many times before they go on record. If necessary point out that undoubtedly a Union Govt. will be favored in the East.--will they oppose it? I am pretty sure in a final test it would carry to put it in the hands of a committee with power to act. I know that some of the strongest of the opposition would not oppose that. However that is a last resort.<sup>95</sup>

Sifton's strategy, however, failed, as the convention, while supporting a resolution in favor of continuing unimpaired Canada's war effort, also voted to endorse Sir Wilfrid Laurier as its recognized leader. This was as unsatisfactory to Sifton as it was to the Free Press.

The week following the Winnipeg convention proved to be a low point in the negotiations between Borden and the conscriptionist

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<sup>94</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, Saturday, no date but probably August 4th, 1917, D. P. M73.

<sup>95</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, no date, 1917, written from C.P.R. train, obviously in first week of August, D. P. M73.

Liberals, notably N. W. Rowell and Sifton. Sifton himself was extremely pessimistic about the chance of success, as he wired Dafoe on August 12th:

Trying to work out arrangements under Judge or another neutral leader. If it fails absolutely nothing in sight except to let present people go to the country as they are. It means defeat and national disaster.<sup>96</sup>

Two days later, however, Sifton had revised his attitude. As he wrote:

I have finally decided to go in and fight it out to a finish. It will get the best arrangement I can but if the arrangement is not good I am not on that account going to run away. We have entirely failed to get any arrangement for an outside leader. D./uff/ is not available. A certain Chief Justice in Ontario was considered but the objections raised were too strong. There is another point that weighs heavily with me. I know Borden and he knows me and we can get along and run the machine effectively. We could tell nothing about a stranger. He might be obstructive and he might want to take the bit in his teeth and run away with the whole thing. In any event the man can't be found and that is the end of it.<sup>97</sup>

Any reservations Sifton may have previously harbored about a coalition government were thereafter completely discarded. Any arrangement was better than none.<sup>98</sup> The Free Press too was of

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<sup>96</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, August 12, 1917, D. P. M73.

<sup>97</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, August 14, 1917, D. P. M73.

<sup>98</sup>It is interesting to note that while Sifton publicly advocated a union war government, he personally favored something a little stronger than this. In his correspondence there is only one reference to this point, but this is significant and should be examined. In a letter to A. Kelly on August 8th, he noted:

...there does not ever seem to have been as much partisanship rampant in Canada as there is today. It does not look as though there would be any chance for a new party. The only hope we have of beating out the anti-war party is to work out some kind of a coalition. (Sifton to A. Kelly, August 8, 1917, C595, 161550, Italics mine)

this opinion, as it stated on August 23rd that "a union government under Sir Robert Borden is far preferable to no union at all."<sup>99</sup>

The successful conclusion to the negotiations for union government on October 12th was as gratifying to Sifton as it was to the Free Press. On that day he wrote John S. Willison that "as for me, I shall be able to return to my plow. I am very well satisfied with the constitution of the Government. Sir Robert Borden has not made the best selection of his own Conservative colleagues but they will do and the Liberal contingent is very strong."<sup>100</sup>

In the election campaign that followed the formation of Union government, Sifton took no part, apparently because he thought the government was in a very strong position and did not need his help.<sup>101</sup> The Free Press as described above, continued its condemnation of the Laurier Liberals, and followed

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The only plausible explanation for Sifton's favoring a new party is to be found in his statements a year previous. Then, he predicted that Laurier's action on the bilingual question would result "sooner or later in a complete upheaval in Canadian politics, and I am sure I hope it will. The present party organizations are illogical and absurd." (Sifton to Dafoe, May 11, 1916, D. P. M73) It would appear, thus, that Sifton conceived of the split in the Liberal party caused by conscription as the opportunity for creating new party organizations. This proved to be impossible, and a coalition was 'the only hope', but it is important to note the radical extreme of which Sifton approved.

<sup>99</sup>M. F. P., August 23, 1917.

<sup>100</sup>Sifton to Willison, October 12, 1917, S. P. C596 162010,

<sup>101</sup>Dafoe, C. S., p. 438.



the policy that Dafoe outlined to Chisholm on October 14th, of giving the government "strong independent support."<sup>102</sup> The results of the December 17th balloting amply vindicated the interpretations of both Sifton and the Free Press of the feelings of English speaking Canadians.

In his biography of Sifton, Dafoe stated that "the Manitoba Free Press,...all through this [conscription] crisis was in constant touch with Sir Clifford Sifton and in close harmony with his views..."<sup>103</sup> The foregoing analysis of Sifton's attitudes and the Free Press's editorials fully substantiates this statement. The paper accepted his interpretation of Borden's motives in introducing conscription; it followed him in demanding that the conscriptionist Liberals abandon Laurier and vote for the Military Service Act; the change in its attitude toward Laurier coincided with Sifton's; its demand for the fusion of the conscriptionist Liberals and Conservatives paralleled its owner's adoption of this view; and finally, its assertion that the conscriptionist Liberals should accept Borden as the leader of a union government followed Sifton's assumption of this attitude. There can be little doubt, therefore, that Sifton played a key role in the formulation of the Free Press's editorial policy on the conscription crisis and the union government that resulted;

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<sup>102</sup>Dafoe to H. E. M. Chisholm, October 14, 1917, D. P. M73.

<sup>103</sup>Dafoe, C. S., p. 420.

Dafoe, it would seem placed great value on Sifton's ability to interpret political events and was, therefore, quite willing to permit the Free Press to benefit from his acumen.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FREE PRESS AND UNION GOVERNMENT, 1918

In view of the unwavering support given by the Free Press to the formation and re-election of Union government, its editorial attitude toward that administration throughout the course of 1918 was to a large extent, predetermined. It found little to criticize and much to praise in the work of Borden's Unionists in the period between that government's re-election and the end of the war in November, 1918. For example, on January 15th, the paper asserted that "the government's course since the election has been such as to encourage the people in the belief that their confidence has not been misplaced..."<sup>1</sup> A month later it defended Union government against the charge that it had not lived up to its election promise to abolish the patronage system and replace it with a civil service commission. This, said the Free Press, was in the process of coming about; "to decline to fill any vacancy occurring in the outside services until the commission is in a position to recommend a suitable appointee and to give a certificate of fitness would be to throw the particular machinery into confusion..." it declared.<sup>2</sup> Two weeks later it accorded

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<sup>1</sup>M. F. P., January 15, 1918.

<sup>2</sup>M. F. P., February 9, 1918.

the government the highest of accolades, stating:

It is a matter of universal comment here, by those who have the government under constant observation, that this is the most harmonious administration that Canada has known for at least twenty years...The expectations and hopes of those who urged union government and fought for it are thus being realized. There is in office a government which has but one clear obligation; that of giving the best service it is capable of to the country as a whole. It is also free, almost entirely, from the distractions and interferences which in the past have made a really national administration of affairs impossible..."<sup>3</sup>

Significantly, the reason for the efficiency and capability of the new administration the Free Press attributed to the new Liberals ministers. On February 23rd, this was pointed out:

It is pretty generally admitted here that in their capacity for sustained and vigorous attention to affairs of state there are only about four of the older members who can match the achievements of the new ministers; these are the Prime Minister, f who is a notable worker; Sir Thomas White, Mr. Meighen and Dr. Reid."<sup>4</sup>

Efficient government was not the only asset of the union of the conscriptionist Liberals and Conservatives which the Free Press deemed praise-worthy. On March 22nd, for example, it considered "The Status of Political Leaders," stating:

The theory of the political leader as demigod entitled to the adoration of his followers ought to be extirpated in Canada; it has done incalculable harm. One of the good results of the Union government politics is that it has damaged, if it has not destroyed, this illusion, which has exercised so disastrous sway over the imagination of Canadian electors."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>M. F. P., February 22, 1918.

<sup>4</sup>M. F. P., February 23, 1918.

<sup>5</sup>M. F. P., March 22, 1918.

Similarly the paper applauded the change in the relationship between the government and Parliament which union had affected:

The whole machinery by which, under the old order, the government dominated parliament, governed the country and carried out its programme, has been scrapped. The government can make no appeal to the partisan devotion of its followers. It has, by discarding patronage, thrown away its power to encourage obedience and discourage insubordination by a system of rewards. All governments in theory are at the mercy of their following; but under a party system the real situation is the reverse of that which is apparent--the party following is subject to its leaders. But the conditions today at Ottawa are what they appear to be: the government has no real protection against the members except the appeal to reason and the merits of its performances.<sup>6</sup>

In this same vein, the Free Press in obvious reference to the influence of "big business" on May 1 contended that "there never was a Parliament in Canada where the opinion of the mass of the people meant so much and the desires of the powerful few were so little regarded as the Parliament which is now attending to the business of the country."<sup>7</sup> In Union government, therefore, the Free Press saw a real revolution in Canadian politics. This revolution, moreover, met with its whole-hearted approval.

With regard to specific actions taken by the Union administration, the Free Press was equally as generous in its commendations. Borden's announcement in the first week of April that all resisters to the Military Service Act would promptly be drafted evoked the editorial entitled "Drastic, But Just."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>M. F. P., April 12, 1918.

<sup>7</sup>M. F. P., May 1, 1918.

<sup>8</sup>M. F. P., April 4, 1918.

The announcement of the government's intention to restrict titles in Canada also met with the Free Press's approval.<sup>9</sup> So too the cancellation of the exemptions granted to men between the ages of 20 and 22 was accepted as necessary, and justified by the paper as "the only solution of the difficulty;...the Government in taking this drastic action is simply carrying out the mandate given to it by the electors of Canada last December."<sup>10</sup> It adjured the government to "stand fast" against the delegations of Ontario and Quebec farmers who opposed the cancellation; "the Union Government," it asserted, "was put into office to secure the necessary reinforcements for our troops in France. This is its first duty; also its second and third. Everything else comes after--and a long way after..."<sup>11</sup>

On the question of the acquisition of the railways too, the union government was accorded the support of the Free Press, although on this matter its advocacy was somewhat qualified. The paper, throughout 1918, approved the principle of governmental ownership, and encouraged the acquisition of the Grand Trunk and Grand Trunk Pacific.<sup>12</sup> It asserted, however that the ten million dollars awarded to Mackenzie and Mann for the Canadian Northern

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<sup>9</sup>M. F. P., April 10, 1918.

<sup>10</sup>M. F. P., May 2, 1918.

<sup>11</sup>M. F. P., May 14, 1918.

<sup>12</sup>M. F. P., May 17, 1918.

was much too high, and feared that the owners of the Grand Trunk would force an equally bad bargain upon Parliament.<sup>13</sup> The paper questioned, moreover, the means by which the Canadian National was to be administered; it feared that as long as the government appointed its board of directors the railway would be a matter of patronage.<sup>14</sup> The Free Press suggested that to avoid this possibility the board of directors should be composed of appointees of the provincial governments, and the various boards of trades and labour as well as of the federal government.<sup>15</sup> Thus while it approved the principle of governmental ownership of all railways outside of the Canadian Pacific, the Free Press expressed reservation about the means by which the combined railways would be administered.

Interestingly, the Free Press occasionally counselled its readers not to accept blindly the Unionists' actions. On April 12th, for example, it asserted that "the attitude towards the government of the newspapers, of the man in the street, and of the members of the house itself is one of somewhat critical detachment; there is more criticism than praise."<sup>16</sup> Again on June 6th it contended that "the only course for the patriotic

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<sup>13</sup>M. F. P., May 30, 1918 and June 5, 1918.

<sup>14</sup>M. F. P., August 19, and September 9, 1918.

<sup>15</sup>M. F. P., September 23, 1918.

<sup>16</sup>M. F. P., April 12, 1918.

citizen is to give his government an intelligent and disinterested support; not to expect from it impossibilities, but on the other hand not to accept without question everything that it proposes or does as beyond criticism;..."<sup>17</sup> In spite of this advice, however, the Free Press itself found very little in the way of criticism, at least of the government's war programme.

Until the signing of the armistice and the cessation of hostilities in November, the Free Press's attitude toward the Union administration remained essentially friendly and uncritical. It defended the government on the charge that the Victory Bonds should not be tax-free, stating that the most important thing was to get the loan and that every incentive should be used to ensure this end.<sup>18</sup> It continued to praise the government for acquiring the necessary reinforcements for Canada's overseas forces, for "it was to do this work that the Government was called into being,..."<sup>19</sup> In this period, Borden was frequently criticized by other newspapers for staying too long in England; the Free Press disagreed with this criticism. "Sir Robert Borden, in this supremely important matter," it asserted, "...has well served the Canadian people by his visit to England and has earned and will receive their commendation."<sup>20</sup> As to Borden's

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<sup>17</sup>M. F. P., June 6, 1918.

<sup>18</sup>M. F. P., August 16, 1918.

<sup>19</sup>M. F. P., August 17, 1918.

<sup>20</sup>M. F. P., August 26, 1918.



position while in London, the Free Press was equally as generous in its terms of praise. On August 2nd, for example, it declared that "Sir Robert's statement upon...all...phases of the imperial problem has been scrupulously correct; his Imperialism is of that sound, sane type usually known by the qualifying adjective Liberal..."<sup>21</sup>

As suggested by the above enumeration of issues, it was primarily as a war government that the Union administration received the support of the Free Press. This was clearly exemplified in the editorial of November 25th entitled "In Retrospect," which in tone and substance indicated that the Union government had fulfilled the purpose for its formation and that support for it could no longer be justified on this basis. It read, in part:

In retrospect Canada is genuinely thankful that Union saved it from a lonely shame in the moment of victory. Sir Wilfried Laurier and all others of his opinion notwithstanding, the Canadian people is well seized of the truth that that fate would have been Canada's but for the consummation of Union Government with the object--which it has obtained--of applying conscription upon the fairest possible basis.<sup>22</sup>

While the Free Press gave unwavering support to the Union government, its attitude toward the Liberal opposition, reduced in the federal election of 1917 to primarily a Quebec party, was viciously critical. As in the case of Union government,

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<sup>21</sup>M. F. P., August 2, 1918.

<sup>22</sup>M. F. P., November 25, 1918.

this was largely preconditioned by the events of 1917 surrounding the issue of conscription. As has been seen above, once it became clear that Sir Wilfrid Laurier was unalterably opposed to conscription and that in this he was following the lead of the Quebec populace, the Free Press turned its big guns on him and his sympathizers. Throughout the months preceding the formation of Union government, as well as throughout the election campaign the paper condemned Laurier and his following as opponents of Canada's war effort. While the successful re-election of Union government in December of 1917 assured the continuation of conscription, it in no way altered the Liberal leader's attitude toward the issue. As a result, the Free Press's opinion of Laurier and his Liberal following remained unchanged.

The rumor from Ottawa in the first week of January 1918 that Laurier intended to resign the leadership of the Liberal party and hand it over to Mackenzie King evoked the derision of the Free Press. "There is now no Liberal party in Canada, as an organization" it stated; "there is a party which today follows Sir Wilfrid and might, possibly, follow Mr. King tomorrow; but it is not entitled to the name Liberal. The Liberal leaders of Canada are in the Union Government and the Liberal electors are behind them."<sup>23</sup> As to Mackenzie King the

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<sup>23</sup>M. F. P., January 9, 1918.

paper was frank and explicit:

If the Liberal party re-emerges after the war, which is quite among the possibilities, it will look for its leader among the members or supporters of Union Government. No man who was wrong on the issue, which was settled on December 17, can ever lead a reunited Liberal party. Mr. King's attempt to re-enter Canadian public life as an opponent of Union Government and its war programme ended in utter defeat. He will be well advised if he accepts the situation: returns to his job in the United States as a salaried employee of John D. Rockefeller. There is no future for him in Canada.<sup>24</sup>

This open opposition to King as a possible Liberal leader takes on added significance in view of the events of 1919 which brought him to that position. At this point the Free Press's condemnation of such a possibility was unequivocal.

The rioting that broke out in Quebec over the application of conscription in April was the occasion for several bitterly condemnatory editorials on Laurier and the Quebec Liberals.

That of April 9th was particularly biting. It stated:

In theory there is a French Liberal party which is all-powerful; it controls, with one exception, the entire French-Canadian representation of the house of commons. This parliamentary party to the last man detests Bourassa, hails Laurier as leader. Nevertheless it lives by the mercy of Bourassa and his clerical associates; and the price it has paid for the right to exist is the acceptance of the Bourassa Nationalism.<sup>25</sup>

So too, the continued opposition of Laurier to conscription after Parliament held a secret session on April 17th in which confidential information was laid before the House in order to

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> M. F. P., April 9, 1918.

indicate its necessity elicited damning criticism from the Free Press. There it asserted:

Sir Wilfrid [Laurier] has failed Canada not a few times since the war began; never more tragically than last week, when a united and determined Parliament, speaking for the premier overseas British Dominion, could have given the Allied cause a moral reinforcement worth an army corps. A high-minded patriotic attitude by Sir Wilfrid and his following on this occasion might have gone far to repair the mistakes of the past. But this could not be, because Sir Wilfrid could not rise to the opportunity. His position of ungracious, critical opposition at this moment of dire national peril places him finally in this war.<sup>26</sup>

Significantly, this was the last major reference made by the Free Press to Sir Wilfrid Laurier until after his death on February 17th, 1919. Rather than publicize his position by critically analyzing it, it preferred simply to remain silent. After such damning attacks as those quoted above, such silence was in itself eloquent.

As has been indicated above, the Free Press was primarily concerned with the government's handling of the war; in this it found little to criticize and much to dondone. Purely domestic policies, on the other hand, such as the railways, were dealt with more independently and critically. This was essentially the treatment given to the tariff, which in the pre-war period had been of utmost importance to the west, and therefore also to the Free Press. As long as the war lasted the Free Press adopted the attitude that the tariff, which in the

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<sup>26</sup>M. F. P., April 22, 1918.

past had proven so disruptive a factor, and which would undoubtedly be such in the future, should stand in abeyance. Its references to this question throughout 1918 were only occasional, and all were moderate in tone. Its editorial on May 10th, for example, castigated the Liberal opposition for its efforts to split the ranks of the Unions by the introduction of the tariff issue.<sup>27</sup> At the same time it commented on the question:

The discussions in Parliament make it quite plain that once the pressure of the war is relaxed the tariff issue will become a considerable factor in Canadian politics. If the Unionist party is to continue, and there are a number of reasons why it should, there will have to be an adjustment of the tariff issue in which some reasonable regard will be paid to the desires of the people of Western Canada. If the adjustment can be made, by consent, before the close of the war, the political and national consequences would be highly beneficial.<sup>28</sup>

Thereafter, the paper merely suggested that some compromise agreement should be reached between the groups of divergent tariff policies, specifically the farmers and manufacturers.<sup>29</sup> The Free Press seemed to hope that the union which had been formed for the furtherance of the war effort might also be extended to the question of the tariff, the greatest single differentiating factor between the political parties' domestic policies.

Between the formation of Union government and the end of

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<sup>27</sup>M. F. P., May 10, 1918.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>M. F. P., June 18, 1918, and August 19, 1918.

the war, thus, the Free Press had well-defined attitudes toward Union government, and the Liberal opposition. Sympathetic to the point of blind partisan support for the Union administration on the question of its war policies was balanced by a critical, often hostile, attitude toward the Liberal party. It is important to note that these attitudes were both determined by the degree of devotion of the respective parties to the war effort, and not by any domestic issues, such as the tariff. In this latter regard the Free Press retained its independence, offering suggestions but making no demands on either the Unionists or Liberals.

To determine the causative factors of the editorial policy pursued by the Manitoba Free Press in the period between the formation of Union government and the end of the war is a relatively easy matter, inasmuch as the various attitudes described above were preconditioned by the events surrounding the conscription crisis. The paper's antipathy for the Liberal party and its support for Union government were, therefore, but the continuation of set policies. The Free Press, its editor, Dafoe, and its owner, Sifton, were all unalterably committed to Canada's maximum contribution to the war cause, and as long as it lasted they could only support the war party, Union government. What must be considered here, however, is the difference between the editorial support for Union government envisaged by Dafoe and Sifton, as a basis for understanding the

paper's later withdrawal of that support.

Sifton's attitude toward the Union government and therefore his conception of what the Free Press's attitude toward it should be, were substantially different from those of Dafoe. This was clearly indicated in a letter he wrote Dafoe on October 3rd, 1917, nine days before the formation of Union government, and at the peak of the negotiations in which he was intimately involved. Then he stated:

In talking with Sir Robert Borden yesterday he mentioned to me that you had written him on the western situation. It occurs to me to say that I think it would be well for you to be cautious in writing anyone. The possibilities of the future hardly include the idea that the F. P. can support a party dominated by the Conservatives for any length of time and it might be awkward for you to feel that you had discussed matters too freely with the enemy. I do not think you are likely to err on the side of rashness but you will I am sure understand my feeling in referring to it.<sup>30</sup>

Even at the height of the negotiations for Union government, thus, Sifton considered Borden 'the enemy'; his attachment to that administration was only a temporary expedient necessitated by conditions, not a permanent commitment. This was further exemplified in Sifton's letter to Dafoe on October 15th, after Union government had been formed:

I wish to have a very serious talk with you about the policy of the paper and I had intended going out this week to do so, but I find that it is quite impossible for me to do so and that it will be impossible for me to leave town this month. I think therefore that you should make arrangements to come down here so that we can get settled on the

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<sup>30</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, October 3, 1917, D. P. M73.

points I have in mind. It is quite impossible for me to say on paper what I wish to say but there is the possibility of the F. P. being put in a false position and I want to make sure that we understand each other.<sup>31</sup>

Taken in conjunction with the letter cited above, Sifton's reference to a "false position" can only have meant uncritical support for Union government, which he wished to avoid.

Dafoe too expressed the opinion that the Free Press should independently support the Union administration. In a letter to the Ottawa correspondent of the Free Press, H. E. M. Chisholm, on October 14th, he criticized Chisholm's reports for being "too friendly to Laurier and too hostile to Borden."<sup>32</sup> He went on to counsel him that "the Free Press, while it has no intention of becoming the organ of the new government, proposes to give it strong independent support,...", adding "there is, of course, no reason why you should not treat Sir Wilfrid with justice and consideration; but do not go out of your way to boost him."<sup>33</sup>

As exemplified above, the Free Press generally commented favorably upon the actions of the Union government in the furtherance of the war cause. This would appear to contradict the expressed intention of Dafoe, and the apparent desire of Sifton that the paper give the government "independent" support.

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<sup>31</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, October 15, 1917, D. P. M73.

<sup>32</sup>Dafoe to Chisholm, October 14, 1917, D. P. M73.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.



The latter was distinctly disappointed with this situation, as evidenced by his letter to Dafoe on April 27th:

My conclusions from reading the paper is that you have attained a very high standard of excellence. On the other hand I can see no glimmer of an attempt to carry out the clear understanding at which we arrived before I left, eg. that the paper should as regards the Govt. occupy a critical and independent position. In fact, I do not think any Government in my recollection in Canada ever had a more entirely docile and apologetic supporter.<sup>34</sup>

The reason for Sifton's concern that the Free Press was being "docile and apologetic" in regard to the government was to be found in his evaluation of that administration. As he stated:

There is no sign of a Union Government here. The same clique is in charge--rather more so than before.<sup>35</sup>

Later in the year, his opinion was unchanged as he wrote that it was "essentially a Tory Government with an infusion of Liberal brains."<sup>36</sup>

As indicated by the Free Press's approval of the Union government's war programme, someone in its editorial management evaluated the government much differently than Sifton, and presumably it was Dafoe. Pertinent to the difference in their evaluations is the fact that throughout 1918 Sifton was in England and therefore out of immediate touch with Canadian political affairs. Closer to the situation Dafoe concluded that the government was carrying out its functions as well as

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<sup>34</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, April 27, 1918, D. P. M73.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, December 18, 1918, D. P. M73.

could be expected, while Sifton, not being so intimately acquainted with its achievements could see little difference between the Union government and its Conservative predecessor. Because he was in a better position to judge the success of the government, Dafoe undoubtedly believed his own evaluation to be the more accurate, and acted upon it.

At the same time, the fact that the Free Press's comments upon the Union government specifically dealt with issues directly related to the war cause is important. On the key question of the tariff, the paper did not commit itself to supporting Union government; on the contrary its comments were entirely non-committal. So too with the railway issue. It commented favorably upon the principle of government ownership of railways, a position it had taken when the issue was first raised in 1917 and when there was a partisan Conservative government in power. However it criticized the terms of the acquisition of the Canadian Northern as well as the means the Union government was using to administer the newly created Canadian National system. Thus while the Free Press committed itself to the Union government's war programme, it remained entirely independent of it with respect to domestic policies. Obviously the paper's support of a government on the basis of a war programme could only last as long as that programme was required, that is, as long as the war lasted. As soon as the war ended, therefore, the Free Press would be free to place its support wherever it

wished.

There can be little doubt that Dafoe was chiefly responsible for the attitude assumed by the Free Press toward the Union government in the period between its re-election and the conclusion of the war. Sifton's highly critical comments upon the paper's editorial approach leave no doubt as to this point. But at the same time, Dafoe made sure that it was not put in the "false position" of becoming a permanent supporter of the government forces by committing it only to the administration's war programme. By ensuring that the Free Press would be free to follow any policy it desired in the post-war period, Dafoe thereby maintained the independence expressly desired by Sifton, and thus achieved at least in part the goal they had together decided upon.

## CHAPTER V

### THE FREE PRESS AND POST-WAR POLITICS, 1919 TO 1921

The Manitoba Free Press editorially was sympathetic toward the Union government headed by Sir Robert Borden and antagonistic toward the official Liberal party led by Sir Wilfrid Laurier throughout the duration of the war. Significantly, however, the paper's sympathy for the government was restricted primarily to its war programme; with regard to domestic policies, it was largely non-committal. As a result, the end of the war necessitated a reconsideration of policy by the Free Press management. What policy was eventually decided upon, and the formative factors in this decision will be the subjects of this chapter.

Only three weeks after the cessation of hostilities, the Free Press gave the first indication of where its sympathies were likely to lie. This was its editorial commentary of December 4th on the announced platform of the Canadian Council of Agriculture. That platform demanded the immediate ratification of the reciprocal trade agreement negotiated with the United States in 1911, and the increase of taxation on inheritances, unimproved land values, and personal and business income.<sup>1</sup> This the Free Press generally approved, declaring that it would

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<sup>1</sup>M. F. P., December 4, 1918.

"commend, broadly speaking, the assent of the people of the three Western Provinces."<sup>2</sup> Specifically, it stated that:

The reduction of the tariff, regarded as an instrument for the protection of Canadian manufacturing industry, and the prompt acceptance of the standing offer of the United States of reciprocal treatment of the articles specified in the unratified agreement of 1911, are practical necessities for the West...<sup>3</sup>

It concluded by asserting that "if the coalition government is to be maintained,...the opinions of the farmers must be respected and considered by the administration."<sup>4</sup>

The demand for the downward revision of the tariff and the ratification of the reciprocity pact with the United States was repeated on December 11th, and again on December 21st.<sup>5</sup> In January, 1919, however, the Free Press became more moderate in attitude; it continued to demand the reduction of the tariff, but qualified this by adding that "there will have to be consideration for manufacturing industries wherever hardship would be inflicted by too drastic measures."<sup>6</sup> Later in the month it came out in favor of a tariff for revenue as the best answer to Canada's economic needs; this, it asserted, would supply the revenue necessary to offset Canada's war debt, as

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>M. F. P., December 11 and December 21, 1918.

<sup>6</sup>M. F. P., January 16, 1919.

well as ensuring the prosperity of the agricultural community.<sup>7</sup>

Having once adopted the tariff for revenue policy, the Free Press adhered to it for the next three years. In the first six months of 1919, especially, its advocacy of this policy was intense. Complimentary to this demand was the paper's ardent denunciation of protection as a tariff policy, particularly as it was supported by the Canadian Manufacturers' Association. It continued to support the platform of the Canadian Council of Agriculture, but without mentioning the question of reciprocity with the United States; instead it came to assert that the Council's platform was "not a demand for immediate free trade...but a demand for adjustment of taxation according to a real ability to pay."<sup>8</sup> Throughout the first half of 1919, thus, the Free Press's tariff policy was substantially modified from support for reciprocity to a tariff for revenue purposes.

Although in December, 1918, the Free Press advocated the immediate ratification of the reciprocity pact, this in no way involved an alienation of its support for the Union government. The paper asserted that in the period of reconstruction that would follow the war, it was desirable to have a coalition government, as "it can do a great deal, and do it more

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<sup>7</sup>M. F. P., January 27, 1919.

<sup>8</sup>M. F. P., April 4, 1919.

efficiently than could a party government."<sup>9</sup> Besides, it added, "no better administration is now in prospect."<sup>10</sup> This endorsement of Union government was repeated on December 18th, 1918, and January 1st, 1919. In the middle of January, 1919, however, the Free Press became somewhat more critical of the government, as it began a prolonged demand that the administration outline the domestic policies it intended to pursue. On January 14th, for example it declared:

The complement to repatriation is industrial and social betterment. And that is why the policy of the Union Government in relation to such questions as the tariff is a matter of prime importance.<sup>11</sup>

Significantly, this was the first indication of the paper's more independent and critical attitude toward the government. The repetition this demand throughout the first half of 1919 suggested that the Free Press's support for the Union government was considerably more reserved than during 1918.

The tariff policy of the Union government, so long demanded by the Free Press was finally indicated in the budget introduced into the House of Commons on June 5th, by the Minister of Finance Sir Thomas White. In substance, the tariff clauses of that budget offered a ten percent reduction on most agricultural machinery; as well, the budget announced the

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<sup>9</sup>M. F. P., December 7, 1918.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>M. F. P., January 14, 1919.

removal of the Special British tax, and of the general war tax on foodstuffs, clothing oils and bituminous coal.<sup>12</sup> The Free Press was clearly disappointed with it. "No Western Unionist", it stated, "would be prepared to accept the tariff reductions announced by the Minister of Finance, as in themselves sufficient."<sup>13</sup> It suggested that the farmers of western Canada need free trade with the United States in raw materials and agriculture machinery, and at least a fifty percent reduction in the tariff on British goods; "compared with these objectives the reductions outlined by Sir Thomas White are trifles" the paper contended. More significantly the budget intensely accentuated the disillusionment of the Free Press with the Union government. As it noted:

There have been many who hoped that the Unionist movement... might...have become a permanent national organization linking up the more progressive and patriotic elements of the Dominion and giving Canada a stable forward-looking administration during the trying and dangerous period of reconstruction. That hope is not yet dead; but it is fading. Such an organization could only come into effective being if in its policy and its outlook it was, in fact, whatever it called itself, a National Liberal Party.<sup>14</sup>

As evidenced by this commentary, the Free Press was rapidly shifting to a position of greater independence in its attitude toward the government.

Even more important than these comments, however, was the

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<sup>12</sup>M. F. P., June 6, 1919.

<sup>13</sup>M. F. P., June 9, 1919.

<sup>14</sup>M. F. P., June 9, 1919.



Free Press's reaction to the resignation of T. A. Crerar from the government in opposition to the budget.<sup>15</sup> It saw in this resignation far-reaching implications. As it stated:

The retirement of Mr. Crerar probably does not imply the immediate disintegration of the present government, nor an impending election...It does, however, mark a step in the inevitable evolution which has been foreseen by political observers. There will emerge, sooner or later, a Western progressive party under its own leadership which will either sit in opposition or co-operate in the government of the country on the basis of alliances that will make possible the fulfillment, wholly or in part, of its policies...<sup>16</sup>

The paper's sympathy for Crerar personally was further exemplified, as it noted that "it will be the all but universal wish that he [Crerar] remain in public life as one of the leading representatives of Western opinion in the Dominion House."<sup>17</sup> This was affirmed several days later, when it declared that "Mr. Crerar, in his address in Parliament, undoubtedly expressed the predominant views of the west upon the tariff question."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>T. A. Crerar, President of the Grain Growers' Grain Company and its successor, The United Grain Growers' Company from 1907 to 1929. In 1917 he entered the Union Government as Minister of Agriculture, but resigned in 1919, and became leader of the National Progressive Party, a post he held until 1922. In 1929 he became Minister of Railways in the King Government. He held Cabinet office again from 1935 to 1945 when he was appointed to the Senate.

<sup>16</sup>M. F. P., June 7, 1919.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>M. F. P., June 13, 1919.

In spite of the apparent sympathy of the Free Press for Crerar and the possibility of a western progressive party, the paper's reaction to the formation of the farmers' political party in Alberta in the last week of July was extremely non-committal. It factually outlined the process by which the party had been created, and added simply that "the development is a matter of concern to all existing political organizations and their leaders."<sup>19</sup> The cause of this hesitancy to comment more definitely on the new party was indicated a few days later in an editorial entitled "Representative or Delegate?" There the Free Press criticized the demand of the farmers that they have strict control over their representatives at Ottawa; this, it insisted, made them delegates rather than representatives, and was contrary to the English constitutional system.<sup>20</sup> The paper wanted nothing to do with this sort of system.

The leadership convention of the Liberal party which was necessitated by the death of Sir Wilfrid Laurier on February 17th, 1919, opened in Ottawa on August 5th, and was the occasion for extensive editorial reference by the Free Press to the party which, since 1917, had been the subject of its opprobrium. In the ten months following the end of the war, one would hardly suspect that the Liberal party even continued to exist if the

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<sup>19</sup>M. F. P., July 28, 1919.

<sup>20</sup>M. F. P., August 2, 1919.

Free Press's comments upon it were used to gauge its activity.

Upon the death of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the paper had paid tribute to him as "statesman, countryman and friend", but was otherwise reserved in its editorial testimony to him.<sup>21</sup>

Thereafter only infrequent reference was made to the Liberal party. When in March, A. R. McMaster introduced an amendment into the House of Commons to ratify the reciprocity pact with the United States, the Free Press was bitter in its condemnation of the opposition's "childish manoeuvring" to split the government ranks; this, in spite of the fact that only a few months earlier it had given its approval to such a ratification.<sup>22</sup>

With regard to the convention, the Free Press made its position quite plain at the outset:

The political future of the reconstructed party which is expected to emerge from the Ottawa convention will depend largely upon the status of this Liberal-Unionist minority in the convention and the regard which the majority pay to their views.<sup>23</sup>

As to the results of the convention, the Free Press made no pretense of hiding its disappointment. It did not comment immediately upon the success of the reconciliation of the Liberal-Unionists with the official Liberal party; only four months later did it assert that in this respect the convention

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<sup>21</sup>M. F. P., February 18, 1919.

<sup>22</sup>M. F. P., March 27, 1919.

<sup>23</sup>M. F. P., July 31, 1919.

had been a failure.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, the paper found much to criticize in the platform adopted by the Liberal party, as well as in its choice of Mackenzie King as leader. The Liberal tariff resolution it described as "merely a proposed tariff schedule, not a declaration of principle."<sup>25</sup> The railway resolution adopted at the convention the Free Press called "an attempt to side-step a question which cannot be side-stepped."<sup>26</sup> The resolution on Canada's Imperial relationship, which promised only to resist the centralization of the Empire, it found inadequate too.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, with regard to the most important accomplishment of the convention, the election of Mackenzie King as leader, the Free Press again expressed grave reservations. While it granted that King had the advantage of youth and of administrative and public experience, it maintained that he had also "one very serious handicap. This is Mr. King's record on the war; or rather his lack of record. If he took any part whatever in the organization or forwarding of Canada's war effort there is not public record of the contribution."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>M. F. P., December 31, 1919.

<sup>25</sup>M. F. P., August 15, 1919.

<sup>26</sup>M. F. P., August 12, 1919.

<sup>27</sup>M. F. P., August 7, 1919.

<sup>28</sup>M. F. P., August 9, 1919.

From these criticisms, it is apparent that the Free Press's hostility toward the Liberal party was in no way lessened by its reorganization in August, 1919.

The activities of the Liberal party after its August convention elicited the condemnation of the Free Press. It castigated that party for being "Colonials by Their Own Choice", as follows:

As the bidding of poor, jealous, childish political human nature they [the Liberals] renounced their birthright as the political descendents of Laurier; and gave up to their opponents the Liberal and democratic conception of the British Commonwealth and Canada's relation thereto, taking in lieu thereof the old abandoned formulas of Colonial subordination and impotence.<sup>29</sup>

The paper was critical too of the Liberal party's attempt to retain its solid block of support in Quebec. Lapointe, the French Liberal leader, it declared, was bowing to the wishes of "le nationalism" to attain this end.<sup>30</sup> So too the Free Press criticized the Liberal party for its continued failure to explicate a tariff principle, instead of its "mere formulation of expedients without relation to any permanent policy."<sup>31</sup> At the end of 1919, thus, the Free Press's severely critical attitude toward the Liberal party continued unabated.

In the last half of 1919, the Free Press pursued an

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<sup>29</sup>M. F. P., September 13, 1919.

<sup>30</sup>M. F. P., November 4, 1919.

<sup>31</sup>M. F. P., December 20, 1919.

independent line of policy with respect to the farmers' movement as well. While it applauded the policies advocated by the farmers, particularly those on the tariff and the question of Canada's Imperial relationship, the paper found much to criticize in the form of organization the movement was developing.<sup>32</sup>

When it especially condemned about the movement were its class characteristics; these, the paper declared would have to be shed, for "only as a political party has it any real future."<sup>33</sup>

The Free Press singled out especially the United Farmers of Alberta, led by Henry Wise Wood, as being particularly susceptible to this criticism.<sup>34</sup> Wood's desire for class representation in elective legislative bodies it described as a "new sovietism" which "would reduce the representatives of the people to the status of class delegates and turn responsible government into a class war."<sup>35</sup> Even though it whole-heartedly approved the programme of the accelerating farmers' movement, therefore, the Free Press could by now be described as its partisan advocate in the last half of 1919.

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<sup>32</sup>M. F. P., August 6 and August 7, and December 20, 1919.

<sup>33</sup>M. F. P., October 31, 1919.

<sup>34</sup>Henry Wise Wood, an American immigrant to Canada in 1905 who became, as president of the United Farmers of Alberta, one of the leading spokesmen of Western agrarian discontent in the 1920's.

<sup>35</sup>M. F. P., November 5, 1919.

With regard to the Union government, the Free Press's attitude in the last six months of 1919 was equivocal, but definitely independent. It continued to demand that the administration delineate a definite domestic programme, and especially a tariff policy.<sup>36</sup> In October it noted that there was a Unionist party forming, "not so much due to the desires of individuals as to the pressure of events."<sup>37</sup> If such a party was formed, the paper asserted, "every Liberal-Unionist and every Conservative recovers his complete freedom to decide his future political course."<sup>38</sup> The Free Press's own position with respect to this new party was made abundantly clear; "the Unionist party" it stated, "will be given a fair field and no favor; and it will have to make good or fall by the wayside."<sup>39</sup>

The rumor in December that Sir Robert Borden would retire from the Union government elicited from the Free Press a more definitive analysis of the government. It treated Borden sympathetically, stating that over the past three years he "had done his bit."<sup>40</sup> Union government, however, suffered its first severe criticism at the hands of the paper. This was as follows:

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<sup>36</sup>M. F. P., September 27, 1919.

<sup>37</sup>M. F. P., October 4, 1919.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>M. F. P., December 16, 1919.

The remarkable fact emerged last summer that there was in power at Ottawa a Government commanding a tidy Parliamentary majority that did not know whether it was alive or dead; did not know whether it had a name or not; had no idea what it would try to make the future yield it; had no distinctive policy nor programme.<sup>41</sup>

The paper called upon the members of the government to either agree on a policy and a leader, or else separate and "let events take their course."<sup>42</sup> But while it for the first time became openly critical of the government, the Free Press did not assume a policy of opposition to it. Instead it preferred to wait and see what the nature of the new political alignments would be. As it stated on December 19th:

The old ties have been loosened or cut and the old order is dissolving...New leaders will emerge, or old leaders will find themselves with new followers. Neither the one nor the other can be predicted.<sup>43</sup>

The announcement that Borden would retain the Prime Ministership in name, though not in fact, the Free Press described as "an impossibility", asserting that "the Government will either be destroyed during the session or it will emerge as a political unit under definite leadership and with a definite policy..."<sup>44</sup> Early, in January, however, it was somewhat kinder in its comments upon the arrangement, declaring that "it was

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> M. F. P., December 19, 1919.

<sup>44</sup> M. F. P., December 20, 1919.



probably the only alternative to a complete collapse, with the resulting administrative and political chaos."<sup>45</sup>

Throughout the first half of 1920, the Free Press continued to become somewhat more critical of the government, but still failed to adopt a policy of active opposition to it. The government's announcement in the first week of January that a committee of the cabinet would hold hearings on tariff revision the paper described, non-comittally, as a "course... in complete accord with the principle of government by representative ministers responsible to the whole people."<sup>46</sup> In February, it found much promise in Arthur Meighen's Winnipeg address, declaring that it showed him to be "a believer in a moderate tariff for revenue producing purposes, [and] at the same time supporting the creation of a tariff board whose business it would be to see that the tariff was not made use of by certain classes to further their own fortunes."<sup>47</sup> This, coupled with the paper's observation that Sir Thomas White's frankly protectionist address in the House of Commons had destroyed his chances of leading the Unionist party, suggests that it continued to believe there was some possibility of the

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<sup>45</sup>M. F. P., January 3, 1920.

<sup>46</sup>M. F. P., January 2, 1920.

<sup>47</sup>M. F. P., February 20, 1920.

government becoming a moderate tariff party.<sup>48</sup>

The budget tabled by the Minister of Finance, Sir Henry Drayton on May 19th, however, dispelled the Free Press's hopes in this respect. While it commended the proposals outlined, the removal of the war customs tax of  $7\frac{1}{2}\%$ , and the tariff structure enquiry, as "headed in the right direction...", it also declared that the government was protectionist in principle.<sup>49</sup> It admitted that the government was "liable under severe pressure to consent to reductions--almost to a "tariff for revenue," but maintained that the necessary pressure could only be exerted "through the election of independent or third party candidates at the general election..."<sup>50</sup> Slowly, but very definitely, thus, the Free Press shifted to a more critical attitude toward the Union administration.

The retirement of Sir Robert Borden from the government on July 1st and Arthur Meighen's assumption of the leadership of the newly-named National Liberal and Conservative Party was taken by the Free Press as the occasion to clarify its position. While it praised the work of the Union administration as a war government, it noted that "since the armistice the

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<sup>48</sup>M. F. P., March 10, 1919.

<sup>49</sup>M. F. P., May 20, 1920.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

Government has been a political failure."<sup>51</sup> As to Meighen and the new party, the paper was completely non-committal, observing only that he had "an unlimited field before him for the exercise of such talents for leadership as he possesses."<sup>52</sup>

With respect to the farmers' movement, the Free Press in the first six months of 1920 became even more commendatory in its few remarks upon it. While it continued to criticize the provincial organizations of the farmers in Ontario and Alberta for their class characteristics, it attempted to show that the federal farmers' movement was not of this nature. As it stated on January 12th:

This [farmers' movement] is a genuine political movement, originating in a quite natural way and giving signs of developing into a great national party. Its policy is not a class programme;...It is drawing support from both the old political parties in both the cities and the country, and may, quite conceivably, be numerically the strongest party in the next Dominion Parliament.<sup>53</sup>

Three months later it declared that "the strength of parties in the future is going to exist chiefly in the enthusiasm and devotion of the rank and file," and that judged on this basis the farmers' movement "is likely to be in a favored position in comparison with its rivals..."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>M. F. P., July 3, 1920.

<sup>52</sup>M. F. P., July 9, 1920.

<sup>53</sup>M. F. P., January 12, 1920.

<sup>54</sup>M. F. P., April 16, 1920.

In regard to the Liberal party in the first half of 1920, the Free Press continued to be highly critical. That party's attempt to defeat the government in Parliament in the last week of February was severely condemned by the paper. It saw in this attempt a disreputable motive, as follows:

The fact that under a proper redistribution the west will gain at least twenty members, while the east will lose ten, may have some bearing upon the demand which is being heard in the east, and which Mr. Mackenzie King voices, for an early election.<sup>55</sup>

As well, the Liberal party was condemned for its tariff policy, which the Free Press described as being "moderate protectionism."<sup>56</sup> In April it commented caustically upon the Liberals' method of playing on racial feelings to retain its block support in Quebec.<sup>57</sup> And finally, the paper refused to let its readers forget King's opposition to conscription in 1917. It declared:

It will be quite in order for the electors to give full consideration to it [King's war record] in reaching a decision as to whether...he is entitled to the high and responsible position of Prime Minister which he seeks at their hands.<sup>58</sup>

On one issue only did the Free Press commend the attitude of the Liberal party; this was its position on Canada's relationship to the Empire. It had earlier described the Liberal

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<sup>55</sup>M. F. P., March 3, 1920.

<sup>56</sup>M. F. P., March 24, 1920.

<sup>57</sup>M. F. P., April 9, 1920.

<sup>58</sup>M. F. P., April 22, 1920.

policy on this matter as "colonial," but King's addresses on the subject in the early months of 1920 convinced it that at least he had adopted a policy much more to its liking, that is, of Canada being a free and equal nation within the British Commonwealth.<sup>59</sup>

In the last half of 1920, the final major change in the editorial policy of the Free Press was instituted. This was the initiation of its openly hostile attitude toward the government of Arthur Meighen. The first indication of this hostility was given in an editorial note on August 20th, as follows:

The managers of the newly-named ministerialist political party apparently hope that the last two-thirds of its elaborate title will be scrapped and it will come to be known as the National party. Developments to date, however, rather suggest that it is the first two-thirds that should be dispensed with, leaving it with the short and simple name of Conservative.<sup>60</sup>

In view of the paper's pre-Union attitude toward the Conservative party, this comment clearly expressed its growing dissatisfaction with the Meighen administration.

The cause of this disallusionment was three-fold. In the first place, the Free Press was highly critical of the proposed increase in the railway rates by the Board of Railway Commissioners. Moreover, the chairman of that Board was Frank Carvell, an ex-Unionist, and in the opinion of the paper he was treating

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<sup>59</sup>M. F. P., March 13 and March 18, 1920.

<sup>60</sup>M. F. P., August 20, 1920.

the West in an "autocratic" manner, because he refused to go to the Prairies to hear arguments against the proposed increase, and demanded that its opponents place their views before him in Ottawa.<sup>61</sup> Secondly, Meighen revealed himself to be a protectionist with regard to the tariff, and this programme the Free Press had most definitely set itself against.<sup>62</sup> Finally, and most importantly in the opinion of the Free Press, Meighen's attitude toward the farmers' movement was reactionary. As it stated:

[Meighen] planted himself immovably upon the rock of things as they were, and viewed all movements for change and all symptoms of unrest comprehensively as part and parcel of a revolutionary tide which, as threatening to sweep away the landmarks of civilization, must be resisted with unflinching resolution.<sup>63</sup>

Having thus placed himself against this group, the Prime Minister alienated permanently the support of the Free Press.

Having definitely set itself in opposition to the Meighen government, the Free Press undertook a campaign of criticism which, in its ferocity, had not been followed since the formation of Union government in 1917. On August 26th it warned that if an election were held in the near future, the farmers' party would be the victor in the prairie provinces, with the

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<sup>61</sup>M. F. P., August 9, and August 13, 1920.

<sup>62</sup>M. F. P., August 21, 1920.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

government carrying only "an odd seat here and there."<sup>64</sup> It continued and enlarged upon its identification of the government's tariff policy as protection, rather than tariff for revenue.<sup>65</sup> Meighen's attacks upon the farmers' movement as "revolutionary" also evoked the paper's condemnation; "in all this", it stated, "Mr. Meighen displays a temperamental equipment which gives little ground for hope that he will be a judicious pilot for the ship of state."<sup>66</sup> So too the government's handling of the increase in railway rates was attacked. The cabinet had reviewed the rates, and had come to the conclusion that the increase was not justified, but rather than overruling them, it ordered that they stand until more thoroughly considered by a special railway board. This, the Free Press described as "a most lame and impotent conclusion."<sup>67</sup> With regard to the Prime Minister's tour of the west in the last week of October and the first two weeks of November, the Free Press was caustic in its comments. It condemned him for remaining silent upon the questions of natural resources, and railway rates, and maintained that his protectionist tariff views had

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<sup>64</sup>M. F. P., August 28, 1920.

<sup>65</sup>M. F. P., September 10, November 18, and November 22, 1920.

<sup>66</sup>M. F. P., September 25, 1920.

<sup>67</sup>M. F. P., October 8, 1920.

made little impact on the Western populace.<sup>68</sup> It accused Meighen of setting up the 'straw man', free trade, and devoting his attention to this question rather than the real issue, a tariff for revenue, which the people of the west desired.<sup>69</sup> By the beginning of 1921, thus, the Free Press was in open and definite opposition to the National Liberal and Conservative government of Arthur Meighen. In the eyes of the paper, this government was essentially Conservative in nature, and therefore worthy of little praise and much condemnation.

The Free Press's attitude toward the Liberal party in the last half of 1920 underwent no major change. It continued to criticize the Liberals' tariff policy as being protectionist. For example, on August 26th it asserted that:

The difference between the Liberal tariff policy as expanded in parliament and elsewhere by the recognized leaders of the party and the tariff policy outlined by Mr. Meighen at Stirling and Truro, is the difference betwixt tweedledum and tweedledee. Both provide for a tariff that will supply revenue and at the same time furnish protection for manufacturers.<sup>70</sup>

That party's chances of gaining support in the West it maintained to be less than the government's.<sup>71</sup> The paper commented more favorably on King's tour of the West than on Meighen's, stating

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<sup>68</sup> M. F. P., November 18, 1920.

<sup>69</sup> M. F. P., November 22, 1920.

<sup>70</sup> M. F. P., August 26, 1920.

<sup>71</sup> M. F. P., August 28, 1920.



that the Liberal leader had been "discreet" in his references to the farmers' movement, and had recognized it "as an expression of genuine Liberalism."<sup>72</sup> It hastened to add, however, that while King had been conciliatory in his attitude, many of his followers had not, and for this reason the official Liberal party was weak in the West.<sup>73</sup> Significantly, the Free Press made no major editorial reference to the Liberal party for a period of five months after the above comment. This in itself was indicative of its attitude.

As in the case of the Liberal party, the Free Press's attitude toward the farmers' movement remained unchanged throughout the remainder of 1920. It continued to defend the movement against the accusation of being dominated by class instinct. As well, in response to the declaration of the Canadian Reconstruction Association that the farmers advocated free trade, the paper asserted that "no organized political group in Canada supports free trade as a policy."<sup>74</sup> When in December, the Canadian Council of Agriculture accepted the Progressive parliamentary group led by Crerar as the federal representatives of the farmers' political movement, the Free Press was generous in its terms of praise. It declared that

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<sup>72</sup>M. F. P., November 3, 1920.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>M. F. P., October 9, 1920.

"in the adjustments and alignments of the future, this movement will be an integral part, probably the foundation stone, of a great national political party which, whatever its name, will be in policies liberal in the true acceptance of that often ill-used term."<sup>75</sup> It praised Crerar and the programme he outlined, stating that he "spoke from a higher attitude and displayed a wider outlook" than either King or Meighen.<sup>76</sup> By the end of 1920, thus, there was little doubt where the sympathies of the Free Press lay.

In the first eight months of 1921, the editorial policy of the Manitoba Free Press underwent only a few minor changes. Its attitude toward the Meighen government remained severely critical. For example, it stated that the government's loss in the West Peterboro by-election in February meant that:

...it will meet parliament without authority or prestige; it will have a majority so precarious as to make it a highly dangerous business for it to submit legislation of a controversial character; it will be subjected to the constant taunt, which will embody the truth, that it is usurping a power which the country does not wish it to exercise--and the net result must be a steady dwindling of whatever strength it may have in Parliament and country.<sup>77</sup>

But while it asserted that the government was usurping power, the Free Press did not demand an immediate election. Rather it demanded that the first business of the government and

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<sup>75</sup>M. F. P., December 3, 1920.

<sup>76</sup>M. F. P., December 13, 1920.

<sup>77</sup>M. F. P., February 9, 1920.

Parliament was the redistribution of constituencies, in order that an election might be called.<sup>78</sup> It even went so far as to suggest that the government should make no radical changes in the tariff, for this might result in its defeat before redistribution was completed.<sup>79</sup>

This overriding desire of the Free Press that there should be no election until after the completion of redistribution explained its reaction to the budget tabled by Sir Henry Drayton on May 9th. It described this budget as being "frankly protectionist in character," but welcomed the government's postponement of the revision of the tariff.<sup>80</sup> Thereafter the paper concentrated on identifying the government with protectionism, and therefore alien to the desires of western voters. Too, it repeated frequently that under no circumstances should Meighen call an election prior to the redistribution of constituencies. As it warned on August 25th:

Unless a defeat in the House releases him from his obligation, Mr. Meighen is bound in honor to provide for a redistribution of the constituencies before election.<sup>81</sup>

In spite of its disenchantment with the Meighen government, thus, the Free Press refused to advocate an election to bring about

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<sup>78</sup>M. F. P., February 22, 1921.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>M. F. P., May 11, 1921.

<sup>81</sup>M. F. P., August 25, 1921.

its defeat.

The one policy of the Meighen government which was commended by the Free Press was with respect to Canada's independent status. On April 4th, it praised Meighen for publicly opposing the creation of an Imperial Executive.<sup>82</sup> A month later it applauded Meighen for his cautious treatment of the agenda of the Imperial Conference scheduled for June.<sup>83</sup> As well it approved Meighen's refusal to discuss the naval question at the Imperial Conference.<sup>84</sup> Meighen's opposition to the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, at that Conference too was greeted enthusiastically by the Free Press.<sup>85</sup> Finally, Meighen's role in the Imperial Conference generally was commended, as the paper stated that "Canada's ultimate control over her own foreign affairs [was exemplified] by his [Meighen's] vindication of the right of Canada through her parliament to pass upon the Anglo-Japanese alliance, should it be renewed."<sup>86</sup> But while it approved Meighen's Imperial policy, it cannot be stressed too strongly that this was the only aspect of his programme that the Free Press condoned.

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<sup>82</sup>M. F. P., April 4, 1921.

<sup>83</sup>M. F. P., May 7, 1921.

<sup>84</sup>M. F. P., June 4, 1921.

<sup>85</sup>M. F. P., June 17, 1921.

<sup>86</sup>M. F. P., August 11, 1921.

With regard to the Liberal party, the Free Press made only three major editorial references in the first eight months of 1921. The first of these, given on May 12th, suggested that its critical attitude toward the Liberal party was being altered. The editorial dealt with the Fielding Tariff Amendment to the government's budget. It stated:

The present amendment is not a mere bid for votes, but is an intelligible formulation of tariff policy which may afford a basis for future co-operation on tariff matters between political forces that have hitherto viewed one another with distrust...The amendment is a direct repudiation of protection as the governing principle in tariff-making; and thus marks an advance upon the colorless resolution in the official Liberal platform in which the question was dodged...It is in effect a declaration in favor of a tariff for revenue which is the kind of tariff that Canada needs.<sup>87</sup>

The reference to "future co-operation on tariff matters between political forces" could only have meant the Liberals and Progressives. This fact that the Free Press even mentioned this possibility is singularly significant. However, the paper's later editorial comments were of a considerably different nature from this one. At the end of May it repeated its oft-cited complaint that the Liberal party maintained its strength in Quebec by appealing to the racial instincts of the people.<sup>88</sup> And a month later it criticized King for his constant attacks upon the Meighen government as a usurper of power rather than

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<sup>87</sup>M. F. P., May 12, 1921.

<sup>88</sup>M. F. P., May 30, 1921.

addressing himself to the important issues of the day.<sup>89</sup>

The National Progressive party, officially sanctioned by the provincial Councils of Agriculture in the first two months of 1921, continued to receive the whole-hearted support of the Free Press. Without exception the paper approved the policies advocated by Crerar on the various issues that arose. His plan to de-capitalize the Canadian National Railways, to enforce rigid economy in it by eliminating duplication, and to increase its income by settling the lands along it, the Free Press described as "a more constructive program than [those of] the leaders of either of the other political parties."<sup>90</sup> So too, it stated that Crerar's budget speech "clearly pointed out those features of the Government's fiscal policies that are unsuitable to a country such as Canada and to the particular conditions that now obtain."<sup>91</sup> In the first eight months of 1921, therefore, the Free Press stood unequivocally behind the National Progressive party.

On September 1st, Prime Minister Meighen announced that a federal election would be held on December 7th. The Free Press's reaction was immediate and bitter:

To prevent the West from having its full measure of influence at Ottawa is, of course, one of the reasons for the dissolution in advance of redistribution. Twelve

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<sup>89</sup>M. F. P., July 5, 1921.

<sup>90</sup>M. F. P., March 18, 1921.

<sup>91</sup>M. F. P., May 19, 1921.

additional members from the West would have meant at least ten more followers for Mr. Crerar, a prospect not very agreeable to the Government, and perhaps not very agreeable either to the Liberals. To block this the West is to be deprived of its rightful measure of representation.<sup>92</sup>

Two days later this sentiment was reiterated, this time by quoting Meighen's justification for not calling an election immediately after he became leader of the government in 1920.<sup>93</sup>

As to where the Free Press would place its allegiance was a question which the paper settled at the outset of the campaign. It avowed its independence of all political parties in the following terms:

The Free Press is concerned with the fortunes of no party, no group, no individual, no combination of individuals except as their activities affect the interests of the country. It is wholly free to serve the state with singleness of purpose; and it puts itself within the judgement of the public as to whether or not it lives up to this obligation.<sup>94</sup>

But while it proclaimed its independence, the Free Press throughout the campaign invariably opposed the policies of the Meighen government and supported those of the Progressives. In regard to the government, the paper was particularly venomous. "The Government is a Conservative government and it appeals for support to Conservatives, new and old" it declared.<sup>95</sup> It

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<sup>92</sup>M. F. P., September 3, 1921.

<sup>93</sup>M. F. P., September 5, 1921.

<sup>94</sup>M. F. P., September 8, 1921.

<sup>95</sup>M. F. P., September 6, 1921.

denounced the administration for its failure to reduce freight rates.<sup>96</sup> Hardly a day passed that the Free Press did not carry editorial notes castigating the protectionism of the government. Its attitude toward Meighen and his followers was explicated most clearly on November 21st, after Meighen had begun his western campaign tour:

For those who think it necessary in the public interest that there should be a change of government--a change not merely of name, but a change in methods, in outlook, in policies--their course is clear. It is to defeat Meighen candidates and to elect in their stead candidates who can be relied upon to oppose any government, however formed, which does not carry out the reforming and progressive policies which are necessary if this country is to escape from the economic doldrums in which it is now marooned.<sup>97</sup>

The number of editorials of this nature which appeared in the Free Press left no doubt as to its attitude toward the Meighen government. Independent it might be, but nevertheless it showed itself partial to opposition to the encumbant administration.

The complete lack of criticism by the Free Press of the policies and personnel of the Progressive party would seem to belie its avowal of independence. But, in fact, although the paper did invariably support the Progressives' platform it never came out with an official endorsation of that party. In this way it could validly claim to remain independent. But at the same time the constant support which it gave to the Progressive

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<sup>97</sup>M. F. P., November 21, 1921.

<sup>98</sup>M. F. P., October 7, 1921.



policies left no doubt as to where its sympathies lay. Throughout the campaign the paper consistently defended the Progressives against charges of class instinct. It was not a "class movement, bound for free trade" as described by government newspapers, asserted the Free Press.<sup>98</sup> Crerar's demand for a strict accounting of campaign contributions and expenditures was defended and adopted by the paper.<sup>99</sup> On the railway issue, it declared that "Mr. Crerar was the only party leader who laid before Parliament anything like a really constructive policy in regard to the most serious problem now facing the Dominion."<sup>100</sup> The Progressive leader's demand that the natural resources of the three prairie provinces be immediately returned to them was applauded by the paper.<sup>101</sup> Finally, the Free Press's adjurations that only "reforming and progressive" candidates should be elected was but a thinly advocacy for the Progressive party.<sup>102</sup>

It should be noted that the Free Press devoted much less time and energy to supporting the principles and platform of the Progressive party than to its opposition to the Meighen government. This was undoubtedly one aspect of its avowal of

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<sup>98</sup>M. F. P., October 7, 1921.

<sup>99</sup>M. F. P., October 19, 1921.

<sup>100</sup>M. F. P., October 12, 1921.

<sup>101</sup>M. F. P., November 6, 1921.

<sup>102</sup>M. F. P., November 21, 1921.

its independence. It would suggest too, that it believed the Progressive strength in the West was considerable, and that the party which presented the greatest threat was the government. Therefore the Free Press dedicated its energies to destructive criticism of the administration rather than to constructive advocacy of the Progressive movement.

Significantly, the Free Press expended least editorial space on the Liberal party. Apart from numerous editorial notes, it devoted only five major editorials to King and his followers. Generally, the paper was critical of the Liberals. On September 23rd, for example, it criticized King for his pious attack on Meighen for appointing a number of men to the Senate; "Mr. King, or any other political leader would do the same thing under the same circumstances," it argued. While it commented favorably upon King's tariff for revenue policy, the Free Press had serious reservations about some of his Quebec followers, as it accused the Montreal group of "out-Meighening Meighen."<sup>103</sup> So too it criticized the apparent sympathy of the Liberal party for the Shaughnessy railway plan, which called for the merger of the Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railways. The effect of this plan the paper described as follows:

It would give the control of all the railways of Canada into the hands of an irresponsible and irremovable junta of representatives of "big business," who would just take

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<sup>103</sup>M. F. P., September 26, and October 11, 1921.

possession of this country and run it for themselves, and their friends and associates.<sup>104</sup>

Two weeks later, when Mackenzie King finally did repudiate the Shaughnessy scheme, the Free Press expressed some relief, but remained uneasy because of the influence men such as Rudolphe Lemieux, who favored it, might have in a Liberal government. Finally, the Free Press was critical of the Liberal party's decision to enter candidates in the constituencies being contested by Progressives. This, it asserted, would only cause three-cornered fights, and thereby increase the chances of government candidates being elected.<sup>105</sup> In the same editorial it denounced King's offer of an alliance with the Progressives:

Mr. King's idea of an alliance with the Progressives appears to be one that would make this movement a mere adjunct to the Liberal party, relating the Progressives to his following as a sort of subordinate group.<sup>106</sup>

Thus the Free Press's attitude toward the Liberal party throughout the election campaign was generally critical, but was by no means as hostile, as its approach to the government. The infrequency of its editorial references to that party would suggest that the paper looked upon it as an eastern phenomenon, and correspondingly, viewed the Progressive party as the true expression of Liberalism in western Canada.

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<sup>104</sup>M. F. P., October 1, 1921.

<sup>105</sup>M. F. P., November 15, 1921.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid.

The election of December 7th saw the Liberal party elect 117 members, the Progressives elect 65, and the Meighen forces reduced to the minority of 50. The Free Press was fairly well satisfied with the outcome. The key to the results, it declared, was opposition to the government, which was expressed in the east by support for the Liberal party, and in the west, for the Progressives.<sup>107</sup> The Progressives, it believed, could have their policies effectively represented by their 65 members.<sup>108</sup> As to the new Liberal government, it was non-committal, stating only that if it "proves worthy of its name and lives up to the engagements made on behalf of his party by Mr. Mackenzie King," the Progressives would co-operate with it.<sup>109</sup>

It was the influence of the Quebec, and especially Montreal, protectionists that aroused the greatest fear of the Free Press. Its editorial of December 12th entitled "Montreal Reaches For The Reins" pungently described this fear. At the same time, the paper was concerned about the fate of the Progressive party, in view of the negotiations between Crerar and King that were in progress. It was concerned that King would possibly try to "sink the Progressive movement without a

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<sup>107</sup>M. F. P., December 8, 1921.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

trace."<sup>110</sup> In the Free Press's view:

Co-operation, at the outset at least, must take the form of a coalition with the identity of the Progressive party preserved and with reasonable guarantees that its policies, at least insofar as they are in no way conflicting with the campaign professions of the Liberals themselves, will be taken up by the new government and made effective.<sup>111</sup>

So too, the Liberal party would have to decide what programme it would follow, the paper stated. Either the protectionists or the tariff for revenue advocates would have to be cast off.<sup>112</sup>

The failure of the negotiations between King and Crerar the Free Press attributed to the former. In its view, the cause was "the refusal of Mr. King to make a proposition that could be intertained by even the most reasonable members of the Progressive party."<sup>113</sup> At the same time it declared that if King's administration was "a Liberal government in fact as well as in name...the Progressives will have no option but to give it a disinterested and hearty support."<sup>114</sup> Two days later, the Free Press outlined the attitude it would adopt toward the new government. It promised to give it "a fair field and a fair show," and declared that if it succeeded in grappling with the problems of the day, "it will not lack its reward."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> M. F. P., December 20, 1921.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> M. F. P., December 21, 1921.

<sup>113</sup> M. F. P., December 28, 1921.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> M. F. P., December 30, 1921.

In his biography of Sir Clifford Sifton, John W. Dafoe made the following pertinent statement about Sifton's post-war activities:

Until they were shadowed by private sorrows the years following 1919 [the year of Sifton's permanent return to Canada] constituted one of the happiest periods of Sir Clifford Sifton's life. He was free from pressing business responsibilities; and he was able to give ample time to what was always the first interest of his life--the study, consideration and discussion of public affairs...Further, He was more active than ever before in his association with the Manitoba Free Press. During these years, to a much greater extent than previously, he was a factor in the making of editorial policy, filling virtually the role of consulting editor.<sup>116</sup>

A study of the correspondence between Sifton and Dafoe in the period 1919 to 1927, the year of the former's retirement from the Board of Directors of the Free Press, certainly substantiates this statement. The frequency of their communication in this period was unmatched in any other comparable period of their association; moreover, it dealt with all the major, and many of the minor issues of the day. From this wealth of information the attitudes of Sifton and Dafoe toward the policies and personnel of the federal parties will now be determined. By a comparison of these with the editorial policies of the Free Press described above, the role of Sir Clifford Sifton in the formulation of the paper's editorial policy can be established.

At the end of November, 1918, John W. Dafoe embarked for Europe as the representative of the Department of Public

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<sup>116</sup>Dafoe, C. S., p. 491.

Information on the Canadian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference. He did not return to Canada until the end of March, 1919, and was therefore not personally in control of the editorial page of the Manitoba Free Press in the four months immediately following the war. At the same time, Sir Clifford Sifton was in England; as he did not return permanently to Canada until July, 1919. Because there is very little correspondence extant between Sifton and Dafoe, and none between either of them and the acting editor, G. MacCrae, it is extremely difficult to discover the formative influences in the paper's editorial policy in these four months. Tentatively, however, it might be assumed that before leaving Dafoe would have outlined to MacCrae the general line of policy he wanted him to follow, and, therefore, must be considered at least partly responsible for it.

As described above, the major immediate change in the Free Press's post-war editorial policy was concerned with the tariff. As long as the war lasted, it had been extremely conciliatory on this question, advocating only that the manufacturers and farmers get together and agree on some sort of compromise tariff. Its rather enthusiastic endorsement of the platform of the Canadian Council of Agriculture on December 4th, which demanded, among other things, the immediate ratification of the reciprocity pact with the United States, was a significant deviation from this moderate attitude. The fact that the paper repeated the demand twice throughout December indicated that the editorial

of the fourth was no momentary lapse.

For the Free Press to endorse the ratification of the reciprocal trade agreement with the United States was understandable, perhaps predictable, in view of its position on the issue in the election campaign of 1911. Then, it, and as evidenced by his correspondence, Dafoe, had vehemently supported reciprocity. Even after the Laurier government's defeat over that issue, Dafoe personally had been adamant in his assertion that reciprocity should remain a plank in the Liberal party platform. This he stated explicitly in a letter to Laurier in 1912:

There are some issues which a political party can manufacture, try out on the electorate, and quietly shelve if they do not work. The issue of a larger measure of trade with the United States is not one of these.<sup>117</sup>

As by December, 1918, the United States had not rescinded the reciprocity pact negotiated by the Laurier government, it only required the ratification of the Canadian parliament to make it operative. In view of the rupture between the Free Press and the Liberal party, it was not unnatural for the paper to endorse the ratification of the reciprocity pact as advocated by the Canadian Council of Agriculture. As had been the case in 1911, the responsibility for this endorsation must be attributed to Dafoe. Sifton had openly broken with the Liberal party in 1911, on the reciprocity pact and had publicly campaigned against its

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<sup>117</sup>Dafoe to Laurier, November 18, 1912, D. P. M73.



ratification. And he did not later have a change of heart, as he wrote Dafoe in 1920, that "there is only one [tariff] policy for Canada and that is to stand on its own legs like any other country."<sup>118</sup>

Significantly, however, the Free Press only advocated the ratification of the reciprocity agreement in the month of December, 1918. In the middle of January, 1919, it became more conciliatory in its attitude, and by the end of the month had shifted to the demand for a tariff for revenue purposes. No more mention was made of the ratification of the reciprocity pact. Throughout the first half of 1919, this position was evolved to the point that the paper asserted that not even the Canadian Council of Agriculture was demanding free trade with the United States. This modification of the Free Press's tariff policy was extremely important because once having adopted the tariff for revenue policy, it continued to advocate it over the course of the next three years--in short, it became a permanent fixture. It was, moreover, primarily the tariff question that determined the paper's attitude toward the old political parties and the new farmers' movement in that period.

Complimentary to this change in tariff policy by the Free Press was the almost simultaneous alteration in its attitude toward the Union government. Throughout December 1918, the

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<sup>118</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, December 22, 1920, D. P. M73.

paper had consistently defended the need for the continuation of the coalition government in the post-war reconstruction period. Then in the middle of January, 1919, it began to demand that the government outline its domestic programme, and particularly its tariff policy. Inasmuch as this was the first step in the alienation of the Free Press's support from the Union government, it is vital that the factors that brought it about be determined.

The fact that two major changes in the editorial policy of the Free Press, the modification of its tariff policy, and the beginning of its more independent and critical approach to the Union government, were instituted almost simultaneously would suggest that the two may have had a common origin. Unfortunately there exists no written correspondence on either of these alterations, and it is, therefore, impossible to determine definitely their formative influences. On the other hand, a reconstruction of the events of December, 1918, does produce conclusions that may be accepted with a fair degree of certainty.

In view of Dafoe's support for reciprocity in 1911, and Sifton's opposition to it, it may be postulated that the Free Press's endorsement of the platform of the Canadian Council of Agriculture in December, 1918, was made with his approval, if not on his request. Furthermore, inasmuch as Dafoe's first despatch from London was not sent until December 10th, it is

possible that he may still have been in Canada on November 29th, the day that the Canadian Council of Agriculture announced its platform.<sup>119</sup> If this was the case, it is also likely that he would have communicated his estimation of it to Macrae. But whether or not he did so, he most certainly would have learned of it upon his arrival at England, as well as of the Free Press's commentary on it. The fact that the Free Press repeated its support for the Council's platform as late as December 21st would suggest its editorial management had been given no reason why it should comment any differently, by Dafoe or anyone else.

The alteration of the Free Press's attitude toward the Union government in January would appear to have resulted from some influence other than Dafoe. If he had advised the acting editor, Macrae, that the paper should take a more independent and critical attitude toward the Union government, he would probably have done so before leaving Canada, in which case it would have been less supportative and more critical of the administration throughout December.

So too, the Free Press's modification of its tariff policy which paralleled this change in attitude so closely would seem to be due to some other factor. The fact that the two were made almost simultaneously alone would suggest this, as would the contrast between the paper's original support for reciprocal

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<sup>119</sup>M. F. P., December 11, 1918.

trade with the United States and its revised policy of tariff for revenue.

The only intelligible interpretation of these two major changes in policy lies with Sir Clifford Sifton. Both were changes from policies which he in the past had disagreed with, to policies which he approved. Sifton's opposition to reciprocity with the United States had been amply demonstrated in 1911, and as exemplified above, he had not since changed his opinion. With regard to the Free Press's support for the Union government, Sifton had been highly critical, asserting that he had never seen such a "docile and apologetic" attitude by any newspaper toward any government. This would suggest that Sifton may have had an important causative in the paper's changes of policy.

As a matter of fact, Sifton did have an opportunity to play such a role. In his biography of Sifton, Dafoe recorded that "we were both in England at the time of the "coupon" election of December, 1918;..."<sup>120</sup> The election to which he referred was held on December 26th, 1918, and it would thus appear that Dafoe spent Christmas with the Sifton family. Sifton, therefore, did have an opportunity to express to Dafoe his opinions on the major issues of the day, and in view of his past activities in this respect, there can be little doubt that he did so. In view of the fact that the changes made in the

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<sup>120</sup>Dafoe, C. S., p. xviii.

Free Press editorial policy were in the direction desired by Sifton, and that they were made approximately two weeks after he and Dafoe had conferred in England, it would appear that Sifton had paramount influence in bringing them about. In the absence of written evidence, this cannot be definitely demonstrated, but the circumstantial evidence would certainly suggest that this was the case.

As described above, the second major step in the alienation of the Free Press's support from the Union government was made in June with the announcement of the budget. Not only did it criticize the budget, but it expressed its first real disillusionment with the government, and also forecast rather sympathetically the formation of a western progressive party. Significantly, Sifton had written Dafoe three weeks before the budget was tabled, exactly to these effects. Then he stated:

It is the general opinion that the budget will not meet the wishes of the Western people at all and that the opposition affords them very little more comfort than the government. Under these circumstances the natural development will be an organization of the Western men and the Ontario farmers to promote tariff reform.<sup>121</sup>

The degree of similarity between this and the commentary of the Free Press on Crerar's resignation from the government is unmistakable. The event that Sifton could not have foreseen, the resignation of Crerar, undoubtedly added considerable weight to his prediction. This is not to say that Sifton was the sole

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<sup>121</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, May 12, 1919, S. P. D. C., C-735.

factor in the Free Press's editorial attitude on this matter, as the signs that he interpreted were apparent for Dafoe's analysis as well. Nevertheless this would seem to be another case when Sifton's political acumen was amply vindicated, and Dafoe permitted the paper to benefit from it.

The degree of similarity of the views of Sifton and Dafoe with respect to the position which the Free Press should adopt is exemplified in the correspondence between the two men in July, 1919. On July 16th, Sifton wrote Dafoe as follows:

I am just writing now to ask you to keep the Free Press entirely uncommitted on the subject of the Federal Government and its policies either as constituted now or as it may be re-organized, until I am able to get out and discuss the subject of policy with you and Macklin. Sir Robert Borden failed to implement his promise to form his Union Government on a fifty fifty basis, and he conspicuously /sic/ fell down in one or two very important matters which are now however things of the past. Every sign indicates that his reorganized Government will be weaker than the present combination and so predominantly Conservative that the Liberal element may be regarded as non-existent.<sup>122</sup>

In his reply to this letter, Dafoe assured Sifton that the Free Press was not committed to any political party. As he stated:

You appear to be somewhat apprehensive lest the Free Press should be committed to the new Unionist party before the whole situation is canvassed. You need not worry; the Free Press, with my consent, will not be committed either to the Unionist, the Liberal or any other party--at least under existing conditions. We are definitely outside the breastworks now; and I think we ought to stay there unless there are very good national reasons why we should identify

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<sup>122</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, July 16, 1919, D. P. M73.

ourselves permanently or temporarily with a definite political movement. The complete independence of the Free Press has been carefully safe-guarded; we are free to take any line we like or place our support where we please without laying ourselves open to charges of breaking faith etc. So far as we have been writing on questions of large policy we have been if anything nearer to the farmers' movement than to either of the regular parties.<sup>123</sup>

As described above, the Free Press by July had shifted to a fairly independent position. Its attitude could be catalogued more accurately according to its criticisms of the various parties than to its support for any single party. As Dafoe asserted, it was most closely identified with the policies of the farmers' movement than with either of the old parties, and inasmuch as there was at that time no formal political party organized out of the movement, the Free Press was hardly committing itself by supporting its policies.

At the same time, it should be noted that Dafoe's evaluations of the Union government and of the Liberal party varied somewhat from those of Sifton. Unlike Sifton, who believed that the administration was becoming the old Conservative party reconstituted, Dafoe thought that "the probability is... that we have seen the last of the old conservative party, though there will be a group in the Unionist party which will call themselves by this name..."<sup>124</sup> While he believed the new Unionist party would draft a programme "attractive to at least

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<sup>123</sup>Dafoe to Sifton, July 24, 1919, D. P. M73.

<sup>124</sup>Dafoe to Sifton, July 21, 1919, D. P. M73.

a considerable proportion of the Unionist liberals who are politically at loose ends at present," he added "I cannot say that I have any great hopes that the result will be satisfactory."<sup>125</sup> It is apparent that it was Dafoe's uncertainty about the reorganized Union party that stood in the way of the Free Press's adoption of Sifton's openly hostile attitude toward it.

As to the Liberal party, Dafoe in the same letter expressed grave reservations. He saw that party as being divided into three separate elements: the first was "the Quebec brand which is largely clerical in direction;" the second was eastern Liberalism, which "in its regard for financial and manufacturing interests is not very easily distinguishable from Conservatism;" and the third was low tariff, western Liberalism.<sup>126</sup> Dafoe could not see how these three elements could be merged into a single party, and wondered if they were, "will the resulting party be anything more than an organized hypocrisy dedicated to getting and holding office?"<sup>127</sup> The antagonism the Free Press displayed toward the Liberal party would, therefore, appear to reflect Dafoe's attitude.

That this was indeed the case is substantiated by the fact that in the same period, Sifton was somewhat more sympathetic

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<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid.



to the Liberal party. Dafoe recorded that after returning from England, Sifton was "friendly to the policies avowed by Mackenzie King, the newly elected leader of the Liberals..."<sup>128</sup> This was suggested too in Sifton's letter to Dafoe on September 8th:

I have been reading your editorials with much interest. I observe that there is a slight indication of hostility to the Laurier Liberals. As to the wisdom of showing this you will have to be the judge.<sup>129</sup>

The editorials to which Sifton referred were those on the Liberal leadership convention held in August. While these were more 'definitely' than 'slightly' hostile, it is interesting to note that Sifton, although obviously not in agreement, left the Free Press's attitude to Dafoe.

The Free Press's sympathy for the policies of the farmers' movement throughout 1919 would seem to have resulted from the mutual agreement of Sifton and Dafoe. Dafoe reported that upon his return from England, Sifton, with respect to this movement, remarked to friends that he had recovered the radicalism of his youth, thereby indicating his sympathy for it.<sup>130</sup> It would appear, however, that Sifton left the paper's attitude toward the farmers mainly up to Dafoe. As he stated:

You will know more than I about the prospects of the

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<sup>128</sup>Dafoe, C. S., p. 482.

<sup>129</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, September 8, 1919, D. P. M73.

<sup>130</sup>Dafoe, C. S., p. 482.

farmers' movement.<sup>131</sup>

Dafoe himself supported the farmers' programme, as he wrote N. W. Rowell:

Hostility to the farmers' movement would have been unjustifiable because its platform approximates pretty closely to what the Free Press has been arguing for years.<sup>132</sup>

The fact that the Free Press refused to endorse officially the the farmers' movement was undoubtedly due to the tinges of class consciousness which surrounded it. Dafoe made this explicit in this same letter to Rowell, as he stated that "it will not be possible for us to support it [the farmers' movement] unless it sheds its class characteristics."<sup>133</sup>

Perhaps the clearest statement of the factors which brought the Free Press to its position of independence of all political parties was made by Dafoe as he declined N. W. Rowell's invitation to discuss Unionist policy in December. While he admitted that his "personal feelings for the Union Government are those of friendliness and sympathy," he declared that there were several reasons why the Free Press could not support the administration.<sup>134</sup> Among these were "the present policy of the Government--that of drift..." and the fact that it would have

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<sup>131</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, January 16, 1920, D. P. M73.

<sup>132</sup>Dafoe to Rowell, December 13, 1919, D. P. M73.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid.

"done the government no good; and our institution great harm."<sup>135</sup>  
More importantly, Dafoe stated that he alone had not been responsible for the decision to keep the Free Press aloof from the government. As he stated:

The course and policy to be pursued by the Free Press in these extraordinary days which have fallen upon us has been a matter of very careful consideration by myself and my associates in the ownership and management of the Free Press. These include four or five persons whose views I am bound to consider. After many conferences a decision was reached, agreeable to us all, that in the present state of affairs we should occupy a position of detached, watchful waiting leaving us free to take a decided action one way or the other, if later on, this should seem desirable in the public interest.<sup>136</sup>

In view of Sifton's pronouncements upon the administration, there can be little doubt that in the conferences to which Dafoe referred, he had been a leading spokesman for the forces opposed to the Free Press's continued sympathy with the Union government.

As described above, the Free Press maintained its position of complete independence of all political parties at the beginning of 1920. Its sympathies lay generally with the programme of the farmers' movement, but it refused to officially endorse that party. Highly critical of the Liberal party, it had shifted to a more critical approach toward the government as well. This situation suited Sifton as he wrote Dafoe that "I have been reading the Free Press regularly since you were

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<sup>135</sup>Ibid.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid.

here and it generally accords with my views."<sup>137</sup> Significantly, Sifton asked Dafoe in the same letter, "please do not throw any more boquets [sic] to Borden. I think this last performance is beneath contempt."<sup>138</sup> He was referring to Borden's retention of the leadership of the Union government in name, though not in fact. Sifton, even during 1918, had been highly critical of Borden. Dafoe, on the other hand had a quite different estimation of the Prime Minister. He had first developed a friendship with Borden during the negotiations over the formation of Union government in 1917, a friendship that had been strengthened when the two men were together in Paris in 1919. It would appear to have been this, more than any other factor, that caused Dafoe to retain an uncertain hopefulness about the prospects of the Unionist party. As a result of this hopefulness, he refused to put the Free Press in complete opposition to the administration as long as it was headed by Borden. This is exemplified by the fact that the first severe criticism of the Union government came in December, 1919, when it was rumored that Borden was retiring from it. When he did not, the paper, in the first six months of 1920, continued its somewhat equivocal attitude toward his administration. And finally, it was only after Borden had retired on July 1st, 1920 and was succeeded

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<sup>137</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, January 16, 1920, D. P. M73.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid.

by Meighen, that it began unflinchingly to oppose the Unionist forces.

The decision to place the Free Press in uncompromising opposition to the Meighen government was, in its timing, most probably Dafoe's. But at the same time there can be little doubt that Sifton was an important factor in causing Dafoe to make it, as exemplified by his constant complaints over the preceding two years. There is also evidence to suggest that Sifton's role may have been more direct than this, as he wrote Dafoe on October 16th:

As I have expressed myself heretofore, whatever the political future may be, there is no place whatever for the Free Press in the support of the kind of Government that Mr. Meighen is likely to have. Its place will be independent criticism and opposition.<sup>139</sup>

The ultimatum nature of this letter suggests that Sifton may, in effect, have 'laid down the law' to Dafoe on this matter. This should, however, be qualified with the observation that Dafoe was most probably in complete agreement with Sifton, in view of Meighen's reactionary denunciations of the farmers' movement in August.

With respect to the Liberal party, the Free Press continued to be generally critical throughout the first half of 1920. In the latter half of that year, however, it treated the Liberal leader, King, a little more sympathetically, although it

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<sup>139</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, October 16, 1920, D. P. M73, Italics mine.

retained reservations about the genuity of some of his followers. This modification from a severely hostile to only a slightly hostile attitude would appear indirectly to have been due to Sifton. He expressed his sympathy for the Liberal party in a letter to Dafoe on October 16th, as follows:

...at the present time the Province of Quebec represents the only substantial popular element in Canada that can be relied upon to stand for Liberal principles. Not all the followers of King from Quebec are genuine Liberals but the majority of them are, and the only hope for anything that can be called a Liberal Government and a Progressive Government in Canada comes from an alliance between King and the farmers.<sup>140</sup>

Dafoe, in his reply to this letter, stated that such an alliance could not be formed before an election, as the two extremes of the farmers' party, the former conservatives and the radical class-conscious group, would rebel against it. Significantly, however, he did concede that:

I am satisfied that a fusion of the Liberals and the Farmers for the purpose of carrying on a Government will be quite practicable, after the election provided the tariff is made upon the lines which I have indicated.<sup>141</sup>

It would seem that Dafoe viewed it objectionable not in itself, but as a factor in the west, which should be left to the farmers. Reluctantly, Dafoe, and with him the Free Press was being swayed to a more favorable estimation of the Liberal party, at least in part, by Sifton.

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

As to the Free Press's continued support throughout 1920 for the policies advocated by the farmers' movement, there need be little comment as it was the continuation of a set policy. It should be noted, however, that Sifton was completely in agreement with this policy. His remark that the only hope of a Liberal or progressive government lay in an alliance between King and the farmers was one expression of this fact. Another was to be found in his letter to Dafoe on November 13th:

There is only one basis for union. It is that of a revenue tariff pure and simple,...The idea that there can be no substantial change made in the tariff is an entire mistake...The farmers are reasonable and moderate in their views and it ought to be possible to find common ground as nobody wants to abolish the tariff in a hurry.<sup>142</sup>

The Free Press's approval of the farmers' movement was thus completely in line with Sifton's own views.

In the first eight months, of 1921, the Free Press made no radical alterations in its editorial policy. As has been described, its support for the policies advocated by the farmers' movement cum National Progressive Party continued, as did its opposition to the policies of the Meighen government. While it welcomed the revision of the tariff policy of the Liberal party, the paper continued to criticize it for its pro-French tendencies in Quebec. Even this concession by the paper to the Liberal party must be considered, indirectly, a reflection of Sifton's more sympathetic evaluation of it.

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<sup>142</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, November 13, 1920, D. P. M73.

Other than this, there was really no alteration in policy, and therefore no necessity to look for formative factors. There remains, however, the approach taken by the Free Press in the election campaign of 1921. In large measure this was necessarily predetermined by the paper's editorial policy prior to the announcement of the election on September 1st. Its obvious sympathy for the policies of the Progressive party, its critical, though increasingly less hostile attitude toward the Liberal party, and its viciously hostile approach to the Meighen government were therefore predictable. On the other hand, the Free Press at no time officially placed its support behind the Progressive party. The reason it did not do so was explained by Dafoe in his letter to Sifton on October 1st. There he stated:

I think our real objective in this campaign ought to be to confirm and reinforce the position of the Free Press as the great independent newspaper of Western Canada.<sup>143</sup>

With this policy Sifton was in entire agreement. In reply to this letter he wrote:

I entirely agree with your general plan of operations and see no reason to advise any departure from what you suggest.<sup>144</sup>

The campaign policy pursued by the Free Press was, therefore, one suitable to both Dafoe and Sifton.

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<sup>143</sup>Dafoe to Sifton, October 1, 1921, S. P. D. C. C-735.

<sup>144</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, S. P. D. C., C-735.



It is significant that in regard to the results of the December 7th election, the approach taken by the Free Press was exactly that counselled by Sifton on December 8th. Then he wrote Dafoe:

It is likely that King will be immediately surrounded by a crowd from Quebec and Nova Scotia hungry for spoils, reinforced by a certain clique from Ontario...Believe me the people of Canada will not be likely to look upon such a combination with lasting favor, and for myself I would decline to avow myself a supporter of it.<sup>145</sup>

The Free Press's editorial of December 12th entitled "Montreal Reaches for the Reins" was exactly to this effect. Again, Sifton wrote Dafoe that:

Unless King offers a coalition with Crerar on a fifty-fifty basis with a definite recognition of the fact that Ontario and the West has [sic] an equal representation and a definite recognition of its [sic] policies, Crerar should stand out...<sup>146</sup>

This was the demand that the paper made on December 20th. Another point it made in that editorial was also to be found in Sifton's letter. As he described it:

The present view of those in control of the Liberal organization is that they should sit at the head table and the Farmers' organization should take whatever crumbs that are offered to them.<sup>147</sup>

Finally, and most importantly, Sifton outlined the attitude he believed the Free Press should take. It was:

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<sup>145</sup>Sifton to Dafoe, December 8, 1921, D. P. M73.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid.

...the attitude of the Free Press should be that of being willing that King should have a fair chance and be judged on his merits but very definitely independent.<sup>148</sup>

Dafoe essentially agreed with Sifton's analysis of the situation, but he was definitely less optimistic about the possible outcome of the King-Crerar negotiations. As he wrote on December 19th:

When he [King] finds that he can only get the Progressives upon terms which will safeguard their identity and give Crerar a position in the government not unlike his own, he will try to get along without them and will make up a government out of the Liberal antiquies who are now congregating at Ottawa. It will not be much of a government...<sup>149</sup>

In view of Sifton's advice, and Dafoe's obvious pessimism about King's intentions, the Free Press's attitude toward the failure of the negotiations was not surprising. What was surprising was Sifton's interpretation of the failure. On December 30th he wrote Dafoe that "it is clear that the Progressives must take the responsibility for having refused to come in."<sup>150</sup> He went on to advise Dafoe that "the Free Press should not under any circumstances endeavor to carry the responsibility for them [the Progressives] but that the attitude should be equally independent towards the government and towards the Progressives."<sup>151</sup> By the time this letter was written, of course, the Free Press

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Dafoe to Sifton, December 19, 1921, D. P. M73.

<sup>150</sup> Sifton to Dafoe, December 31, 1921, D. P. M73.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

had already blamed King for the failure of the negotiations, but this did not mean that it would "carry the responsibility" for the Progressives. On this point too Dafoe and Sifton were in accord, as the former wrote on December 31st:

I think the political situation so far as the Free Press is concerned is quite satisfactory. We can pursue a thoroughly independent course, giving the Government fair treatment and await results.<sup>152</sup>

Between the end of the war and the election of the Mackenzie King government in 1921, the Free Press made several important changes of policy, in all of which a degree of Sir Clifford Sifton's influence may be found. Its adoption of the moderate tariff for revenue producing purposes in January, 1919, was the first of these changes. The second was the gradual alienation of the paper's support from the Union government, to a position of independence, and then in 1920, to unqualified hostility. The third was the opposite trend, from severe antagonism to a less critical, though still independent attitude by the Free Press toward the Liberal party. The last was the independent sympathy which it extended to the farmers' movement. In total, these changes amounted to the one position Sifton was particularly desirous that the Free Press should occupy-- complete independence of any and all political parties.

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<sup>152</sup>Dafoe to Sifton, December 31, 1921, D. P. M73.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

In the period 1916 to 1921, the Manitoba Free Press underwent a series of alterations in policy with respect to the various federal political parties. Traditionally a supporter of the Liberal party, and an ardent critic of the Conservative government, it, in 1916, deviated momentarily from this policy over the bi-lingual schools question; the federal Liberals were castigated for their introduction of the Ontario schools issue into the federal arena, and the Conservative party was commended for its opposition to the Lapointe resolution censuring the Ontario provincial government. This break in traditional policy proved to be only temporary, but it did give an accurate forewarning of the attitude the paper would take toward the Liberal opposition to conscription of the following year.

In 1917, the Free Press was completely alienated from the Liberal party because of its opposition to conscription, which the paper equated with opposition to the furtherance of Canada's war effort. The paper's advocacy of a national government, which it had begun in December of 1916, was undoubtedly a sincere expression of support for that cause, and therefore any party that placed obstacles in its way would not receive its sympathy. After considerable uncertainty throughout the months of June and July, the Free Press finally adopted this estimation of the Liberal party, and put the full weight of its authority against Laurier's anti-conscriptionist position. At the same time, it renewed its demand for the formation of union government, and continued it

until its realization on October 12th. In the election campaign that followed, the Free Press's editorial sympathies were thereby predetermined; anti-Liberal and pro-Union were its policies.

In the period between the formation of Union government and the signing of the Armistice in November, 1918, the Free Press pretty consistently sympathized with the government's war programme. With respect to domestic policies, on the other hand, it was mainly silent, and therefore non-committal. It viewed the government as a special government with one purpose, the maintenance of Canada's war effort; domestic issues would have to stand in abeyance until after the war was over. Thus even though it allied itself with the Union government on its war programme, the Free Press retained its independence to place its support where it liked after the war was over.

Finally, in the three years immediately following the war, the Free Press shifted to an independent position. Most radical of its changes in policy was its gradual withdrawal of support from the Union government, to the point when, in August, 1920, after the retirement of Borden, it became openly hostile to the government headed by Arthur Meighen. Complementary to this was the gradual warming of its initially frigid attitude toward the Liberal party led by Mackenzie King. And, the greatest testimony to its independent position, was the Free Press's support for the policies advocated by the farmers' movement, the National Progressive Party.

As exemplified by the main text of this thesis, all of these major changes in the editorial policy of the Free Press were made either at the suggestion, or at least, with the approval, of Sir Clifford Sifton. As described

in chapter II, John W. Dafoe's attitude toward the bi-lingual schools issue, was in large measure determined by Sifton's views. Therefore, so too was his reaction to the introduction of the Lapointe resolution into the House of Commons in May, 1916. At the time of that resolution too, the Free Press's anti-Liberal attitude was not only sanctioned but encouraged by Sifton.

Similarly this was the case with respect to the Free Press's complete break with the Liberal party in 1917. Even though it had been demanding the formation of a coalition government for five months, the paper, throughout June and July, did not come out in opposition to the Liberal party, but rather was harsh in its criticism of the Borden government for placing Laurier in an untenable position. This interpretation of the situation was undoubtedly Sifton's rather than Dafoe's. Further, it was not until Sifton was convinced that Laurier was irrevocably anti-conscriptionist, and that under no circumstances would he support it, did the Free Press begin to condemn Laurier. The fact that Dafoe had come to this conclusion prior to Sifton, yet had not incorporated his view into editorial policy strengthen's this interpretation of Sifton's importance as a policy formulator. Nor did the paper renew its demand for national government until Sifton had come to agree with Dafoe that this was the only possible solution.

With respect to the Free Press's obvious sympathy for the Union government's war programme, it is apparent that Sifton's influence was much less. From England, he was highly critical of the paper's allegiance to the government on this matter. Significantly, however, the Free Press was committed to

the government only as long as the war lasted; the absence of its approval of the Unionist's domestic policies rendered it free to assume any position it wished after the war was over. The independence this approach enabled was exactly that desired by Sifton.

In the years immediately following the war, finally, the changes made in the Free Press's editorial policy must be attributed in part to Sifton. The modification of its tariff policy, from reciprocal trade with the United States to tariff for revenue would, in January, 1919, certainly appear to be the result of his views. The initiation of its more independent attitude toward Union government which took place in the same month similarly carried the shadow of the owner's opinions. The Free Press's independent sanction of the policies of the farmers' movement corresponded entirely with Sifton's views, as did its rather reluctant accretion of sympathy for the Liberal party. As to the final alienation of the paper from the government after the retirement of Borden, there is no question but that this was the alteration Sifton had been demanding for over a year. In the election campaign, the attitudes adopted by the Free Press met with the complete approval of Sifton, and the independent position assumed by the paper after it was exactly that counselled by him.

In view of the high degree of similarity between the attitudes of the Free Press toward the various political parties, and the opinions of Sifton, there can be no doubt that he played a most influential role in their formulation. He did so in two ways. The first, and the less important, was by direct suggestion to Dafoe. On occasion he issued definite ultimatums to Dafoe with regard to the policy to be followed. One example of this was his letter to Dafoe

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in October, 1919, when he ordered that there was to be no Free Press support for the Meighen government. Most frequently, on occasions such as this, Dafoe was pretty much in agreement with him, and thus in spite of the fact that the paper followed the policy he desired, it is questionable how formative his ultimatum was.

More importantly, Sifton influenced Dafoe and thereby the Free Press indirectly by his interpretation of events in the past and forecast of future possibilities. Sifton was an astute analyst of political affairs, and Dafoe recognized him as such. Most often, Dafoe valued Sifton's analyses of events very highly, and allowed the Free Press to benefit from his abilities. This would very much seem to have been the case in 1916 with regard to the bilingual schools' issues in 1916. So too, in 1917; Dafoe accepted Sifton's interpretation that Borden's announcement of conscription, followed by his offer to Laurier of coalition government, was an attempt to isolate Laurier and destroy the Liberal party. As well, Dafoe did not act upon his own view that Laurier was unalterably anti-conscriptionist until Sifton agreed with him, nor did he renew the Free Press's call for union government until Sifton had placed his support behind the project.

Significantly, Sifton had the least influence on the editorial policy of the Free Press when he was out of the country, and therefore not in a position to evaluate the political situation, that is, throughout 1918. Dafoe therefore relied upon his own interpretation of events, and incorporated them into editorial policy. At the same time, he did follow Sifton's desire that the Free Press remain independent of the government by refusing to tie it to the



Union administration on domestic matters.

It was in this way too, that Sifton's influence on the editorial policy of the Free Press was affected immediately following the war. His analysis of the government as being essentially Tory in spirit, proved to be borne out, particularly after Meighen became Prime Minister. With his demand that the Free Press be independent of it until the political situation became clearer, Dafoe agreed. Here Dafoe played a major moderating role; as long as Borden was head of the government, he refused to place the Free Press in opposition to it, but as soon as Meighen took over, he was quick to put the paper against it. Sifton's more sympathetic attitude toward the Liberal party in the last half of 1920 and throughout 1921 would seem to have influenced Dafoe as well. Sifton, much more quickly than Dafoe, forgave the Liberal party for its anti-conscriptionist position, and therefore made a much more realistic analysis of its programme. There can be little doubt that it was this factor, more than any other, that alienated Dafoe from the Liberal party in the post-war years, particularly when it was led by the anti-conscriptionist King. Throughout the election campaign of 1921, the Free Press was largely indifferent to the Liberal party, mainly because it viewed the Progressives as representative of the true Liberal element in the west. On the other hand it made no concerted effort to deride the party in the east, and this concession in itself must have been the result of Sifton's more sympathetic approach to it.

But while Sifton's influence on the Free Press's general attitude toward the federal political parties was considerable, this was not always the case with regard to the specific approach the paper might take toward an

individual issue. Instances of this nature were Sifton's opposition to the League of Nations, and his opinion on how Canada's autonomous position should be established. These have not been discussed, because they did not bear directly upon the Free Press's attitude toward the major political parties. Nevertheless it should be noted that on these issues, the position of the paper obviously reflected Dafoe's views and not those of Sifton. Significantly, however, Dafoe spent a considerable amount of time justifying his position to Sifton, who reluctantly would agree that there was merit to his argument.

On the basis of the findings of this thesis, it is not possible to assert definitely that Sifton exercised a large degree of influence on Dafoe throughout the entire extent of their twenty-seven year relationship. It is possible, however, to conclude that the probability of this being the case is very high. The one important exception to this rule was in regard to the reciprocity issue of 1911. And that instance, as has been ably explained by Ramsay Cook, resulted primarily because Dafoe was able to persuade Sifton that the Free Press's opposition to reciprocity would destroy its reputation as the voice of the west, and therefore be financially disastrous.<sup>1</sup>

As described in the introduction, Dafoe always maintained that Sifton ultimately left the responsibility for and therefore the making of policy decisions to those in immediate editorial control of the paper. The findings of this thesis cannot seriously dispute this fact. Nevertheless, as has been seen the decisions arrived at consistently corresponded to the views held by Sifton.

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1. Ramsay Cook, op. cit., p. 49.

If they did not, he was invariably given the reason why. By his counsel, his advice and his political analysis, Sifton was thus able to retain a large degree of control over the editorial policy of the Manitoba Free Press.

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