

Report of the Annual Meeting Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada

Report of the Annual Meeting

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Volume 40, numéro 1, 1961

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/300583ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/300583ar>

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Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0317-0594 (imprimé)

1712-9095 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Cook, R. (1961). John W. Dafoe: Conservative Progressive. *Report of the Annual Meeting / Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada*, 40(1), 75–85.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/300583ar>

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JOHN W. DAFOE: CONSERVATIVE PROGRESSIVE

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Every historian is aware of the hazards that confront those who attempt to place political ideas in nice categories. The ferment of political speculation which characterized the 1930's has further complicated the problem, as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s first volume in *The Age of Roosevelt* so well demonstrates.¹ The difficulty is perhaps most graphically illustrated in a remark made by the American literary critic, F. O. Matthiessen. "The term 'liberal' seems unsatisfactory now", he wrote. "It signifies hardly more when used, say, in an editorial in the *New York Times*, than a gesture in the direction of the Democratic party; or, in *The New Republic* or *PM*, as a rather evasive gesture to stall off definition of a more clear-cut position to the left; or, in the *New Masses* — depending on which way the line is running — as a gesture of conciliation or contempt".² In Canada, even without the benefit of a New Deal, a *New York Times*, a *New Republic*, or a *New Masses* (though we are about to have a New Party) we are just as confused about the meaning of that frequently used and misused term "liberal". After all, we have had in this country not only Conservatives, Liberals and Progressives, but also Liberal-Conservatives, Liberal-Progressives, and Progressive-Conservatives — among others!

Recently scholars have spent a good deal of effort searching the past in an attempt to identify political traditions. The American case provides an interesting, if cautionary, example. One scholar, in a book called *The Decline of American Liberalism*, has argued that American liberalism has experienced an almost constant deterioration since the Revolution. Another writer, in *The Liberal Tradition in America*, argues rather more convincingly, at least within his definition, that the only American tradition is the liberal one, and that it is by no means declining. To compound the confusion, a reading of Clinton Rossiter's *Conservatism in America*, leaves one with the suspicion that the author's performance is often fittingly Disraelian; he has caught the liberals in bathing and made off with their doctrines.³

In Canada the search for political traditions has been pursued with less vigour, though with no less conflicting results. Professor Underhill,

¹ Schlesinger, A. M., Jr., *The Crisis of the Old Order* (Boston, 1957), ch. III.

² Matthiessen, F. O., "The Education of a Socialist", in Sweezy, P. and Huberman, L., *F. O. Matthiessen, 1902-1950* (New York, 1950), 19.

³ Ekirch, E. E., *The Decline of American Liberalism* (New York, 1955); Hartz, L., *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York, 1955); Rossiter, C., *Conservatism in America* (New York, 1955). See also Crick, Bernard, "The Strange Quest for an American Conservatism", *The Review of Politics*, XVII, 3 (July, 1955), 359-376.

who has spent a good part of his life in search of Canadian liberalism, has argued that most Canadian intellectuals are liberal for the simple reason that "the Canadian tradition has been so essentially a liberal one".⁴ Naturally this view is not shared by everyone. It would be fair to say that Professor Creighton's address to this association in 1957 was an appeal for a conservative interpretation of Canadian history.⁵ Perhaps Professor Morton was answering this appeal in his stimulating statement of the relevance of Canadian history last year.⁶ Clearly, then, there is no generally accepted body of established doctrine which one can use to define a political tradition in Canadian, or indeed, North American terms. What I would like to attempt is a consideration of the main elements in the thinking of J. W. Dafoe in an effort to define at least one articulate Canadian's political assumptions. Perhaps this venture may offer a few insights into the Canadian political tradition in general.

John Wesley Dafoe was born in the Ottawa Valley of Loyalist stock. Though his parents were Conservatives, Dafoe early deserted the political faith of his fathers in favour of the party of Edward Blake. At the same time he rejected the agricultural calling of his parents for the profession of journalism. Throughout his life two early influences remained apparent in this thinking — his rural background, and the views of the uncorrupted Liberal party of Blake. This is not surprising, for the platform of the Liberal party in the 1880's, evolved in opposition to Sir John Macdonald's National Policies, had its strongest appeal among the English-speaking Protestants of rural Canada. When Dafoe moved permanently to Winnipeg in 1901, he assumed the task of voicing the aspirations of an agricultural community not unlike that from which Blake's party had drawn much of its strength. Dafoe's political opinions never entirely lost that element of "voluble virtue" which Sir John Wilison claimed characterized the Liberals of Blake's day.

These early influences can be most easily discerned in Dafoe's views on Canadian domestic problems. His repeated campaigns, both before and after the Great War, for freer trade, more equitable freight rates, and the construction of the Hudson Bay Railway, stemmed from a firm belief in the virtues of the agrarian society that these policies were designed to aid.⁷ In the support and advice he gave to the Progressive movement in the twenties, his desire was to protect and preserve the position of agriculture. Crerar, Dafoe once remarked, "is nothing more or less than a liberal of the type with which you and I were quite familiar before 1896".⁸ In the Progressivism of T. A. Crerar there was much

⁴ Underhill, F. H., "The Revival of Conservatism in North America", *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, VII, III, 1958, 17.

⁵ Creighton, D. G., "Presidential Address", *C.H.A. Report*, 1957, 1-12.

⁶ Morton, W. L., "Presidential Address", *C.H.A. Report*, 1960, 1-21.

⁷ *Manitoba Free Press*, 18 October 1920.

⁸ *Public Archives of Canada, Dafoe Papers*, Dafoe to Sifton, 10 Nov. 1920.

that was conservative and backward looking; Crerar's followers were, in Dafoe's judgment, "the real inheritors of the Liberal economic tradition...".⁹ In essence, the objective of the Dafoe-Crerar Progressives was a modification of the national policies for a conservative purpose. They believed that a decrease in the tariff, and one or two other measures to protect Western interests, would guarantee the place of agriculture in the Canadian economy, and save the country from the dominance of those business interests which were nurtured by the tariff and stimulated by the Great War. If the tariff was maintained at a high level, the farming population would be seriously depleted by urbanization, a situation which the *Free Press* predicted would lead to "social and economic convulsion".¹⁰ Thus Dafoe was instinctively sympathetic to the social conservatism of the Progressives. Thus, too, he was hostile to the class consciousness of the followers of Henry Wise Wood and bitterly opposed to the nascent radicalism of the Winnipeg Labour Movement. Even J. S. Woodsworth, whom Dafoe knew and respected, was regarded as "almost mentally unbalanced with respect to Social and Labor questions";¹¹ the Winnipeg General strike was interpreted as an abortive Bolshevik uprising.¹²

Until 1917 Dafoe looked to the Liberal party as the instrument through which the West could best express its aspirations. In the peculiar wartime circumstances of 1917 he broke with Laurier and turned his talents to the support of the Union Government movement. At the end of the war, Dafoe, like many Westerners, was left without a firm attachment to any party. On the one hand the Unionists were changing back into their Conservative costumes. But on the other hand, Dafoe could not easily forgive the Liberals who had refused to support conscription. Moreover he believed that the rump Liberal party was controlled by Eastern protectionists. He therefore gave independent support to the Crerar Progressives. For many Westerners, Union Government was a purgatory through which they passed from the hell of the old parties to the heaven of Progressivism. Dafoe's celestial vision was more limited. His political objective in supporting Crerar was to drive the Liberals back to their original Garden of Eden innocence before the serpent of protectionism had left its venomous mark on the party. In short, he envisaged a party system divided on the principle of the tariff, with some

⁹ *Ibid.*, Dafoe to A. Bridle, 14 June 1921.

¹⁰ *Manitoba Free Press*, 18 October 1920.

¹¹ *Public Archives of Canada, Sifton Papers*, Dafoe to Sifton, 1 Oct. 1921.

¹² *D. P.*, Dafoe to A. Bridle, 14 June 1921. Dafoe's Progressivism was not unlike that described by Professor George Mowry in *The California Progressives* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1951), 101. "California progressivism was an expression of an older America objecting to the ideological and social drifts of the twentieth century. Representing a particular strain of middle-class individualism, the progressive became militant when he felt himself hemmed in between the battering corporation and the rising labor unions." See also Hofstadter, Richard, *The Age of Reform* (New York, 1955), 5.

Liberals joining the Progressives, and others going over to the Conservative side.¹³ However, the amorphous nature of the Progressive movement, coupled with the astuteness and good fortune of Mackenzie King, prevented this outcome. By 1926 Dafoe was ready to write off the Progressives. He believed that they had succeeded in achieving limited results, but the price of their continued existence was to split the anti-Conservative forces, thus allowing Meighen to pass through the "door of opportunity". The price was too high. Writing to Sifton in February 1926, Dafoe summed up his position: "I may say that I have been able to understand and to some extent sympathize with the insurgent Progressives. Like them I have only been able to bring myself to give the Government a hand by contemplating the probabilities of the Conservatives coming to power".¹⁴

With these harrowing thoughts in mind, Dafoe whole-heartedly supported King's stand on the "constitutional crisis". He chose to interpret this event as an attempt by a British appointed Governor General to foist on Canada a constitutional practice long obsolete in Britain. Did this not mean that Canada was a colony rather than a nation? In his resounding affirmative, Dafoe swept aside all questions of constitutional subtlety, drove the last of the Crerar Progressives into the everlasting arms of Mackenzie King, and contributed an important share to the Liberal victory. Despite his public enthusiasm for King, however, his private position was that "our fight in the West was more *against* Meighen and his policies than *for* King".¹⁵ After 1926 Dafoe gave his support, though often unenthusiastically, to King and the Liberal party. Indeed, if King had possessed the light touch of Franklin Roosevelt he might, on some Western tour, have made some remarks rather like the ones F.D.R. made on a visit to Emporia, Kansas during the 1936 campaign. In asking for the whereabouts of the well-known Progressive Republican editor, William Allen White, the President observed jokingly, "I wish he were here. He is a very good friend of mine for three-and-a-half out of every four years".¹⁶ King might have observed that Dafoe was a very good friend for two months out of every term of office — the two months of every election campaign.

Dafoe's decision to throw his support behind the Liberal party after 1926 did not mean that his essential objectives had changed. It was merely an admission that the Progressive movement was no longer seen as the best, or safest, method of pursuing those objectives. He now hoped to win them by boring from within King's party. This view can be

¹³ *D.P.*, Memo: Re Political Situation, 20 January 1920.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Dafoe to Sifton, 19 February 1926.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Dafoe to Sifton, 27 September 1926.

¹⁶ Burns, J. MacGregor, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox* (New York, 1956), 281.

illustrated by examining Dafoe's attitude to the Depression and his contribution to the Rowell-Sirois Commission.

When the Great Depression struck, Dafoe was completely unimpressed by proffered panaceas that required government intervention and collectivism. In his view the economic collapse was the punishment wrought by a Cobdenite god on the disobedient nations who had rejected his commandments. In 1932 Dafoe told Professor C. R. Fay: "I read with interest everything that your old comrade Keynes writes; but I find myself stubbornly refusing to believe that he can work any such miracle as he has in mind by a managed inflation of the currency. This world which has been defying all the economic laws for twenty years — indulging in war and all that derives from it, economic war and all the follies that go with it — cannot escape punishment by monkeying with the currency. We are getting what we jolly well deserve; and the nations will have to repent and do penance before conditions will be righted."¹⁷ Dafoe's answers to the economic problems of the thirties were freer trade, retrenchment and sound money. His view remained that what was good for agriculture was good for Canada. The country's chief problems resulted from "our noble Canadian determination to industrialize Canada beyond the limits of economic justification".¹⁸ Moreover, "the farmers as the primary producers subject to the conditions of world competition cannot be penalized in the slightest degree in order to help out any other Canadian industry", he maintained.¹⁹ These were the same views that had motivated his support of Crerar.

Clearly, in his thinking on domestic policy, Dafoe was very much a Westerner. He believed that the good things of the Canadian federation had not been shared equally and at the basis of much of his criticism of the national policies was his desire to see all sections of the country prosper. He was certainly not a supporter of provincial rights; indeed few arguments could draw his fire more quickly than a statement of the compact theory of Confederation.²⁰ He was the spokesman for a section, but only because he believed that the West had not been accepted as a full partner in the Canadian nation. For this reason Dafoe made an important contribution to the recommendations of the Rowell-Sirois Report. He hoped that the objectives he had always fought for — a fair distribution of the burdens and rewards of Confederation — would result from the Commission's labours. But Mackenzie King found it just as difficult to follow Dafoe's recommendations on this subject as he had on economic policy in the twenties.

¹⁷ *D.P.*, Dafoe to C. R. Fay, 30 May 1932.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Dafoe to Vincent Massey, 8 April 1935.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Dafoe to Harry Sifton, 4 June 1932.

²⁰ Dafoe, J. W., "Revising the Constitution", *Queen's Quarterly*, XXXVII, 1930, 1-17.

The one area of fairly complete agreement between Dafoe and King was Imperial relations. Dafoe, like King, was a thorough-going status-seeker. In one important respect, however, he differed from many Liberals, notably King and Laurier, in his view of Canadian autonomy. Dafoe welcomed the international responsibilities which he believed national status carried with it. Thus during the lengthy debate over the naval question before 1914, he was always ready to go farther than the Liberal leadership if the critical international situation required it.²¹ Moreover, it was his belief that Canada was a nation with international responsibilities that determined his break with Laurier in 1917. Whereas Laurier saw Canada as a supporter of Great Britain in the Great War, and therefore not required to make the same sacrifices as the principal belligerents,²² Dafoe held that Canada was a principal who should exert as great an effort proportionally as the other Allies. For this reason, among others, Dafoe supported conscription and Union Government, while Laurier rejected them both.²³

In the immediate post-war years Dafoe agreed with King that Canada should have full control over her foreign policy. He maintained that the best solution to the Imperial question was the one that Sir John Macdonald had envisaged — a Kingdom of Canada with all the sovereign powers that the term implied, in permanent alliance with the other members of the Commonwealth. "There is nothing new in this", he told Sir Alfred Zimmern, "it was Sir John Macdonald's idea fifty years ago".²⁴ Of the many opportunities that Dafoe had of pressing this idea on King, the best came in 1923 when he accompanied the Canadian delegation to the Imperial Conference. Though King was reluctant, at that time, to press for a final definition of Dominion status, he did take a stand, partly at Dafoe's urging, against a common Imperial foreign policy.²⁵ Dafoe's gradual return to the Liberal fold can be dated from this Conference.

Though Dafoe recognized in the Balfour Declaration and the Statute of Westminster the very definition of Imperial relations which he had long sought, he never lost the belief that eternal vigilance was the price of autonomy. Moreover, he was never entirely satisfied that even Mackenzie King was capable of resisting the blandishments of British politicians anxious to provide the Commonwealth with a united foreign policy.²⁶ For example, he feared that the 1937 Imperial Conference had

²¹ *D. P.*, Dafoe to J. E. Atkinson, 22 August 1912; Eayrs, James, "The Round Table Movement in Canada", *C.H.R.*, XXXVIII, I (March, 1957), 9-11.

²² Skelton, O. D., *The Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier* (London, 1922), II, 508-509.

²³ Cook, Ramsay, "Dafoe, Laurier and Union Government", *C.H.R.*, XLII, 3 (Sept., 1961).

²⁴ *D. P.*, Dafoe to Sir Alfred Zimmern, 28 April 1922.

²⁵ Dawson, R. McGregor, *William Lyon Mackenzie King: A Political Biography, 1874-1923* (Toronto, 1958), 434-80; Cook, Ramsay, "J. W. Dafoe at the Imperial Conference, 1923", *C.H.R.*, XLI (March, 1960), 19-40.

²⁶ *D. P.*, Dafoe to T. A. Crerar, 20 April 1937.

not only agreed to a common policy, but that the policy was the worst imaginable — appeasement.²⁷

By 1937, of course, Dafoe had grown sharply critical of King's conduct of Canadian foreign policy. Though he agreed with King that Canada should have the power to formulate an independent foreign policy, the two men differed fundamentally over the use of that power. King, following in the footsteps of Laurier, was anxious to keep Canada free from external commitments. Dafoe firmly believed that the country should follow a policy of active international co-operation. In 1919 he had accompanied Sir Robert Borden to the Peace Conference and was present at the birth of the League of Nations. He came home convinced that this organization could make the world safe for democracy, and for twenty years he fruitlessly called upon the nations to live up to their covenanted obligations. He set the tone in a speech delivered shortly after his return from Paris when he declared: "In the secret Councils of the Peace Conference, Idealism and what the Germans call Realpolitik, fought out their duels; and they each won something from the struggle. The Treaty was made by the Past; the League of Nations is the Charter of the Future, the one star of hope shining in the overcast sky."²⁸ As the grip of isolationism tightened over Canadian foreign policy, Dafoe's support of the League grew more ardent. Isolationism would destroy the League, and if it failed he saw no alternative but international anarchy and renewed war.²⁹ His jeremiads reached their shrillest pitch at the time of Munich. Above the din of congratulations offered the Munichers, Dafoe demanded, "What's the Cheering For?"³⁰

The chief weakness in Dafoe's view of world politics was his failure to recognize that the League had not abolished power from the affairs of nations. To him "power politics", like "imperialism", was an undefined term of denigration. Democratic nationalists eschewed them both. After Munich had completed the destruction of the League, Dafoe concluded that the "Imperial centralizers", this time the "Cliveden Set", had again been at work. Perhaps even King had joined hands with the schemers. "He is one of the Makers of the World of To-Day and perhaps his responsibility is greater than we have thought", he wrote despondently of King in November 1938.³¹ To the end of his life Dafoe remained a Wilsonian idealist, and an opponent of every suggestion of a united Commonwealth foreign policy. In 1943, when General Smuts suggested that the Commonwealth, united with some of the nations of Western Europe, might act together as a counterbalance to the emerging super

²⁷ Dafoe, J. W., "The Imperial Conference of 1937", *U.T.Q.*, VII, I (October, 1937), 1-17.

²⁸ Dafoe, J. W., "The Sister Nations of North America", *The Free Press Prairie Farmer*, 27 August 1919.

²⁹ *Winnipeg Free Press*, 12 June 1936.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 30 September 1938.

³¹ *D.P.*, Dafoe to George Ferguson, 29 November 1938.

powers, Dafoe reacted like Pavlov's dog, striking down the suggestion as a return to a centralized empire and power politics.³²

Though he persisted in advocating collective security throughout the inter-war period, Dafoe was fully aware that the League had been seriously crippled by the refusal of the United States to accept the Covenant. Several months before Pearl Harbour he told Henry Luce that "During these long years of American withdrawal from participation in world affairs... I have felt a deepening apprehension, which in recent years became a certainty, that this abstention meant ultimate disaster for the world, including the United States".³³ Perhaps his most profound hope was to see the United States reject isolationism. Throughout his life he argued that the greatest potential force for peace and justice in the world lay in the close co-operation of the nations of the English-speaking world. In the evolution of the modern Commonwealth, Dafoe thought he saw the means whereby the tragic breach of 1776 could be healed. Naturally he did not look forward to an institutional re-unification. Rather he hoped that through the voluntary co-operation of equals in an organization like the League, the English-speaking democracies could succeed in preserving world order.³⁴ In 1930 he was expressing his deepest conviction when he told a British audience: "In the moral consolidation of the English-speaking people the whole of the future rests."³⁵ This was a goal towards which Dafoe worked throughout his career for he believed that his passion for a peaceful world, in which a small country like Canada could thrive, would be achieved only if the United States and the Commonwealth led the way.

These ideas represent the central core of Dafoe's thinking, and from them it is perhaps possible to attempt a definition of his political position.

The easiest task is an assessment of Dafoe's view of Canada's place in the world. It is fair to say immediately that his ideas on Imperial relations fit well within the Canadian tradition. But Dafoe would have been the last to claim that this tradition belonged exclusively to liberals or to the Liberal party. It was a tradition begun in the post-Confederation period by Macdonald and completed by King, with each major Prime Minister contributing his share. Therefore it seems accurate to suggest that it was more the nationalist than the liberal in Dafoe that motivated his fight for Canadian autonomy.

In his attitude to the United States, Dafoe was both a Liberal and a nationalist. He laid heavy emphasis on the necessity of close relations between the two major North American democracies. But he was not

³² *Winnipeg Free Press*, 23 December 1943.

³³ *D.P.*, Dafoe to Henry Luce, 19 March 1941.

³⁴ *Manitoba Free Press*, 21 July 1908; *Winnipeg Free Press*, 9 May 1941.

³⁵ Dafoe, J. W., "Canada and the United States", *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, IX, 6 (November, 1930), 734.

unaware of the potential American threat to Canadian independence. "I no more want to see the Canada of the future bossed from Washington", he wrote in 1942, "than I favored having it bossed from London as was the case not so long ago".³⁶ Still, on this subject, Dafoe was closer to Blake, Laurier and King, than to Macdonald, Meighen and Bennett. Yet I must hasten to add that by no means all members of the Liberal party have shared Dafoe's views on Canada's relations with the United States.

In looking at the League of Nations one can surely say without fear of contradiction that Dafoe was a liberal of the school of Cobden, Bright and Woodrow Wilson. Prior to 1945 the Canadian liberal tradition was marked by a strong strain of isolationism. Dafoe never shared this tradition. Nor did he accept the King-Laurier distinction between "status" and "stature".³⁷ Since he had a liberal's suspicion of "power politics" and "imperialism", and a nationalist's attachment to sovereignty, he found in the League of Nations precisely the type of institution through which Canada could fulfil her international responsibilities without limiting her status.³⁸ In addition, Dafoe saw the League as the potential focus of co-operation between the United States and the Commonwealth.

As I have tried to suggest, most of Dafoe's conclusions about Canada's place in the world were based on his assumption about the moral unity of the English-speaking world. This was an assumption that has been shared by many English-speaking Liberals. Its most vocal proponent before Dafoe was probably Goldwin Smith,³⁹ and it is not without significance that both were continentalists.⁴⁰ Whether this view represents a distinctly liberal tradition in Canada is highly debatable. Certainly few of the French Canadians who have contributed to that tradition would subscribe to it, as Henri Bourassa once pointed out to Dafoe.⁴¹

Thus on matters relating to Canada's relations with the outside world, Dafoe was, broadly, a liberal-nationalist. But even a liberal nationalist is, in part, a conservative, his objective being to protect and conserve the sovereign independence of the nation. "In that accomplish-

³⁶ *D.P.*, Dafoe to John Stevenson, 12 February 1942.

³⁷ Pickersgill, J. W., *The Mackenzie King Record* (Toronto, 1960), I, 512.

³⁸ Niebuhr, R., *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (New York, 1953), 55. "Liberalism of the historic variety is not only inclined to neglect the power factors in a situation but it is prone to project rather more comprehensive plans into the future than the exigencies in international relations warrant."

³⁹ Underhill, F. H., *In Search of Canadian Liberalism* (Toronto, 1960), 98. It is perhaps worth noting that an earlier generation of Canadians, contemporaries of Smith, could use the same arguments in support of plans for Imperial Federation. G. M. Grant maintained that Canada's "rightful place in the history of the world" was "to be a link that shall bind into a world wide brotherhood, into a moral — it may be a political — unity the mother of all nations, and all her children, the great daughter to the south of us as well as the youngest born of the family". Grant, *Rev. G. M., Imperial Federation* (Winnipeg, 1890), 15.

⁴⁰ Dafoe, J. W., "The Problems of Canada", in *Great Britain and the Dominions* (Chicago, 1928), 137.

⁴¹ *D.P.*, Henri Bourassa to Dafoe, 26 April 1928.

ment and its continuance", Professor Morton has remarked, "lies the relevance of Canadian history".⁴²

What can be concluded about Dafoe's views on domestic issues? Of central importance is his attitude to the French Canadians. Though by the end of his life Dafoe's sympathies for the French Canadians had broadened,⁴³ this group never fitted easily into his scheme of thought. Indeed, one may ask what happens to French-speaking Canadians in the moral unity of the English-speaking world? On separate schools, the French language, and conscription, Dafoe was a democrat rather than a liberal, prepared to see the minority coerced by the will of the majority.⁴⁴ Moreover, he had an Anglo-Saxon's belief in the self-evident superiority of his culture. In this there was perhaps an element of social Darwinism, but only that element exhibited by a long line of liberals in Canadian history from Lord Durham to George Brown and Goldwin Smith.

Perhaps the most complex problem in examining Dafoe's political ideas is his attitude to the state in economic life. In this area he was consistent, without being completely doctrinaire, throughout his life. There can be no doubt that Dafoe hankered after the lost and largely mythical world of nineteenth century *laissez-faire*.⁴⁵ Despite the shock of the Depression he remained almost completely sceptical about the promised results of social and economic planning.⁴⁶ It is here that the worst confusion about such terms as "liberal" and "conservative" arises. In every modern industrial nation the term "liberal" has been claimed by the proponents of two contradictory viewpoints. Chronologically, those who held that a society's economic life would develop in the most equitable fashion free from governmental interference were first to adopt the title. But in the twentieth century, the advocates of state interference in economic affairs for the purpose of setting standards of security and welfare, have also often adopted the "liberal" label. In recent decades the supporters of *laissez-faire* have, in reality, become the conservatives. The alteration in liberal strategy was inevitable for, as one commentator has remarked, "a technical society, moving from commercial to industrial activities, was bound to find the emancipation from traditional restraints inadequate in the long run as a program for justice".⁴⁷

⁴² Morton, "Presidential Address", 21.

⁴³ D. P., Dafoe to John Stevenson, 12 February 1942.

⁴⁴ Lord Acton, "Nationality", in *The History of Freedom and Other Essays* (London, 1922), 290. "The co-existence of several nations under the same state is a test, as well as the best guarantee of its freedom." On this point, see also the brilliant analysis of the conflict between liberalism and nationalism in Kedourie, Elie, *Nationalism* (London, 1961), especially 131-133.

⁴⁵ D. P., Dafoe to F. H. Underhill, 8 October 1932. This letter is printed in Underhill, *In Search of Canadian Liberalism*, 145-47.

⁴⁶ Dafoe, J. W., "Canadian Problems of Government", *C.J.E.P.S.*, V, 3 (August, 1939), 287.

⁴⁷ Niebuhr, R., "Liberalism: Illusions and Realities", *The New Republic*, 4 July 1955, 12. See also, Shapiro, J. S., *Liberalism and the Challenge of Fascism* (New York, 1949), 401.

Dafoe was one of those middle-class liberals who could afford to prefer economic liberty to social security. This was a conclusion that stemmed from his basic belief that Canada was a country economically dependent upon primary products in a world governed by Cobdenite economic laws. The policy best suited to meet the needs of this type of society — or rather designed to preserve it — was one in which the state played a very limited role. For this reason, Dafoe had little sympathy either for the protectionism of Canadian businessmen, or for the economics of the new liberalism of J. M. Keynes or the New Deal, since both were intended to meet the needs of industrial rather than agrarian or commercial societies. In the later years of his life Dafoe was fighting a losing battle to preserve a type of society that was disappearing even in Canada. He was very sensitive on this point, even offering to resign from the *Free Press* in 1934 because his ideas seemed out-of-tune with the times.⁴⁸ But despite an uncomfortable feeling about the way of the world, he never entirely lost hope that Mackenzie King would lead the Canadian people back to the Promised Land.⁴⁹

Perhaps one look at Dafoe's autobiography provides the most revealing clue to his political philosophy. At a testimonial dinner given him in October 1943, the old man recounted, with obvious relish, one of his experiences as a cub reporter in this city of Montreal. The tale began with the text, "opportunity is half the battle of life" and played a variation on a theme of Horatio Alger. In it a country lad, Dafoe himself, worked hand-in-hand with a muckraking newspaper to outwit a firm of fast-talking clothing merchants who prospered on the gullibility of visiting hayseeds.⁵⁰ It is not without significance that Dafoe, the self-made man, saw his life in terms of a country boy who made good. In this story one sees the archetypal pattern of his thought. He never wholly gave up the view that the cities, especially Montreal and Toronto, represented in large the slick suit-salesmen of his youth, with the Prairies assuming the place of the naive farm boy. It takes little imagination to cast the *Free Press* in the role of the public-spirited newspaper exposing the dishonesty of the merchants and protecting the innocent yokel. Perhaps this one incident reveals more about the ideas of John W. Dafoe, whom I have characterized as a conservative progressive, than all the millions of words that flowed from his pen during a long and distinguished life.

⁴⁸ *D.P.*, Dafoe to Harry Sifton, 1 January 1934.

⁴⁹ *University of Toronto Library, Wrong Papers*, Dafoe to G. M. Wrong, 18 September 1934. The editor of the *Canadian Forum* struck very close to the mark when he castigated Dafoe and King for refusing to follow in the path marked out for liberals by the New Deal. "...Rooseveltian liberalism is for Liberals in general the last call for dinner in the dining car. And our Canadian liberal leaders, instead of rising to the call, prefer to sit in their seats reading early nineteenth century romances." *Canadian Forum*, XIII, 156, September 1933, 443. It need hardly be added that despite his abstemiousness, King managed to survive.

⁵⁰ Dafoe, J. W., *Sixty Years in Journalism* (Winnipeg, 1943), 2.