

McGILL UNIVERSITY

INTER-DEPARTMENTAL MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 3rd, 1963

TO: Dean Scott

FROM: Mrs I.M.B. Dobell

SUBJECT: Letter from Talbot Papineau
to Henri Bourassa, March 21st, 1916

Dear Frank:

This is a photostat copy of Talbot Papineau's letter to Henri Bourassa dated in the Field, France, March 21st, 1916.

It could have been written this morning.

I.M.B.

In the Field.

France, March 21st 1916.

To Monsieur Henri Bourassa,
Editor of "Le Devoir."
Montreal.

My Dear Cousin Henri.

I was sorry before leaving ^{Quebec} ~~Canada~~ in 1914 not to have had an opportunity of discussing with you the momentous issues which ~~had been~~ ^{were} raised in Canada by the outbreaks of this ~~war~~ ^{year's} ~~of this~~ ^{war.} ~~we~~ ^{we} have had ^{some} discussions in the past and although we have not agreed upon all points yet I am happy to think that our pleasant ~~relationship~~ ^{friendship} which indeed dates from the time of my birth has ~~not~~ ^{continued} uninjured by our differences of opinion. nor would I be the first to make it otherwise for however I may deplore the ^{character} ~~influence~~ of your views I have always considered that you held them honestly and

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Photostat of.

(2)
sincerely ~~and to be interested by~~ and that
you were singularly free from purely
selfish or personal ambitions. ~~and~~
~~It may be the case in these very possibly~~
nothing that I could have said ~~to~~
in August 1914 would have caused
you to change your opinions. From ~~that time~~
from that time forward I was rather too
occupied to travel. But I did hope, ^{that} as
the war continued and events developed
and ^{as} the great national opportunity of
Canada became clearer to all her citizens
~~that~~ you would have been influenced to
modify your views and to adopt a
different attitude. In that hope I have
been disappointed. Deeply involved, as
the honour and the, ^{very} national existence
of Canada has become - beautiful but
terrible as her sacrifices have been, you
appear to have remained unmoved ~~in~~
and you alone of the leading ^{men} of Canadian
thought appear to have remained unmoved.
and your unhappy views unchanged.
Too occupied by time-halt events in this
country to formulate a protest or ~~even~~
to frame a reasoned argument. I have

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nevertheless followed with intense interest
 and deep regret the course of action which
 you have pursued. Consideration of course
^{had} in your public discomfiture and
~~the~~ the fact that far from sharing in
 your views the vast majority of
 Canadians and even ^{many of} those who had
 formerly agreed with you - were now
~~hostile~~ though ~~and~~ bitterly opposed to
 you. With this fact in mind I wanted not
 take ^{the} time from my duties here to write
 you this letter did I not fear that the
 influence to which your talent, energy
 and sincerity of purpose - formerly
 entitled you - might still be exercised upon
 a small minority of your fellow countrymen
 and that your attitude might still be
 considered by some as representative of the
 race to which we belong. Nor can I
 altogether abandon the hope - presumptuous
 no doubt ~~that~~ but friendly and well-
 intentioned - that I may so express myself here
 as to give you a new outlook and a
 different purpose and perhaps ^{even} win you to
 the support of a principle which has been

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proved ^{and} which will yet ~~be~~ ^{prove} to many Canadians ~~and~~ ^{to many Canadians} dearer than life itself.

I shall not consider ~~at~~ the grounds upon which you base your opposition to Canadian participation in this more than European - in this World War. Rather ^{to begin} by pointing out some reasons ^{why} your whole-hearted support might have been expected.

And the first reason is this. By the declaration of war by Great Britain upon Germany Canada ^{became} ipso facto a belligerent. This is not a matter of opinion it is a matter of fact. subject to invasion and conquest. Her property at sea subject to capture. Her coasts subject to bombardment or attack. Her citizens in enemy territory subject to imprisonment or detention. This is not a matter of opinion - it is a matter of fact - a question of international law. No arguments of yours ^{at least} could have persuaded the Kaiser to the contrary. Whatever your views or theories may be as to the future constitutional development of Canada ~~the~~ and in those views I believe I coincide to some extent. The fact remains that at the time of the outbreak of war Canada was in possession of the British Empire and as such

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as much involved in the war as any country in England and from the German point of view and the point of view of International Law equally subject to all its pains and penalties. Indeed proof may no doubt be made that one of the very purposes of German aggression and German military preparedness was the ambition to secure a part if not the whole of the English possessions in North America.

That being so surely it was idle and pernicious to continue an academic discussion as to whether the situation was a just one or not, as to whether Canada should or should not have had a voice in antebellum English diplomacy or in the actual declaration of war. Such a discussion may very properly arise ^{so long as} ~~up to~~ ^{a successful} conclusion of the war, but ~~not~~ ^{not} ~~at~~ ^{at} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~time~~ ^{time} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~war~~ ^{war} ~~when~~ ^{when} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~issues~~ ^{issues} ~~are~~ ^{are} ~~being~~ ^{being} ~~decided~~ ^{decided} in Russian fashion that is by ~~the~~ ^{an} ~~appeal~~ ^{appeal} to the Power of might - the liberties of discussion which you enjoyed by virtue of British citizenship were necessarily curtailed and any resulting decisions utterly valueless. If ever there was a time for action and not for theories it was to be found in Canada upon the outbreak of war.

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6.
Let us presume for the sake of argument
that your attitude had, ^{also} been adopted by
the Government and people of Canada and
that we had declared our intention to
abstain from active participation in
the war until Canada herself was
actually attacked. What would have
resulted? One of two things. Either the Allies
would have been defeated or they would
not have been defeated. In the former case
Canada ~~might~~ would have been called
upon either to surrender unconditionally to
German domination or to have attempted
a resistance against German Arms. You
I feel sure would have preferred resistance but
as a proper corrective to such a preference
I would prescribe a moderate dose of a heavy
bombardment. I have known my own dogmas
to be seriously disturbed in the midst of a
German artillery concentration. I can assure
you that the further you travel from Canada
and the nearer you approach the great
military power of Germany the less you
value the unaided strength of Canada. By the
time you are within 15 yards of a German
army and know yourself to be heading about
one yard out of a line of 500 miles or more

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You are liable to be inquiring very anxiously
about the presence and power of British
and French forces. Your ideas about ^{would}
charging to Berlin or of ending the war ^{would}
also ^{have} undergone some slight moderation.

No, my dear Cousin, I think you would
shortly after the defeat of the Allies have
been more worried over the mastery of the
German Consonants than you are even now
^{in conflict with} over the Ontario ~~educational system~~
anti-bilingualists. You can imagine

You are untroubled in Tierra del Fuego
eloquently comparing the wrongs of Inuits
and Eskimos. ~~This is quite possible~~

But you will doubtless say the world
have had the assistance of the great
American Republic! This is quite possible &
I will admit that by the time the American
fleet had been sunk and the principal
buildings in New York destroyed the United
States would have declared war upon Europe
but in the meantime Canada ^{might} ^{at any rate}
have been paying tribute ^{to the} ^{British} ^{Government}
German vessels ^{probably} the only thing
German she could have declined.

I am as you know by descent even more
American than I am French and I am a
sincere believer in the future of that

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5.
magnificent Republic. I cannot forget
that more than any other nation in the
world's history - England not excepted -
~~she~~ ^{she} ~~has~~ ^{suffered} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ war solely for the sake
of some fine principle of nationality. In
1776 ~~again~~ - for the principle of national
existence. In 1812 for the principle of the
inviolability of American citizenship. In 1860
for the preservation of national unity and
the suppression of slavery. In 1846 for the
protection of her national title and in sympathy
for the wrongs of a neighbouring people.

Not disappointed as I am ~~at~~ ⁱⁿ the present
inactivity of the States since I ever waver in
my loyal belief that in time to come perhaps
less distant than we realize her actions
will correspond with the lofty expression
of her national and international ideals.

I shall continue to anticipate the day when
with a clear understanding ~~we shall stand~~
~~shoulder to shoulder with America in the~~
and a mutual trust we shall by virtue of
our united strength and our common
purposes be prepared to defend the rights
of humanity not only upon the American
continent but throughout the civilized world.
Nevertheless we are ^{not} feeling with what

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may occur in the future but with the actual facts of yesterday and today - and I would be glad to know if you still think that a power which without protest witnesses the ruthless spoliation of Belgium and Serbia, and without effective action the murder of her own citizens would have interfered to protect the property or the liberties of Canadians. Surely you must at least admit an element of doubt - and even if such interference had been attempted have we not the admission of the Americans themselves that it could not have been successful against the great naval and military organizations of the Central Powers?

May I be permitted to include that had the Allies been defeated Canada must necessarily have suffered a similar fate.

But there was ^{the other} alternative, namely that the Allies, ^{even} without the assistance of Canada ~~would not~~ have been defeated. What then? Presumably French

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of the English citizen can we hope to ~~ever~~ ^{ever}
~~become~~ become a nation ourselves?
 How could we ever acquire ~~that~~ ^{that} Saul
 or create ~~the~~ ^{the} Pride without which a
 nation is a dead thing and doomed
 to ~~fade away~~ ^{fade away} and to ~~disappear~~ ^{speedy decay}
 and disappearance.

If you were truly a nationalist... if you
 loved our great country and without
 swallowness longed to see her ^{become the home of} good and
 smiled ^{people} surely you ^{would} have recognized
 this as her moment of travail and
 tribulation. You would have felt that in
 the agony of her ^{loss} in Belgium and
 France Canada ^{was} suffering the birth pangs
 of ^{her} national life. There never more than in
 Canada herself her citizens are being knit
^{into a solid} ^{gesture of} ^{unity} together for when men stand side by side
 and endure a soldier's life and face together
 a soldier's death they are united in bonds ^{almost}
 as strong as ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~strongest~~ ^{closest} of blood-ties.

There was the great opportunity - for the
 true nationalist! There was the great issue,
 the great sacrifice, which should have
 appealed equally to all true citizens of Canada -
 and should have served to cement them ^{together}

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indissoluble strength. Canada was
 at war! Canada was attacked! What
 mattered, then internal dissensions and
 questions of home importance. Could you not
 have learned a lesson from loyal Ireland?
 What mattered the ~~where~~ and ~~wherefor~~ of the
 war, ~~or even the fact~~ whether we owed
 anything to England or not - whether we
 were Imperialists or not - or whether we
 were French or English? The one simple
 commanding fact to govern our conduct
 was that Canada was at war and
 Canada and Canadian liberties had to
 be protected.

So you as a "Nationalist" this fact
 should have appealed more than to any
 other. Englishmen as was natural
 returned to fight for England just as
 Germans & Austrians & Belgians & Italians
 returned to fight for their native lands.

But we Canadians had we no call
 just as resistent, just as compelling to
 fight for Canada? Did not the Leipzig and
 the Prussian possibly receive victories and

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Vancouver and did you not feel
 the patriotism to make sacrifices for
 the protection of British Columbia? How
 could you otherwise call yourself
 Canadian? It is true ^{that} Canada did not
 hear the roar of German guns nor were
 we visited at night by the murderous
 Zeppelins but every shot that was fired
 in Belgium or France was aimed as
 much at the heart of Canada as at
 the bodies of our brave Allies. Could
 we then wait ^{with} in the temporary safety
 of our distant shores until either
 the Central Powers flushed with
 victory should come to settle their
 account or until by the glorious
 death of millions of our fellowmen in Europe
 Canada should remain in inglorious
 security and a shameful liberty?

I give thanks that ~~you have not~~
~~to answer that question~~ that question
 has been answered not as you ^{Canada} have
 but as those ^{Canada} who
 have already died or are about to die ~~have~~

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here in this gallant ^{matter} Cause of France have answered it.

It may have been difficult for you at first to have realized the full significance of the situation. You were steeped in your belief that Canada owed no debt to England, was merely a vassal state and entitled to protection without payment. You were deeply imbued with the principle that we should not participate in a war in which the declaration of which we had no say. You believed very sincerely that Canadian soldiers should not be called upon to fight beyond the frontier of Canada itself and your ^{faithful} vision was obscured by your indignation at the apparent injustice to a friend ^{minority} in Ontario. ^{in account of his long held attitude of mind}

This is credible that at first ^{and because} it seemed that Canadian aid was hardly necessary. ^{not for every} ~~then~~ we feared that the war would be over before the first Canadian Government should land in France. ~~that~~ You should have continued to ~~failed~~ ^{adapt} your mind to the new situation and should for a while have continued in your former views. But now, now that Canada has pledged herself

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body and soul to the successful
 prosecution of this war. Now that we know
 that only by the exercise of our full
 and united strength can we achieve a
~~fast~~ speedy and casting victory - now
 that thousands of your fellow citizens
 have ~~been~~ ^{been} killed and alas even more ~~may~~ ^{must}
 yet be killed - how in the name of all
 that you may hold most sacred can you
 still maintain your opposition. How can
 you refrain from using all your influence
 and your personal indignation and eloquence
 to swell the great army of Canada and
 make it the representative of all ~~sections~~
 classes of our citizens as possible.

~~As my name could not have been the
 right one I have withdrawn~~

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O my cousin could you have been here
 to witness in its horrible detail the cruelty
 of war - to have seen your comrades suddenly
 struck down, and ^{in death lie} mangled at your side - you
 could not have failed to wish to visit
 punishment upon those responsible. You
 too would wish to see every ounce of our
 united strength instantly and reluctantly
 directed to that end. Afterwards when that
 end has been accomplished then and then
 only can there be honour or profit in the
 discussion of our domestic or imperial
 disputes.

And so my first reason for your
 support would be that you should assist
 in the defence of Canadian territory and
 Canadian liberties.

And my second would be this.
 Whatever criticism may today be properly
 directed against the constitutional structure
 of the British Empire we are compelled to
 admit that the union of the self-governing
 portions of the Empire is a most necessary
 and desirable thing. Surely you will concede
 that the degree of civilization which they
 represent and the standards of individual
 and national liberties for which they stand
 are the highest and noblest to which the
 human race has yet attained and
 jealously to be protected against destruction
 by less developed powers. All ways not

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be perfection - grave and serious faults
 no doubt exist - vast progress must
 still be made - nevertheless that which has
 been achieved is good and must not be
 allowed to disappear. The Bonds which
 unite us for certain great purposes and
 which have proved so powerful in this
 common struggle must not be loosened. They
 may indeed be readjusted but ~~the~~ the
 great communities which the
 British Empire has joined together
 must not be broken asunder. If I
 thought that the development of a national
 spirit in Canada meant antagonism to
 the spirit which unites the empire today I
 would utterly repudiate the idea of a
 Canadian nation and would gladly accept
 the most exacting of imperial organic unions.

Hitherto I have welcomed your nationalism
 because I thought it could only mean that
 you wished Canada to assume national
 responsibilities as well as ^{enjoy} its privileges.

But your attitude in the present crisis
 will obliterate and antagonize the support
 which you might otherwise have received.
 Can you not realize that if any ~~one~~ worthy
 nationality is possible for Canada it must
 be sympathetic to and must cooperate
 with the fine spirit of imperial unity. That
 spirit was endangered by the outbreaks of
 European war. It could only be preserved
 by loyal participation ^{assistance} by all those in whom

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opportunity which could ever have presented itself for us to show unity of purpose and to prove to our English fellow-citizens that - whatever our respective histories may have been we were actuated by a common love for our country and a mutual wish that in the future we should unite our distinctive talents and energies to create a grand and happy nation.

That was an opportunity which your my cousin have failed to grasp and unfortunately despite the heroic and able manner in which French Canadian battalions have distinguished themselves here and despite the whole hearted support which so many leaders of French Canadian thought have given to the cause yet the fact remains that the French in Canada have not responded in the same proportion as have other Canadian citizens and the unhappy impression has been created that French Canadians are not ~~contributing~~ bearing their full share in this great Canadian enterprise. For this fact and this in Moscow you would

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heed largely responsible. Will your ~~name~~
~~name~~ Do you fully realize what such a
 responsibility will mean not so much to
 you personally - for that I would care little -
 but for the principles which you have
 advocated and for some of which I have
 had the deepest regard. You will have
 brought them into a dispute from which
 they may never recover. Already you have
 made the fine term of Nationalist to
 stand in the nostrils of our English
 fellow citizens. Have you caused them to
 respect your national views? Have you
 won their admiration for or led them to
 consider with esteem and veneration your
 ambitions for the French Campaign? Have
 you shown yourself worthy of consideration
 or consideration?

After this war what influence will you
 enjoy - what good to your country will you
 be able to accomplish? Wherever you go you
 will stir up strife and enmity. You will
 bring disgrace and dishonour upon our
 race so that who ever bears a French name
 in Canada will be an object of suspicion
 and possibly of hatred.

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considerations aside and even supposing
 Canada had been a neutral country I
 would have had you decide that ~~Canada~~^{she}
 should enter the struggle, ~~for no other reason~~^{that} ~~that~~^{is a fight}
 a fight for the freedom of the world, in
 the rank of peoples like every other
 country she is ^{herself} actually interested. I will
 not further speak of the causes of this
 war ~~but~~^{but} I should ~~like~~^{like} to think that
 even if Canada had been an independent
 and neutral nation she of her own
 accord would have chosen to follow the
 same ~~path of glory~~^{path of glory} course that she
 is following today.

Perhaps my cousin I have been
 overlong and tedious with my reasons
 but I shall be shorter with my warning
 and in closing I wish to say this to you.
 Those of us in this great army, who may
 be so fortunate ^{as} to return to our Canada
 will have faced the grimest and sincerest
 issues of life and death - we will have
 experienced the unhappy sheyths of brute force -
 we will have seen our loved comrades die
 in blood and suffering.

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Beware lest we return with revengeful feelings for I say to you that ~~for~~ those who while we fought and suffered here remained in safety and comfort in Canada and failed to give us encouragement and support as well as ~~for~~ those who grew great with the wealth dishonestly gained by political graft and by dishonest ^{methods} business at our expense - We shall demand a heavy day of reckoning. ~~But~~ shall inflict ^{upon them} the punishment they deserve - not by physical violence ^{for} we shall have ^{had} enough of that - nor by unconstitutional or illegal means - for we are fighting to protect ^{not to destroy} justice and freedom ~~and to destroy~~ it - but by the invincible power of our moral influence.

Can you ask us then for sympathy or concession? Will any listen when you speak of pride and patriotism? I think not. ~~I think that even you will admit for a~~ ~~future.~~

Remember too that if Canada has become a nation respected and self-respecting ~~it has~~ she owes ^{it} to her citizens ~~who~~ who have fought and died in this distant land and not to those self-styled nationalists who have remained at home.

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24.

Can I hope that anything I have said here may influence you to consider the situation in a different light - and that it is not yet too late for me to be made proud of our relationship?

1389

Sam
Lins

Isaac DuRoi

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