

NEWSPAPERS AND THE WAR.

The Financial Post, itself one of the foremost critics of the Government in connection with the war, devoted considerable comment in its last issue to the attitude of Canadian newspapers in this respect. It finds that "some newspapers—as fervently loyal to Canada and the Empire as any newspapers we have—have reserved the right of constructive criticism. Other newspapers have surrendered it. One, at least, of the country's leading daily newspapers will not even run news reports of criticisms made of the Government by other people." On the other hand, it finds that "the press in England reserves the right of outspoken criticism of the Government's policies and methods in fighting the war."

We have no doubt the Post will admit that a newspaper has a right to criticize or withhold criticism according to its judgment, and that it may or may not be influenced by information which has come to its attention. If this is the case, it scarcely is to be expected that all newspapers will interpret events alike, even overlooking the possibility of an urge for political advantage. Although the press of England reserves the right of outspoken criticism, it is not uniform in using the right. The privilege to criticize implies liberty to withhold criticism if it is considered in the common interest to do so. We don't believe political democracy hangs on such a slender thread that it has to operate only one way to survive.

While the right to criticize is one of democracy's priceless privileges, self-imposed censorship in the name of patriotism is also a priceless privilege obtaining only in a democracy. Its free exercise is a more valuable demonstration than grudging concession to the censor's rules. We are disposed to commend those Canadian newspapers which voluntarily restrain themselves while waiting to see how the Government's program works out, knowing that they can open up any time they find it necessary.

Much of the criticism levelled at the Government so far has been due to the fact that the nation's preparedness for the war has been unwisely explained and over-emphasized. That there has been a great deal of dissatisfaction with the manner in which the country has changed from a peace economy to war cannot be denied. Lack of uniforms, boots and guns, and failure to make prompt provision for dependents' allowances come

directly under the public eye. The reasons for this state of affairs have not been made known in a way to gain sympathetic understanding, if indeed this is possible. The Government's mistake, next to this lack of preparedness, has been in failing to take the public into its confidence on the monumental difficulties encountered in making a quick transition.

There is room to hope, however, that we shall grow out of this situation quickly, not because of criticism, but because any government must realize that it has to be done. The Globe and Mail, for its part, has made every possible effort to understand the broad picture of Canada's war effort, and has preferred to stand against the wide demand for censure rather than take the easier course of following it. This has been done in a spirit of fairness and patriotism, not to stifle criticism, and we believe this is the attitude of most Canadian newspapers. We have no wish to impute dishonest motives to the public men directing affairs at this moment any more than to the Financial Post or other newspapers which take a different view.

When Parliament meets a few weeks hence and the Government has to give an account of its stewardship we are sure the press will not be found lacking in fearless criticism if necessary, or in commendation if this is found to be merited.

We have great respect for Canada's financial weekly, but cannot agree with the nature of its campaign of condemnation since the start of the war concerning acts of the Government previous to the war. The individual attacks it has kept up are not, in our opinion, in the best public interest, but we do not deny the Financial Post the right to disagree with us.

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