

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 60

### “Very Unkind of Those Canadians”

#### Transcript

[music: Ragtime Fanfare]

In the United States, the Democratic Party won a landslide in the midterm elections of 1910. Even Theodore Roosevelt felt discouraged enough to acknowledge that “the American people feel a little tired of me.”

President Taft, as leader of the party, took the defeat even more to heart, expressing his dismay in hyperbolic terms. “It was not only a landslide,” he said, “but a tidal wave and holocaust all rolled up into one general cataclysm.” But what did it portend for the future of the United States?

Welcome to the History of the Twentieth Century.

[music: Ragtime Opening Theme]

Episode 60. Very Unkind of Those Canadians.

When we last looked at the political situation in the United States, William Howard Taft was President and his Republican Party had just been pummeled in the 1910 mid-term elections. Former president Theodore Roosevelt is now out giving speeches, expressing increasingly Progressive positions, and a split was developing between the former friends and political allies.

I haven’t said much about the Republican and Democratic parties in the United States at this time. In fact, you may have noticed I keep using words like progressive and conservative, which are ideologies, but not parties. And up until now, the Democratic Party has mostly been a bit player in our narrative. Most of the action has been in the Republican Party. Now that the Democrats are surging, though, perhaps it’s time to pause for a moment and take a look at these two parties and who they represent.

The Republican and Democratic parties of 1910 resemble their modern versions in some ways, but are quite different in other ways. The two parties in 1910 are coalitions of certain demographics within American society. They are not well defined ideologically. In fact, as you may also have already noticed, there are progressives and conservatives in both parties.

If this seems strange to you, if you are accustomed to thinking about the US Democratic and Republican parties as divided primarily by ideology, the way they are in our time, you're going to have to put that idea aside, because for the first three quarters of the twentieth century, the US political parties are not primarily ideological. Similarly, if you are from another country, where ideological political parties are a normal and expected part of electoral politics, this may seem strange to you. But you'd better get used to it, as this is how American politics will work for most of the twentieth century.

All right, then, so if American political parties don't break down by ideology, how *do* they break down? Well, there are two important splits in American society that appeared in the nineteenth century, and these are the lines along which the two parties organized themselves.

The first split is the American Civil War. The war is long in the past by 1910, but the social divisions left behind continue to define the two parties. The Republican Party began as an anti-slavery party, and this was the party that prosecuted the Civil War and oversaw Reconstruction. So, some of the core constituencies of this party are the people who used to be the most vehement abolitionists. Groups like the Quakers, and the Congregationalists, the New England church that is sometimes called Puritan. But besides abolitionists, most ordinary people in the northern and western states of the US who remember the Civil War, or whose parents did, people who supported the war against the Confederacy as a matter of patriotism, became Republicans, because that was the party fighting to save the United States.

Conversely, in the South, especially in the eleven states that were once part of the Confederacy, white citizens are overwhelmingly Democrats. African-Americans in the South, former slaves and their children, were overwhelmingly Republican, but by 1910, white Southern Democrats have largely succeeded in their twenty-year project to take away from African-Americans most if not all of the rights that they had gained as a result of the Union victory in the Civil War.

If that was all there was to the Democratic Party, you might think it a party of regional resentment, destined to wither away as the Civil War becomes a fading memory. But outside the South, Democrats have found a whole new constituency: Catholics.

Well, that's a bit of an oversimplification. But until 1840, most white immigrants to the US were from the British Isles or Germany or Scandinavia, and were Protestant. To a lot of old American families, America was inherently a Protestant country. This began to change with large scale Irish immigration after 1840. Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European immigrants to America were coming less frequently from northern European Protestant countries, and increasingly were desperately poor people from southern and eastern European Catholic and Orthodox countries, like Italy and Poland and Russia. Now, these people were not all Catholic. Many were Orthodox, and, of course, many were Jewish.

But to the white American descendants of Protestant immigrants of generations past, these newcomers looked quite different. They congregated in big cities, in ethnic enclaves where the language of the old country was heard more often than English, and they seemed to resist American ways and American values. While there were many reasons for this, a lot of Protestant Americans latched onto Catholicism as the overarching explanation. Protestants, in their own view, were inherently individualists and republican. I mean republican with a small “r.” Catholics, by contrast, were seen as embracing an inherently hierarchical and pro-monarchical faith, where opinions were handed down from on high and individuals were encouraged to follow the herd and dissent was discouraged. Protestants saw Catholicism as inconsistent with Americanism, and religious conversion a precondition to assimilation.

And so there was much hostility and suspicion directed toward these Catholic immigrants. It was thought they were more loyal to the Pope than they were to America and that perhaps one day they would use America’s democratic institutions to impose Papal rule on all Americans. Catholics got the worst jobs and the worst places to live. Banks would not loan money to Catholics. They were also blamed for rising street crime in America’s cities.

In part, this was pure anti-Catholic bigotry. But it was also about hostility to foreigners, to poor people, to people who spoke languages Americans couldn’t understand, who ate foods that seemed strange, who practiced customs that struck Americans as just plain weird. “Catholic” was a convenient label to summarize what was wrong with all these immigrants, even the ones that weren’t really Catholic.

The immigrants, for their part, were people who came to the US to flee poverty. Many had unrealistic expectations for what awaited them in the New World. A lot of them ended up in the sort of miserable, grinding poverty we’ve already talked about as endemic to the working classes at this time. Many of them became disenchanting, embittered, and politically radical. As for their ethnic communities and their religion, well, these were about the only things they had in America that *hadn’t* disappointed them, and so they clung to them fiercely.

But while the Republican establishment of the Northeast and Midwest was trying to convince these immigrants to give up their religious and ethnic identities as a precondition for becoming real Americans, the Democratic Party machines in the big cities of those regions, where most of these new immigrants lived, embraced them as they were. The cities became a patchwork of different ethnic neighborhoods. The Italian neighborhood over here, the Jewish neighborhood over there, the Ukrainian neighborhood down the street, and so on. None of these groups had the electoral clout to rule the city themselves, but Democrats worked out ways to weld them together into an electoral coalition. The glue of this coalition was political patronage, which was a widespread practice of both parties at the time.

So if Italians were, say 20% of the coalition, after the Democrats took over City Hall, 20% of the city jobs went to ward leaders in the Italian neighborhood, to distribute to their Democratic

supporters. Since public jobs were far superior to the crappy work that most immigrants got stuck with in the private sector, this was a big deal, and these ethnic groups became more and more loyal to the Democratic Party.

And then there were African Americans. As white southerners asserted political control and made life in the South harder for African Americans, many tried moving to the big cities of the North, seeking the same sort of opportunities the immigrants were after. The Democratic machines in these cities easily and smoothly embraced African-Americans as one more ethnic group in their multi-ethnic coalition.

We've seen in past episodes the rise of muckraking journalism. The fear of the power of large corporations. The concern for the natural world, and for consumer product safety. Laws to limit hours and improve working conditions. And we bundle all this under the label "progressivism." So how does progressivism impact these two political parties? On the Democratic side, the urban working class are the sort of people who in Germany would be voting Social Democrat or in Britain would be voting Labor. They love it. The Southern Democrats are inherently more conservative, but the progressives aren't threatening their iron grip on political power. Anyway, it's not like white southern Democrats are intrinsically against, say, meat inspection laws. So, less enthusiasm, perhaps, for progressive ideals, but no opposition to them.

Republicans, by contrast, have a wing of the party, generally western and rural, that supports progressivism, and an eastern business and professional wing of the party that opposes it. So the rise of progressivism splits the Republican coalition. And it drives many of the most ardent progressives into the Democratic Party, because the Democrats don't have many prominent national leaders fiercely opposed to progressivism, the way Republicans do.

[music: "Alexander's Ragtime Band"]

But I'd like to set aside American politics for a moment and talk about an important American musical event that occurred in March, 1911. Because that was when a 22-year old Russian-born Jewish American songwriter and insomniac named Irving Berlin published "Alexander's Ragtime Band," a milestone in American music. It was the first "hit song" in history.

Berlin already had a modest reputation as a songwriter by 1911, previously best known for a little ditty entitled "My Wife's Gone to the Country (Hurrah! Hurrah!)," but "Alexander's Ragtime Band" made him internationally famous. In an era when songwriters made their money on sheet music at five or ten cents a pop, "Alexander's Ragtime Band" sold over a million copies in the first year in the United States alone. Berlin said he bought his mother a house with the proceeds, all the more remarkable when you consider that Berlin was self taught and hadn't learned to read or write music. He needed a secretary to write his music down for him.

“Alexander’s Ragtime Band” was recorded for the first time in 1911, and in the course of the twentieth century it would be performed and recorded over and over again by some of the biggest names in music: Billy Murray, Al Jolson, Bessie Smith, Louis Armstrong, Bing Crosby, Johnny Mercer, Judy Garland, Ray Charles, Donald O’Connor, Liberace, Ella Fitzgerald, Liza Minnelli, Julie Andrews, the Bee Gees.

If Irving Berlin had died in 1911, “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” alone would have made him a name in American popular music. But he would live to the age of 101, passing away in 1989, and he would go on to write many American standards, like “A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody,” “Puttin’ On the Ritz,” “There’s No Business Like Show Business,” “White Christmas,” and “God Bless America.” He was the greatest songwriter America ever produced. “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” caught on big in Europe, too, even in Russia, ironically, because, hello, Russia, you could have had Irving Berlin all to yourselves if you could just get over the whole oppressing Jewish people thing.

After “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” became a hit, Berlin was called “The Ragtime King,” much to the irritation of Scott Joplin, twice his age and never having enjoyed anything like the kind of success that had come to Berlin after this one song. “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” is credited with reviving interest in ragtime, but although most people you might ask in 1911 would have agreed that this song counted as ragtime, the prevailing view today is that it is not. It’s closer to being a march, actually, although with a touch of ragtime syncopation and a relaxed melody that nicely complements the informal language of the lyrics. I like to think of it as a pivotal moment in the transition of popular music from ragtime to jazz, although in truth, it is neither. It is, simply, a foundational American popular song.

[music: “Alexander’s Ragtime Band”]

As we have seen, President Taft was getting flak for not being progressive enough, which is likely due at least in part to his having been a lawyer and a judge. He just wasn’t comfortable with Theodore Roosevelt’s aggressive brand of bombast. But in the area of anti-trust litigation which, hey, you’d expect a lawyer and judge to be perfectly comfortable in, well, Taft was perfectly comfortable in it. The Taft administration initiated more anti-trust actions in four years than the Roosevelt administration did in seven. It also inherited responsibility for continuing litigation that had begun under the predecessor administration. And one of these cases that it inherited was Roosevelt’s anti-trust suit against the granddaddy of all trusts, John D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil Company.

We’ve already seen how huge and unscrupulous this company has been. We’ve also seen how the oil industry in the US is growing. At about this time, the United States displaced the Russian Empire as the world’s largest oil-producing nation. The rising popularity of the automobile is increasing demand for gasoline, and gasoline is a component of petroleum. Two decades ago, oil companies didn’t know what to do with gasoline. Now, the demand is rising.

Standard Oil is still *the* company in the oil business, but the American oil industry has been growing faster than even Standard Oil can keep up with. Standard controlled close to 90% of the US oil business when Theodore Roosevelt first was sworn in as President. By the time the Roosevelt administration began its anti-trust suit against Standard Oil in 1906, that figure was down to 70%. But that's still a big share.

The stakes in this case were so high that it was a foregone conclusion that it would go all the way to the Supreme Court. In 1911, the Court handed down its decision that Standard Oil was indeed an unlawful monopoly. By that time, the state of New Jersey had begun to permit New Jersey corporations to hold stock in corporations chartered in other states. As a result, the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey became the holding company for all the other Standard Oil companies. The Court ordered Standard Oil of New Jersey to divest itself of its holdings in 33 other companies, and hand these over to its own shareholders, and not to another trust or holding company.

The result of this was an unprecedented breakup of one enormous corporation into a collection of many corporations, some of which would continue to be major players in the US oil industry for the rest of the century.

Twelve of the companies would continue to operate under the name "Standard Oil." They would become Standard Oil of Missouri, or Standard Oil of Kansas, and so on. The major companies would be Standard Oil of Indiana, which would later rename itself the American Oil Company, or Amoco, Standard Oil of California, which would later become Socal, for Standard Oil California, and later still, Chevron, and Standard Oil of New York, which would call itself Socony, for Standard Oil of New York, and later Mobil. As for Standard Oil of New Jersey, still the biggest one of all, it would come to be known as Esso, as in S.O., as in an abbreviation for Standard Oil, and later Exxon. Over the years, these largest and most successful of the Standard Oil children would buy out many other oil companies, both within and without the Standard Oil family, the ultimate merger coming in 1999, when Exxon and Mobil would merge back together to form ExxonMobil, which then became the largest oil company in the world, and it still is today.

The break-up of Standard Oil also led to the spinoff of a couple dozen refining, pipeline, and chemical companies, including South Penn Oil Company, later Pennzoil, and Chesebrough Manufacturing. This last company was originally founded in Pennsylvania by Robert Chesebrough in 1859, the same year commercial oil drilling started. Chesebrough took an interest in the potential medicinal uses of petroleum products, and took note of the fact that drill bits collected a sticky, gooey substance that the men in the drilling crews would apply to their own skin to treat cuts and burns. The drillers called this stuff "rod wax." Chesebrough learned how to extract and purify the stuff, and began marketing it under the trade name "Vaseline,"

apparently a portmanteau of Wasser, the German word for water, and olion, the Greek word for oil.

Chesebrough's company was eventually bought out by Standard Oil, and it became independent again after the Court's decision. By this time, Chesebrough was selling over two dozen different forms of Vaseline, and the stuff was being promoted for everything from skin care to hair tonic to polishing boots to lubricating axles to embalming corpses. Chesebrough himself promoted swallowing a spoonful every day as a preventative, and my own grandmother used to take it as a remedy for sore throat. Not that *I* am recommending any of this. Quite the opposite. Please do *not* swallow petroleum jelly or put it in your mouth. And if you do, don't sue *me*, because I just told you *not* to. Go sue Chesebrough or my grandmother, if you like, since they're both dead.

The independent Chesebrough company would later merge with Pond's Extracts, a patent medicine company that moved into skin creams after patent medicines lost their market, and the combined company would later be bought up by the consumer products conglomerate Unilever, which still sells products under the trademark name Vaseline to this day.

But I digress. Some critics have argued, and still argue to this day, that Standard Oil was big only because it produced better products at a lower cost, and the break-up was unwarranted. But there's more to antitrust considerations than the price of the product. During the congressional debate on the Sherman Act in 1890, Republican Representative William Mason of Illinois said, "If the price of oil...were reduced to one cent a barrel, it would not right the wrongs done to people of this country by the trusts which have destroyed legitimate competition and driven honest men from legitimate business enterprise."

Some argue that since Standard Oil's share of the oil business was declining, it would eventually have lost its monopoly status anyway. I think the most important fact about the breakup of Standard Oil is that the stock prices of the 34 corporations that Standard Oil was broken into collectively doubled almost at once and doubled again in the next eight years. Ironically, John D. Rockefeller's personal fortune increased by \$450 million as a result of the breakup. So, if you believe in the free market, well, the free market is telling us that the breakup was a boon for everyone.

There have been many other antitrust suits since then, and there were some that were aimed at dismantling other large corporations in the way that Standard Oil had been broken up. Corporations like General Motors and Microsoft. But the only other antitrust suit in US history that is comparable to this one was the breakup of AT&T, the American Telephone and Telegraph company, in 1984.

But there is one other antitrust suit from this period that we need to examine, and it involves another corporate behemoth we've already had a look at: The United States Steel Corporation. You may recall from back in episode 43 how President Roosevelt gave the green light for US

Steel to acquire the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company as a way of staving off a financial panic. You may also recall that the deal was presented to Roosevelt as US Steel being a good citizen and pitching in to avert a financial crisis, but in fact the company got TC&I for a ridiculously low price.

Roosevelt had promised not to take anti-trust action against US Steel for the acquisition, but after the Democrats took control of the House of Representatives in 1910, they launched an investigation into this deal. And even though Roosevelt personally appeared before the investigating committee to defend his decision, the Democratic-controlled committee concluded that J.P. Morgan and US Steel had used the Panic of 1907 as cover for this shady deal, and that the former President had been hoodwinked.

Roosevelt took umbrage at this conclusion, and his umbrage became outrage on October 27, 1911. On that date, the headline story in most newspapers was that the Taft Administration had filed an anti-trust action against US Steel, requesting that the corporation be broken up. The headlines stung. "Roosevelt Deceived." "Roosevelt Fooled." The *Philadelphia Record* wrote, "Mr. Taft has kicked him on the shins..." The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* wrote, "This is an official statement that, as president, Theodore Roosevelt was concerned in a lawless act."

Oh, and by the way, October 27, 1911, was Theodore Roosevelt's 53<sup>rd</sup> birthday. So, happy birthday, Mr. President. Happy birthday to you.

Theodore Roosevelt is not one to take something like this lying down. He wrote a magazine article in response to the anti-trust suit that was a blistering attack on Taft's anti-trust policy. And the public sided with Roosevelt, which must have left Taft something close to stupefied. It had been anti-trust litigation that had made Roosevelt a name as a progressive. Now Taft was out-Roosevelting Roosevelt, and he was getting smacked down for it.

The truth was, the national mood had changed. The public wanted more regulation of businesses like US Steel, to deter and prevent unfair trade practices *before* they led to an unlawful monopoly, rather than a policy of waiting until the crime was committed, and then going after the perpetrators. As for US Steel, Roosevelt argued in his article that there was no evidence the company held a monopoly position. US Steel's share of the steel industry was steadily declining. In fact, the US Steel of 1911, *after* the merger with TC&I, held a smaller share of the steel market than the US Steel of 1907 had held, *before* the merger.

Republicans from both wings of the party were cheered by the public split between Taft and Roosevelt. Progressives disappointed with Taft's caution rallied to the former president, while conservatives were cheered by the fact that Roosevelt was condemning Taft for pushing business regulation too far. In December 1911, a newspaper poll of Republican voters showed that 75% wanted to see Theodore Roosevelt become the Republican presidential nominee in 1912.

This was bad news for William Howard Taft, as well as for another Republican with an eye on the White House, Wisconsin Senator Robert La Follette, known to Progressives as “Fighting Bob,” and one of the most famous and influential US Senators in the history of that body.

Robert Marion La Follette was born in 1855 in a log cabin in Dane County, Wisconsin. His father died when he was an infant, and he had had an unhappy childhood, owing to a troubled relationship with his stepfather. He attended the University of Wisconsin, where he met his future wife, Belle Case, an ardent feminist and women’s suffrage advocate. He joined the bar in 1880, married Belle in 1881, and in 1885, at the age of thirty, was nominated by the Republican Party for the post of Dane County District Attorney. He served two terms in that position, then, in 1884, was elected to the US House of Representatives. He served three terms in the House, where he made a name for himself as an outspoken advocate for equal rights for African-Americans and Native Americans. He argued that the Republican Party had lost touch with its roots and become the party of big business. But he would lose his House seat in the Democratic landslide of 1890, and he returned to Wisconsin to begin a law practice in Madison.

La Follette became radicalized (or maybe I should say, *more* radicalized) in 1891, when one of Wisconsin’s US Senators offered him a bribe in exchange for helping to fix a court case. La Follette was infuriated by this brazen attempt by one of the most powerful Republicans in the state to use his position to gain special favors. He spent the next several years campaigning across Wisconsin for reform of the Republican Party. He opposed the powerful lumber and railroad interests that mostly controlled the party, and built alliances with rural farmers, Scandinavian immigrants, and other groups whose interests the Republicans were ignoring. He won the Republican nomination for governor of Wisconsin in 1900, and his insurgent campaign attracted the attention of muckraker journalist Lincoln Steffens. La Follette won that election, at the same time Theodore Roosevelt was elected vice president.

Governor La Follette favored taxation and regulation of the railroads, a workers’ compensation program, a minimum wage, women’s suffrage, direct election of Senators, and progressive taxation. He became the leading Progressive voice of his time. But he couldn’t get his agenda through the Wisconsin legislature, controlled as it was by Stalwart Republicans, as the conservative Republicans of the time were called. He cut deals with the Democrats and with Progressive Republicans to get some of his proposals enacted, and spent his time criss-crossing the state during legislative elections reading out the names of the Republicans in Madison who were blocking his Progressive initiatives. He was re-elected Governor in 1904, at the same time as Roosevelt’s successful Presidential campaign, and was returned to Madison along with a more progressive legislature.

In 1905, after the new legislature was sworn in and seated, they needed to select a new Senator. La Follette nominated himself as Senator and got this approved. But he remained Governor for one more year, leaving that Senate seat vacant. He needed the year to work with the legislature to

enact his 1904 platform, he said. And in 1906, he resigned as Governor to take up his new position as a United States Senator. He would remain a Senator after the transition from legislatively selected Senators to popularly elected Senators, and would hold this seat in the Senate until his death in 1925.

La Follette became the most prominent Progressive in Congress and was largely a supporter of President Roosevelt, although the two men were never close. La Follette saw Roosevelt as an opportunist, a man who had ridden the wave of progressivism that folks like Bob La Follette had put all the work into, and then claimed all the credit for himself. Roosevelt saw La Follette as too radical. An extremist. A troublemaker.

La Follette was one of the many Progressive Republicans who saw William Howard Taft as selling out their movement. In 1909, he and his wife Belle founded a magazine called *La Follette's Magazine*, to provide a vehicle to promote Progressive views. In 1929, four years after La Follette's death, this magazine would be renamed *The Progressive*, and continues to be published to this day.

In January 1911, following the Democratic blowout in last year's midterm election, La Follette convened a meeting in his Washington home of the biggest names in the Progressive movement. He told them that the election results had shown that the Progressive Republican candidates in the West had done just fine in the midterms. What hurt the party was the public revulsion with the Stalwart big business Republicans of the East. He meant to change that, and save the Republican Party from another drubbing in 1912. His idea was to form a new Progressive organization within the Republican Party, the Progressive League, to help keep the Republican Party true to the Progressive vision. It might also prove a useful vehicle for Bob La Follette, should he choose to challenge William Howard Taft for the 1912 Presidential nomination, as seems increasingly likely.

La Follette even swallowed his pride and wrote a personal letter to Theodore Roosevelt, inviting him to join the Progressive League. Roosevelt's name and popularity, La Follette wrote, would be a huge boost to the fledgling effort. Roosevelt wrote back, thanking La Follette for the invitation, but declined the offer to join the League.

[music: Overture to *Treemonisha*]

Just as La Follette was putting together his Progressive League, William Howard Taft unveiled a new tariff reduction plan. Here would be his chance to bounce back from the disappointing outcome of his earlier attempt at tariff reform. This time, instead of an across-the-board tariff reduction, which had proved to be technically challenging and politically difficult, he came up with a simpler idea. A free trade agreement with Canada.

The agreement had been negotiated with the Liberal government of Canada, under the premiership of Wilfrid Laurier. Laurier had been the Canadian Prime Minister for almost 15 years at this time, which remains to this day the longest uninterrupted premiership in Canadian history. Laurier would sit in the Canadian House of Commons for a total of 45 years, also a record that still stands. He was the leader of the Liberal Party for almost 32 years, also a record. Laurier was Canada's first francophone prime minister, and to this day is regarded by Canadians as one of their nation's greatest leaders.

The Liberal Party, of course, is the party of free trade and low tariffs, so this was a natural deal for a Liberal government to agree to. At this point in Canadian history, it is the western, agrarian provinces of Canada that are the Liberal base. Canadian farmers like the idea of free trade, because it means more export markets and therefore higher prices for their produce, and cheaper imported manufactured goods. The manufacturing interests of eastern Canada, especially Ontario, tended to support tariffs and vote Conservative for precisely the opposite reasons.

President Taft called a special session of Congress to enact the American side of the agreement. For the Taft administration, the beauty of this arrangement they had negotiated with the Canadians was that it would not require a treaty. A treaty would have to be ratified by 2/3 of the US Senate, a daunting prospect with so many conservative Republican men of business sitting in that body. Instead, this agreement merely required the legislatures of the two countries to enact reduced tariffs on each other's exports. This would require only a majority vote in the US Senate. It would also require the approval of the US House of Representatives, but as that body was controlled by Democrats, passage of the lower tariff was not seen as a problem.

What *was* a problem was that Progressive Republicans in the Senate mostly represented western agricultural states, and this includes Fighting Bob La Follette. Western progressives were committed to lower tariffs in principle, but in practice what they meant by lower tariffs was lower tariffs on manufactured imports, not on Canadian produce that would be competing head-to-head with what their own constituents were harvesting. And so the Progressive Republicans were distinctly lukewarm to this free trade proposal, and were mocked for it by their conservative opponents. This tarnished the reputation of politicians like La Follette, just as he was announcing his intention to run for President in 1912.

Nevertheless, the bill passed both houses of the US Congress. In the House, the new Speaker, Democratic Congressman James Beauchamp Clark of Missouri gave a stirring speech in favor of the agreement. But perhaps he got a little carried away when he started talking about how this trade deal was just the first step toward closer ties with Canada that would eventually result in a "time when the American flag will fly over every square foot of British North America, all the way up to the North Pole."

In the House, the speech was greeted with prolonged applause and an affirmative vote. In Canada, there was a furor. Um, since when was a US takeover on the agenda? The Conservatives

fanned the flames, calling Laurier disloyal to Britain and claiming the tariff agreement was a secret American plot to annex Canada. Some Liberals in the House of Commons broke with the government to oppose the agreement, and Laurier was forced to call a general election for September 1911 to settle the matter.

Anti-Americanism in Canada reached new heights that year. US newspapers began to advise Americans traveling to Canada not to call attention to their US citizenship. In the US, a Republican Congressman who opposed the agreement introduced a resolution into the House of Representatives calling on the Taft Administration to begin negotiations with the British government over the transfer of Canada to American control.

He didn't mean it, of course. His resolution was intended to provoke the Canadians and it succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. In the general election, the Canadian voters replaced a 133 seat Liberal majority with a 132 seat Conservative majority. The free trade deal was dead. William Howard Taft's top policy priority for the year, the project he spent the most time and energy and political capital upon, had ended in an embarrassing failure.

The *Boston Traveler*, its editors' tongues firmly in their cheeks, opined that "it was very unkind of those Canadians to deprive President Taft of his best argument for reelection just when he needed it the most."

We'll have to stop there for today. If you like *The History of the Twentieth Century*, why not like us on Facebook? Or follow us on Twitter? Come by the website, at [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com), where you can post a comment or ask a question. You can also see playlists of the music used in each episode, and check out some recommended reading. And check out our state-of-the-art 21<sup>st</sup> century donate button, where you can drop a few bucks and help support the podcast. And thanks to Tim, Jennifer, and Alan for their recent contributions. And I hope you'll join me next week on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we begin a two-episode look at the conquest of the South Pole. We just did the conquest of the North Pole in the previous episode, so now's a good time to turn our attention south. That's next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and a couple more things. First of all, it would take years for the federal anti-trust suit against US Steel to reach the Supreme Court. During that time, the company's share of the American steel market would continue to decline. The Court eventually ruled that US Steel was not in violation of the law, and the company won the case.

And also, in 1972, Canada ended the practice of putting the British monarch's portrait on its paper currency. From then until now, as I record this, Sir Wilfrid Laurier's portrait has appeared on the Canadian \$5 bill, which today is the smallest denomination of paper currency in Canada.

Canadian fans of the American television series *Star Trek* noted a resemblance between Laurier and the American actor Leonard Nimoy, and began a practice of coloring in hair, eyebrows, and ears on Laurier's portrait to make him look like Spock from the TV series. Canada experienced a dramatic upsurge in this practice, known colloquially as "Spocking," following Nimoy's death in 2015.

[music: Closing Theme]