

## The Great "Dominion": A Pamphlet written by an English Working Man 30 June 1884, R. James

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Volume 28, 1991

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/ilt28dc01>

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### Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

### ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this article

Ramsay, E. L. (1991). The Great "Dominion": A Pamphlet written by an English Working Man 30 June 1884, R. James. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 28, 261–270.

# DOCUMENT

## The Great "Dominion"

A Pamphlet written by an English Working Man

30 June 1884, R. James

transcribed by Ellen L. Ramsay

THE FOLLOWING TRANSCRIPT of a letter by R. James entitled "The Great 'Dominion': A Pamphlet written by an English Working man" 30 June 1885, is taken from a handwritten document found amongst the pages of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Annual Meeting, (Montreal 1884) Scrapbook I in the Blacker/Wood Library of McGill University. The transcriber has attempted to present the transcript of the document with as much fidelity to the language and grammar of the original as possible (ELR)

### "The Great 'Dominion'"

A Pamphlet written by an English working man

Climate	Summer and Winter
	Spring and Autumn
Population	Irish Canadians
	French Canadians
	Scotch, English & Foreigners
Labour	Tradesmen &
	Labourers            advice

Ellen L. Ramsay, "The Great 'Dominion': A Pamphlet written by an English working man, June 30, 1884, R. James," *Labour/Le Travail* 28 (Fall 1991), 261-69.

The Great Denial

A prophetic utterance by an English working man

Seasons { Summer & winter  
          { Spring & Autumn

Population { Irish Emigrants  
               { Irish Emigrants

Subjects { English & Foreigners

Labour { Englishmen & Irishmen

Wages

Food

Clothing

Housing

At the present time when the Dominion Government has  
made its best almost solely to the assistance which is given in  
providing for alternative living to the masses of emigrants from the  
old country it is important to know & have a clear idea of what  
state things are in & what are the prospects of the general mass of  
working men who come to this country - it cannot possibly be  
a far off aim, it ought to obtain the best in a short time &  
simple form, & this programme has induced me to write the  
following paper & as I am writing it from experience over  
the face of the land, I do not expect for a moment that it  
will be objected to as one-sided or untrue - It does not seem  
fair - in the first place, to touch upon all over the British Isles  
to have from possible, printed matter, the contents of which  
would induce some the most intelligent persons to think, all  
they need do is pay three pence more in the year, when they  
would be at once conveyed from a land of beggary poverty,  
& want, to a land of plenty, hope, & an abundance of labour.

In the first place are you poor, & only in possession of just  
what will pay you passage to it so - at the present time Scotland  
& Yorkshire will - because this country is decidedly a land of  
labourers - on every hand you can around you groups of men in  
the most humble form of clothing possible - I must remember,  
that was experienced, in all the many forms of labour required  
by employers - consequently, the new arrival's engagement is  
restricted in the first & second, or the farm, & in the third  
space I allow myself, I will endeavour to talk my reader along

Wages  
 Food  
 Clothing  
 Religion

AT THE PRESENT TIME when the Dominion Government has turned its back almost entirely to the assistance hitherto given in forwarding & in otherwise seeing to the welfare of emigrants from the old country it is important to know and have a clear idea of what state things are in & what are the prospects of the general mass of working men who come to this country — it cannot possibly be a few coppers ill spent to obtain the truth in a short clear & simple form, & this impression has induced me to write the following pages — & as I am writing it from experience over the face of the land, I do not expect for a moment that it will be objected to as one sided or untrue — It does not seem fair — in the first place, to launch forth all over the British isles in every form possible, printed matter, the contents of which would induce even the most intelligent persons to think, all they need do is pay three pounds over to the agents, when they would be at once conveyed from a land of hopeless poverty, & want, to a land of plenty, of hope, & an abundance of labour.

In the first place are you poor & only in possession of just what will pay your passage? — if so — at the present time hesitate & consider well — because this country is decidedly a land of labourers — on every hand you see around you groups of men in the most humble form of clothing possible — \* men remember that are experienced in all the many forms of labour required by employers — Consequently, the new arrival's engagement is restricted to the pick & shovel, or the farm, & in the short space I allow myself, I will endeavour to take my reader along with me & talk & explain & show him what I have learned as I have worked through the land for 3 long years — When I started, there were several important public works in full swing — now at the present time there is not a single one — & again I repeat, it is only fair that the English labourer should hear from one of his class, the real truth, given, perfectly fearless of contradiction — as an instance of the truth of what I write — take the rebellion in Manitoba & the North-West territory — the troops there have volunteered — entirely on account of the prospect it gave them to alter their present wretched state — the contrary may be asserted, still, were it at all possible, the vast majority of them would confirm this truth, hundreds of them are gone there from the various towns all over the dominion — &, losing the services of so many men from the wharves-docks-farms-factories etc, at the most critical & important time of the year — namely — the Spring, would it is thought greatly distress these industries — take Montreal as an instance — the Centre of Commerce — & employment of general labour — although regiments have gone from that City, up to the North-West, still her streets are crowded with men, all seeking employment, & *hundreds seeking in vain* — & this state of things applies throughout the whole of Canada-

Now it may be remarked that this is exceptional, but it is not — last year it was the same — this year it is even worse — with the probability of next winter being a perfect terror for the unemployed working-masses to contemplate.

### *Climate*

I WILL DEAL with the climate as an emigrant would meet it upon arrival, & so follow on through the year — supposing he comes out in what at home is called Spring — here I venture to say without fear of contradiction — & speaking honestly — there is no such a thing as Spring — one is so used to the vast endless waste of boundless snow, & solid masses of ice, one vast boundless area of ice snow, & bitter-cold, every where — when all at once the snow melts away — ice rots, & breaks up — the sun is out & nature jumps — not from winter to spring, but from Winter right into Summer — the Summer proper — is precisely the same, or as near as possible the same as the British isles — or at least near enough to being the same, perhaps, the Sun may be a trifle stronger in its rays — but this heat is invariably tempered by a cool wind almost always blowing — with an addition of more frequent & more violent thunder storms & heavy rain — there is seldom any spring rains, that being unnecessary, owing to the vast collections of snow.

### *Summer*

NOW ONE WOULD SUPPOSE every thing should be life & work — & so it is when there is work, but there is none — or comparatively none, for the vast numbers of men down from the woods, & innumerable winter hiding places — Will you go on a farm — ? “yes” (—very well, come along — rise at 5 Am breakfast & out by 6 — for breakfast porrage & milk — potatoes, & fried salt pork — dinner at noon — boiled salt pork, pea soup, bread butter & tea — Supper 6 P M — cold pork — & any additional the farmers wife may think proper — one thing almost always on the table is syrup — called in England treacle or at times — golden syrup — wages if engaged all the year round from fourteen to sixteen dollars per month & board — this refers to eastern Canada, away west, farmers are much more liberal, frequently, most kind & generous to their labourers — but of course, they certainly work terribly hard — ( & indeed with very few exceptions) — at the present time throughout the dominion, there is not a single public works — consequently — a man has to contend with the vast numbers of Dutch, Germans, Swedes — Norweigians — Italians, Russians & numerous other nationalities, on every hand, who offer themselves for almost no wages at all — a life & death necessity with them, & indeed with every one in the present state of labour, Any impression you may have about giving the English working man the preference please dismiss at once, rather would I advise you to observe — (because it is a glaring fact ) if an English man commits himself, every prominence is given to it in the public papers — the cause is easily found — Canada is not an English Colony — rather is it Scotch — & Irish, & the longer a man resides in Canada the clearer this fact

becomes — that from end to end entirely, it is a mistake for Englishmen to enter the country at all, glance the eye around where you will in the towns, the prefix Mc or Mac — meets the gaze — & when that is absent, the deficiency is supplied by french names — so far as I have seen, English names being the rare exception — perhaps this was not always the case, perhaps it may not always be the case in the future, but, as I am dealing with the present, there is no room here to speculate — The winter begins about November, & ends in April, consequently there are 5 solid winter months — A month may have the appearance of Spring & another the appearance of Autumn but really — the year is about equally divided between Winter & Summer — winter seeming endless — summer very brief —

### *Winter*

ANY ONE LIVING all their life in England, can have nothing approaching the faintest idea of a winter in Canada, or the clothes required for protection, it is surprising, how many men who thoroughly know better, becomes victims of frost bite, men & horses are frequently found frozen to death — & covered up in a vast snow drift — The cold dreadful winds entirely paralyzing both man & beast — snow falls almost continuously. until drifts, in railway cuttings acquire a depth of more than — 20 feet — Winter clothing is not over expensive & is suited to the action of the body in labour, during the winter months generally extending from November to April every thing in the shape of labour is dead — the only opening being the woods cutting trees —, or as they term it — in the bush, chopping. This work is essentially a french canadian employment & an old country man would stand very little chance — indeed in the present state of things none at all — consequently the question comes — what are the men now in the country to do, (seeing they have no work) when the winter comes, the Canadian Pacific Railway have dispensed with the services of thousands of labourers — These are now cast over the land with no possible prospect of employment, present or future, as there is not a single railway throughout the dominion under construction worth mentioning, or any prospect, of one — the only line within a radius of 400 miles of the commercial centre being the Lake St. Johns — in the mountains north of Quebec, where, at the present moment french & italian navvies are working for very little more than pays for their living, & clothing, I have worked myself amongst them there & where we have returned at the close of the day's labour our faces & necks covered with blood, the effect of the mosquitoes & flies — & which continues, each day being (if possible) worse than its predecessor, so long as the summer continues —

If a man in England is engaged to go out to Canada or any part of the dominion upon agreement of regular employment, every reasonable enducement [is] given him & it seems he has a prospect of constant work in the future of his life, & when on the other hand he sees nothing at home but hopeless idleness & poverty, then in that case I stand forward & advise him not to allow the severity of winter, or the torments of flies & other pests in Summer to hold him back — but I do most

decidedly protest against leading men to suppose that upon their casting England & their homes from them they are also casting behind them idleness & want — & are going to a land of plenty & industry — because it is cruelly misleading & deceiving, & how it is possible for men who have the impression they are honest men, & even gentlemen can forward inducements of such a kind, knowing they are doing a most false & wicked thing is more than I can understand — Some few years ago there was a solid scale of wages, & a man knew pretty well what he could earn if he would but it is impossible to say there is now a scale of wages because a man may be hired as a labourer & receive any wages ranging from 90 cents up to one dollar 10 cents per day — & it is now rapidly becoming the fashion for the french canadians, to stroll around in parties & offer themselves for labouring at a lower figure than other labourers receive — the Dutch & German Agencies are doing the same — these facts I imagine coming from me, one of the labouring crowd. would start the thinking machinery of men in England at work — for they must admit it must certainly be harder to bear want & poverty amongst strangers than at home, where nearly everyone can look for a ray of hope somewhere — Suppose reader you are working as a Carpenter on a house front, or suppose you are painting, or driving a stationary engine — presently a french canadian comes along — or for that matter, 5 or 6 of them — one goes up to the foreman — designated here — the bos [sic] — they having offered themselves for wages considerably below what you are paid — your services are dispensed with & they take your place, & please remember this occurs not as isolated cases — but frequently & no doubt there are plenty of honourable men in England, who, if they read this assertion, will certify what I write — to be quite true & correct — many of the rank & file now serving in the North West have no doubt a clear & distinct recollection of being at one time or another the victim of some such an underhanded unmanly trick, & possibly it served many an arm to revenge such cowardly ways — when in contact with these french half breeds — of course the hatred is mutual & thoroughly reciprocated — as they look upon old country emigrants without exception, as the cause of all their trouble [sic] & want, they do not purchase goods from the stores or the warehouses as a rule — but exchange & barter amongst themselves — & have what they call Brigads — a meeting of all to help one — when they weave spin card & make in all possible ways & forms — they store away their gains & are without doubt a curse to the progress of the dominion.

A year or two back a mechanic could be almost certain of instant employment — & in his first short, summer here, save sufficient to send for his wife & family & even ordinary labourers have frequently been able to do the same, but that is all changed — mechanic's now only receiving labourers wages of three years ago — This paper possibly may be read by some who have a little sum of ready money saved — who have honest ... [illegible] ... able & willing men naturally anxious to improve their chance in life would be glad to know ever so little — I say to such men, form together with an fair honest intention of helping one another right through thick and thin, & I will do my best to point out what to do — first of all —

out side your own little circle keep your intentions to yourselves — disregard all advice in England — go straight to “Allans” office Liverpool & if on reasonable terms take through tickets to Winnipeg when there put your cash in the Bank — seek employment which you are most likely to get almost at once — having now certain leisure time, make yourself known to the Land agent of the Canadian Pacific Railway company — take every care to enquire of him & him only — find out the cost of the land you want — cost of a team of oxen — horses — or what you think best — expense of impliments — entering every thing on paper — see the sum total — & judge amongst you — taking care that your individual land lots are *adjoining* — Another special point, bear in mind you are in a sense, a co operative company — keep together — & assign to each a certain course of enquiry — each one keeping his own notes of reference — the result in 3 or 4 years (with ordinary success) will surprise you — one important point — take a good stock of clothes & boots — *nothing ever manufactured in the dominion yet approach in wearing qualities or cheapness* — the clothes worn by labourers in the old country — any man even if he has to strain a nerve to do this — does a wise thing, he will soon find out to his cost after residing in the (as yet) comparative wilderness of the great Nor’West — if he neglects his stock of every day wear — the relative difference between wages & clothes out here, & ditto at home is very great — as are also the wearing qualities of the two — the great objection generally to our colonies is the mixed population we come in contact with — the barrier to foreign admission being so trivial that it almost amounts to nothing at all — The further west you go the more will be realized the hundreds of little nothings that — collectively, goes to constitute the every day life & signs of daily existance we have been used to at home — the accent is more like it is at home — the features we see around us — the houses — & the style & appearance of things generally — reminds us that we are not entirely amongst foreigners — whereas — in Eastern Canada all this is changed — & precisely the reverse is the case — in

Religion — this especially so — of course there are the forms of worship — & the protestant church we are used to, near at hand — but where the population is thin & scattered in the eastern portion of the dominion, churches of various sects are conspicuous for their presence, while the sects themselves are remarkable for their absence — & one is almost induced to think there various devotional temples were erected by some persons with the idea of being of use at some future period, & as a sign of a resolution at any time & in any manner required, to uphold their own particular form of worship, as the only correct & reasonable one in existance.—

I have resolved to put my simple observations upon paper & print & circulate them if possible amongst working men in England — & any thing (I have seen in print,) I differ from, I think I ought to say why — & this remark applies to none more forcably than the one we frequently read, to the effect that farming here & farming at home is totally different — it may be so — but for the encouragement of farmers & farm labourers at home generally — I beg to assure them — & I do



it without hesitation — that there are vast numbers of cases — in the eastern portions of the dominion (that is the oldest established parts, where native farmers have sold their apparently miserable farms to emigrant farmers or others from the old country with a very remarkable result — the farm becomes a totally different place — fields are gradually made fields in reality, & being manured, they yield crops — vegetables are raised — stock are cared for in a proper manner — & *not abused* — the farm house made homely, & comfortable — & before long there are scores of reasons why — where the one failed the other succeeded — & this let it be remembered in very many cases where the old countryman have neighbours who are in a measure antagonistic to his ideas.

It must be admitted now that a man do not stand the chance he has stood hitherto, but, if the question applies to Manitoba & the western portions generally — then certainly there is every chance in reason — & in many ways a working man's position is better than it is the old country —

A man at Quebec or Montreal has no possible chance of getting west — the fare is very large & there is no possibility now of a man earning it — in this respect a man in England has the advantage of men already in Canada — in conclusion I would respectfully call the attention of every working man be he Labourer or Mechanic to one simple fact — & it goes further than anything to prove my statements — namely — formerly if a man wished to take a passage to England from this country — the lowest average cost would be something near thirty odd dollars — whereas now — under precisely similar conditions of passage a man can go from Montreal or Quebec to London England — Railway fare from Liverpool to London *included* for Thirteen dollars !!!! — a more convincing proof of the state of labour & a mans chance now & formerly need never be sought after than this fact — & bring the question from one of certain success in the past to one of doubt & anxiety in the present & future.

R. James  
Montreal  
30th June 1885

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The following is cut from the *Montreal Daily Star* of 22 June 1885 & requires no comment.

R.J.

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COULDN'T STAND THE MOSQUITOES.

A Gang of Italians Take Refuge in Montreal — They Refuse to Work on the Lake St. John Railway on Account of the Flies.

Yesterday morning 96 Italians arrived in the city from Quebec, and, having no money, they took up quarters on and about Jacques Cartier square. They at several intervals during the day applied for food at the Central Police Station, but this was blankly refused them by Sergeant Dreifuss, who told them he had no power to do so. The Sergeant instructed his men to try and find the leader of the men and Constable Bureau soon returned with a man who gave his name as Jean Mathieu. He stated that he was an agent for Messrs. Henry Zander & Co, in New York, who had engaged the men to work on the Lake St. John railway at a fair price. When the men reached Lake Simon on the above line, the mosquitoes and flies were found to be so numerous and troublesome that they became discouraged in a few days and struck work making their way to Montreal. Last night the men were compelled to sleep in the open air, but the police authorities managed to house the several women accompanying them. To a STAR reporter the agent Mathieu stated that he had learned that 200 hands were needed in Cornwall and that should the small funds still left him suffice he will endeavor to have them sent to that place. The gang is composed of the most miserable lot of people possible to imagine. They are filthy, dirty, apparently only half nourished and can't speak a word of English. There are quite a number of women and young children in the gang. The last lot of Italians which struck Montreal cost the city \$250 to send them back to New York, but Sergeant Dreifuss says if the gang don't make a start for Cornwall, he will send them down to gaol.

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