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Canadianism — A Symposium

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CANADIANISM — A SYMPOSIUM

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The very word Canadianism assumes something more than the fact of a legal entity and suggests emotional, intellectual, and moral qualities in the people calling itself Canadian. Canadians when they think of their national character, if they are very parochial, speak of English-Canadian society and culture or of its French-speaking counterpart exclusively. Such bigotry is, however, rare. Most of us, therefore, begin immediately to explain ourselves in terms of two cultures, two cultures which, we say generously, inspire each other, add variety and richness to Canadian life, preserve a fundamentally common heritage, and so on.

It seems to me that we have rather exaggerated the theme of cousins who have long quarrelled and have now decided to be friends. An examination of history shows that almost from the beginning our very existence has depended on complex reciprocal relationships. Before this audience it is superfluous to labour the facts. I need only refer to them.

As everyone knows the first Canadians spoke French and cherished (with modifications) the way of life of seventeenth century France. This way was challenged by the revolutionary change of government in 1763 when the old struggle for physical survival against the Indians, the climate, and the English down south, took on the new form of a struggle for social and cultural survival against English in their midst. This intimate struggle was complicated by the contemporary imperial debate. In 1775 and after the Canadians had to choose between British rule and American brotherhood. As M. Henri Bourassa once said in my hearing, with a disarming smile, "It was all very simple; we had to choose between the English of Boston and the English of London. The English of London were farther away and we hated them less."

All this is familiar ground and well-trodden. *La survivance* is an heroic theme with French-speaking Canadians. English-speaking Canadians, for the most part, regard it with calm acceptance, or with grudging admiration or with active distaste. All this emotionalism seems to me to obscure two obvious facts.

First, English Canada is a by-product of French "survival". Second, the character of French "survivors" has been profoundly influenced by this by-product.

French-speaking Canada has not survived in a vacuum. English Loyalists came to the St. Lawrence, and were encouraged to come because

the French were there. They upset the neat arrangement of the Quebec Act, which was, indeed, partly responsible for their coming. And their presence meant that many more English, Scottish and Irish would come, as they did, through the first half of the nineteenth century. The will of the French to "survive" (which had prevented their joining the American union) was then the direct cause of the creation of this bi-cultural country.

The character of French survivors has been influenced by their English by-product. The will to survive continued to operate in the rather difficult period after 1791 when radicals of both groups were greatly attracted by American institutions. It is reasonable, surely, to assume that it was the caution of the French-speaking majority which finally determined the acceptance of the "responsible government" device of the 1840's, that device which furnished the constitutional principle of the future British Commonwealth. If Baldwin thought it, and Durham publicized it, Lafontaine made it practical politics. At the same time it is obvious that this constitutional condition of survival would have been unthinkable without the presence and influence of the English-speaking group.

The same close and significant inter-action is observable in the arrangement for federal union which drew around the central core of Canada the Maritimes, the Prairies, British Columbia, and the vast umbrella of the Canadian Shield. Such a growth still stems from the stubborn determination of the French on the St. Lawrence to survive; but this determination would have been fruitless without the close, if occasionally rather ferocious co-operation of the English by-product. It was this co-operation which produced the typically Canadian device of the federal cabinet.

The same close and ferocious co-operation marks the constitutional and political growth of the Laurier, Borden and King regimes. Canada is the product of the French *survivance*, of its English by-product, and of their intimate and complex relationships.

This obvious fact, that the English-Canadian existence stemmed from French-Canadian survival, and the French-Canadian survival has been made possible only by English-Canadian existence, seems to me to be the cardinal fact of Canadianism, known to everyone, but too often ignored. Since we are already products of each other, bound together by indissoluble ties of history, it seems absurd to talk of bi-culturalism as cultural co-operation. It would be truer surely to talk of better cultural circulation in what is and has for two centuries been one body. Canadianism is the nature of this body whose strange and romantic growth and development contrast oddly with its inadequate powers of articulation.

It seems to me that I have said now all that an historian need say. History deals with the past, with what has been done. Historians may suggest why things were, and they may occasionally wonder if they should have been so. They do not, as a rule, assume the role of prophets, still less of reformers.

However, in the last few days it has become clear to me that in Canada philosophers would like to be kings. Our learned deliberations seem to culminate inevitably in a brisk discussion not only of what should be, but of what ought to be done about it.

If this is an essential element of Canadianism I am certainly not going to be less Canadian than my colleagues.

Let me ask, then, how we could get a better cultural circulation in Canada? We could get it, I believe, by thinking less of the admirable but now somewhat outmoded traditions of nineteenth century *laissez-faire*, and recalling the older tradition, perhaps more French than English, which sees the state not merely as an organ of prohibition and police, but as a great social institution representing life in its wholeness. It is surely unworthy to face the world as a nation if our national concerns are limited to levying taxes for an army, a navy, and an air force, and to maintaining railways and building pipelines. Canadians do have other matters to communicate to each other and to the world.

How admirable it would be if the Canadian nation, as a nation, would justify its existence by showing a little more direct concern for matters of the mind; by acknowledging some responsibility for preserving in Canada the great traditions of the arts, letters and sciences which belong neither to Canadians nor to *Canadiens* but to human civilization.

Professor R. A. PRESTON
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While I can agree that Miss Neathy has a case in her argument that the essence of the Canadian experiment is, by and large, a mutually beneficial interrelation of two cultures, I am not happy with the conclusion to which she came. The picture it suggests to me is of a powerful central government (and that now seems to mean one party) swayed by the passions of *both* the majority and the minority groups calling the tune for the stimulation of culture in the name of Canadianism. This appears to me to be potentially dangerous.

Canadianism is the Canadian brand of nationalism. Here we are interested in its cultural manifestations. Now, as this audience fully realizes, nationalism has been a great force for the advancement of modern

civilization and it is still operating, especially among retarded peoples. But it is becoming as great a force for destruction and a danger to the very civilization which it has helped to create.

Some other aspects of nationalism should be noticed. First, nationalism is more often than not negative rather than positive, by which I mean that it develops against something or somebody rather than as a result of internal cohesion. Nationalism then becomes most vigorous and powerful when there is somebody to hate; and if no hateful thing on which it can focus exists, then it tends to create one. Canadianism is now directed against the United States. Secondly, it is a common rule that one's own nationalism is a good thing but the other fellow's is bad. In Canada, Canadianism is good; but Americanism, British jingoism, Spanish pride, German nazism, Italian fascism, and Russian communist nationalism, are bad. Thirdly, nationalism is an emotional rather than an intellectual force; and it feeds on myths rather than on facts.

Canadianism has, however, one feature which seems to distinguish it from other varieties of the nationalist virus. Extreme Canadianists are very prone to sneer at the Canadian achievement. More than half of an article written by a Canadian nationalist usually will be devoted to "knocking" Canada. The Canadian extremist thus finds himself in strange alliance with the many supercilious European and British visitors who delight in deploring Canadian lack of culture, usually on the basis of quite spurious examples. For instance, we are often told by them that compared with England, Canada has no theatre. The fact is that, allowing for geographic difficulties, amateur theatre is more flourishing here than in the thickly populated areas of industrial England. The vitality of the Birmingham Rep. and of the Leeds Civic Theatre does not disprove my contention. Similarly we are told that Canada is architecturally barren. I once heard an English architect resident in Vancouver complain on the C.B.C. that when he looked out of his door he saw nothing but monotonous repetition in the domestic architecture around. I wanted to ship him back to England to remind him that the repetition of the semi-detached middle-class villa over the face of England suggests that English builders of ordinary houses possess only one single set of blueprints. Despite her shorter history, Canada is not backward in architectural effort. But extreme Canadian nationalists take a personal pleasure in calling Canada an intellectual and aesthetic wilderness. Ninety-nine per cent of Canadians we are told are "cultural philistines". This trait of humility, or self-disparagement, is common to both French and English-speaking Canadian nationalists.

Keeping these attributes of nationalism and of Canadianism in mind, I want to urge caution in blindly following the lead of the extreme advocate of "Canadianism". While I agree that it is true that a nation needs

a feeling of common identity and that one place where this can be experienced is in elements of culture that are common to the nation, let us not try to create such a "national" culture artificially. The principle difficulty in the creation of a single Canadian culture is the existence of two linguistic groups. Many briefs presented to the Massey commission expressed hope and confidence that "in our common cultivation of things of the mind, Canadians, French- and English-speaking, can find true "Canadianism". But I can find nowhere in the Report of the commission any attempt to define or describe the qualities of "Canadianism". The reason for this is that most of what is common to the English Canadian and French Canadian culture is a common heritage from western Europe and is not purely Canadian. Furthermore, most of what is derived from environmental influence is shared with the United States. Universal cultural influences and American cultural parallels are equally distasteful to our Canadian nationalist. So he is silent instead of trying to point to those things which we have in common.

What are the characteristics of a "national culture"? The Massey Commission Report says that national literature must give expression to the "fundamental traits of the population and the unique qualities of the country in which this population lives and develops". This connection of culture with locale and with social environment is very sound; but the Report dismisses these as mere "local details". "To be truly national", it goes on, "a literature must be recognized as characteristic of the nation by other nations." In other words you can't identify yourself but the fellow next door knows you.

Is this really sound doctrine? Does the outsider really discern characteristics that are common to a people? The more one comes to know a people the more one appreciates the degree of its diversity. The concept of a single national type is a myth. And I believe that the same thing applies to literature and culture. The richness of the culture of England, France, the United States lies not in their uniformity but in their diversity. He who imagines that these peoples have pronounced national peculiarities which are more powerful than their local variations is oversimplifying on the basis of inadequate knowledge.

How much more false is it to attempt to create such national distinctiveness artificially? The artificial stimulation of a "Canadian culture" would create hollow uniformity and sterility. The search for "Canadian" characteristics in our culture reminds me very much of a German scholar I once knew who was writing a book on the Aryan qualities in English literature. I couldn't understand what he was looking for. And I don't think he could either. This example is particularly appropriate. Stimulation of a "Canadian culture" (the phrase was recently used by a cabinet minister) will inevitably lead to the grosser forms of nationalism such

as preference for the Canadian-born. It will lead to emotional nationalism rather than intellectual and aesthetic development.

Please do not think that I am against the chief proposal of the commission on which Miss Neatby served, namely that in a modern nation the government has an obligation to foster things of the mind and spirit. But let us foster "culture in Canada", not "Canadian culture". A truly cultured people will easily reject undesirable alien influences, will inevitably foster its own peculiar traditions and virtues, and will make its own great contributions to the richness of universal culture. This is not as one Canadian nationalist writer has called it, "wishy-washy internationalism". On the contrary in the modern world it is a harsh necessity. For if emotional nationalism increases much more, our civilization will perish. Artificially stimulated Canadian culture carries with it a contribution to that danger.

MICHEL BRUNET

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Les intellectuels et les dirigeants politiques du Canada ont depuis longtemps pris l'habitude de s'interroger sur la naissance, le développement et la nature d'un véritable canadianisme. La CANADIAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION¹ demeure fidèle à cette tradition en organisant le symposium d'aujourd'hui.

A toutes les générations, quelques esprits inquiets ont soutenu que les habitants du Canada manquaient d'esprit national. Cette accusation revient encore souvent chez les prédicateurs contemporains de l'« unité nationale ». Cependant depuis la fin de la deuxième guerre mondiale, plusieurs observateurs de la fédération canadienne se plaisent à signaler que les contribuables fédéraux ne sont plus attachés au gouvernement d'Ottawa uniquement par la force de la loi mais par une émotion patriotique commune. On croit découvrir enfin un fort courant de canadianisme !

Le canadianisme serait-il un produit du XX^e siècle ? Bien naïf celui qui le soutiendrait. Le canadianisme a pris naissance avec la fondation du premier royaume du Canada au XVII^e siècle. Pendant cent cinquante ans, les colons français venus s'établir en Amérique du Nord ont vécu SEULS dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent. Le territoire qu'ils ont habité est devenu leur unique patrie. Ils ont établi, avec l'aide de la France, une société nationale dont les membres s'appelaient les Cana-

¹ NDLR. — L'auteur préfère ne pas employer l'appellation française SOCIÉTÉ HISTORIQUE DU CANADA, rendue pourtant officielle par le texte anglais et français de la constitution de la Société, par le programme bilingue des réunions et par le *Rapport annuel*.

diens. Ils ont prouvé la puissance de leur nationalisme dans les guerres sanglantes qui les opposèrent aux colonies anglaises. Mais, en 1760, les Canadiens durent céder devant la force de leurs ennemis. Le Canada ne leur appartenait plus.

La Conquête et la colonisation anglaises ont créé une nouvelle société nationale dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent. Les fondateurs du second royaume du Canada refusèrent de s'assimiler à la majorité canadienne et s'appelèrent d'abord *British Americans*. Devenus enfin la majorité et par conséquent maîtres de leurs destinées, ils prirent le nom de *Canadians*. Le Canada français avait été annexé au Canada anglais. Après avoir perdu leur patrie, les Canadiens s'étaient fait enlever jusqu'à leur nom.

Cette substitution de royaume et de noms ne fut pas suffisante pour engendrer un canadianisme commun aux Canadiens et aux *Canadians*. Les descendants des fondateurs du premier royaume du Canada avaient été mis en minorité mais continuèrent à s'imaginer qu'ils avaient la liberté d'orienter la politique du pays selon leur idéal et leurs besoins. C'est ainsi, par exemple, qu'ils n'approuvèrent jamais la participation du Canada aux guerres de la Grande-Bretagne. La politique de centralisation du gouvernement fédéral n'a jamais reçu leur approbation unanime. Ils se méfient instinctivement du Commonwealth britannique. Pour la masse des Canadiens français, le Canada n'est pas un pays indépendant mais une colonie autonome qui n'a pas encore eu l'audace de se séparer complètement de son ancienne métropole. Pour eux, c'est un sentimentalisme inexplicable. Ils se demandent toujours pourquoi le Canada conserve ses institutions monarchiques et refuse de se donner un drapeau et un hymne nationaux. Ayant dû renoncer à la revanche des berceaux, ils poursuivent maintenant l'utopie d'une nation biethnique et bilingue.

Les *Canadians* pratiquent un canadianisme différent de celui des Canadiens. Ils savent que le Canada est une nation issue de la famille britannique. Ils ont conquis leur indépendance nationale sans juger nécessaire de rompre avec le pays qui leur a donné la vie comme nation d'Amérique. En participant aux guerres de la Grande-Bretagne, ils ont toujours eu la conviction de défendre leur propre existence. Sous la direction du gouvernement central qui est en même temps leur gouvernement national, ils ont créé la nation *Canadian*. En choisissant un drapeau, ils n'ont pas l'intention de renier leurs origines. Ils n'ignorent pas que les institutions monarchiques constituent l'une des raisons d'être du Canada comme pays distinct en Amérique du Nord. La majorité d'entre eux n'ont pas la naïveté de croire que le Canada est un pays bilingue et biethnique.

Il existe au Canada deux canadianismes parce que la population se compose de deux nations. Celles-ci demeurent et demeureront unies car

la nation minoritaire n'a pas la liberté de se soustraire complètement à la domination de la nation majoritaire. De plus, *Canadians* et Canadiens sont solidaires devant la pression américaine. Mais même sur ce point, ils ne s'entendent pas toujours sur les moyens à prendre pour résister à leur puissants voisins du Sud. Dans ces conditions, chercher un canadianisme commun c'est tenter de résoudre le problème de la quadrature du cercle.

Les efforts de tous les dirigeants du pays doivent plutôt tendre vers la recherche d'un compromis qui, tout en tenant compte des conditions sociales et économiques contemporaines, assurera aux Canadiens du Québec le maximum de liberté collective à l'intérieur de l'union canadienne. Ceux qui veulent précipiter les étapes et réaliser à tout prix l'unité du pays en imposant aux habitants des dix provinces le nationalisme *Canadian* ne tiennent pas compte des réalités sociologiques de la fédération canadienne. Les événements des dix dernières années ont démontré leur erreur de calcul et leur manque de sens politique. Il faut dire que les historiens anglo-canadiens et canadiens-français en portent partiellement la responsabilité. Si ceux-ci avaient mieux compris et mieux décrit l'évolution historique des deux Canadas, les économistes et les dirigeants du gouvernement fédéral auraient fait preuve de plus de clairvoyance dans leur politique d'unification nationale. De leur côté, les porte-parole de la nationalité canadienne-française auraient montré plus de compréhension et plus de souplesse dans leurs revendications. Il faut admettre que les minorités n'ont pas l'habitude de dominer les majorités. D'autre part, dans un Etat démocratique et fédéral, la majorité ne peut pas imposer intégralement son nationalisme à la minorité lorsque celle-ci conserve un minimum de liberté collective.

C'est pourquoi il y aura toujours, au Canada, du canadianisme et du *Canadianism*.

In the unavoidable absence of Professor Brunet his paper was read by his colleague Professor Guy Frégault. Following are some of Professor Frégault's remarks during the discussion which followed the presentation of the three papers.

G. FRÉGAULT — Les Anglo-Canadiens avaient un choix: rester Canadiens ou devenir Américains. Ils étaient appuyés par la colonisation anglaise. Les historiens canadiens-français constatent que les Anglo-canadiens ne sont pas des coloniaux.

Cependant, pour les Canadiens-français, la source du pouvoir politique se trouvant à Ottawa est aussi étrangère que si elle était à Londres ou à Washington. Pour expliquer cette attitude, les historiens doivent remon-

ter non pas à 1867 ni à 1840, mais à 1760. Les Canadiens-français n'ont pas eu de choix. Ils se sont fait battre.

Ensuite est venue la révolution américaine. Les Canadiens-français ont compris qu'il valait mieux, en termes de population, être 30 p. 100 au Canada qu'une proportion beaucoup plus faible dans le grand tout américain.

Il y a un choix libre et un choix qui ne l'est pas. S'ils avaient été libres, les « Canadiens » auraient choisi d'être indépendants comme les « Canadians ». C'est en ce sens qu'ils n'ont pas eu de choix. Ceux qui choisissent le moindre de deux maux ne doivent pas avoir l'impression d'avoir choisi un bien. Il peut y avoir deux maux et celui qui est le moindre peut encore être un très grand mal. C'est ce dont nous nous apercevons aujourd'hui. Les « Canadiens » auraient pu choisir ce que les « Canadians » ont choisi: l'indépendance. Mais, dans les faits, jamais les Canadiens n'ont eu le choix. La conquête a été faite. Elle n'a jamais été défaite. Les « Canadians » ne peuvent durer que sur les ruines des « Canadiens ».

Actuellement, il n'y a personne qui, ouvrant les deux yeux, ne puisse voir qui détient le pouvoir, qui détient l'argent. Pour comprendre, il faut remonter encore à 1760; les effets se poursuivent jusqu'à aujourd'hui. Je ne crois pas qu'il y ait de raisons profondes, ni de causes qui paraissent à l'horizon qui puissent montrer qu'il en sera autrement demain.

Ce que je veux dire, et c'est précisément le nœud du débat, c'est que la survivance n'est pas une bonne chose. La survivance c'est ce qui reste à quelqu'un qui n'a pas suffisamment pour vivre. La survivance c'est une plaie. Ce qui est intéressant c'est la vie, c'est la direction de sa vie. Il ne s'agit pas de survivre, d'être un témoin, parce qu'on ne peut pas disparaître. Mais c'est exactement notre situation.

En 1760, ce qu'il aurait fallu, ç'aurait été de gagner, ç'aurait été de vaincre. A défaut de victoire, la disparition.

J'explique le présent par l'histoire. L'histoire me montre que, en 1700, il n'y avait absolument rien qui pouvait dire que les Canadiens seraient plus tard condamnés à la survivance. Ils auraient très bien pu devenir un peuple canadien en Amérique, indépendant d'autres collectivités anglaises en Amérique. Ça c'est le passé. Maintenant, je me trouve aujourd'hui devant une situation qui n'est pas celle-là, qui en est exactement le contraire.

Dans ce cas-là, il n'y aurait qu'une chose à faire, c'est d'accorder effectivement l'indépendance aux Canadiens, ce que vous ne pouvez pas faire, parce qu'alors vous perdez votre propre indépendance.