

What is a nation?

That is... for the nations of Canada

BY MARK WEGIERSKI

Deeply frustrated by the vacuity and nullity of late modern politics in current-day Canada, the author of this article has decided to write a risk-taking, daring piece about the Canadian conundrum aiming for a truly world-historical perspective. This is designed as a “think-piece” to stimulate debate about what the foundational principles of human existence may be—and to what extent they are represented in Canada today.

The secret that dare not be spoken in Canada today is that the key to the existence of any real nation (which is clearly not always coterminous with a state) must lie in shared history, memory, culture, and consciousness—that there must be something held socially and culturally in common among the people of a given country, in order to constitute a nation. Does such an identity tend to exclude “others”? The author thinks that a real national identity must be almost by definition exclusive and particular. Canadians, for example, are clearly not Americans.

Canada’s main problem in the last four decades, it could be argued, has been that the obvious “binational” nature of Canada (with the French mostly centered in the province of Quebec),



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as well as the Aboriginal presence, have led to a series of ever deeper conceptual fissures that have culminated in English-speaking Canada all but losing its previously held national identification. Furthermore, the collapse of the British Empire as a meaningful entity in the 1950s, and the attenuation of British identity in Britain itself from about 1965 onward (sometimes called “the abolition of Britain”), have left English Canadians with a permanently undermined sense of identity, which some commentators have called “the permanent cringe.”

Ironically, today’s WASPs in Canada are probably their own worst enemies, when considered in relation to what English Canada traditionally

represented. Many of them seem to have almost naturally cleaved to the most intense extremes of political correctness. In some cases, this could be explained as self-interest allowing them to live extremely materially comfortable lives, but on the other hand, some of them seem to be genuinely

enthusiastic about being massively self-hating. Doubtless, there are elaborate mental gymnastics, which could be the basis of extensive deeper scholarly study, which allow the typical WASP to not face up to just how culturally self-hating he or she is. One supposes that one way out is to embrace environmentalism, which is certainly *prima facie* among the most attractive-seeming philosophies that is considered to be on the Left today.

It is the author’s belief that “multiculturalism”—as it is conceived today, in 2007—has moved far, far beyond what it was envisioned at its inception

in the late 1960s. As far as the author of this article remembers, “multiculturalism” was initially envisaged as little more than a “be nice to different people” philosophy. It also, in the 1970s, paid at least some attention to “white ethnics” (such as Ukrainian-, Italian-, and Polish-Canadians) as part of the “mosaic”—whereas those groups today are typically seen as undifferentiated from the supposed, “oppressive white majority.” The radicalism of the rejection of Canada seen among some minority



A children’s book for “ages 10 and up” which is recommended for “public libraries.”

groups today, would have probably appalled even some of the earlier enthusiasts of multiculturalism. So Canada has been carried along in the last four decades by the impetus of an ever more radical multiculturalism that would have been absolutely shocking to someone like Canada’s longest-serving Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, the leader of what could be called a “traditionalist-centrist” Liberal Party—and, to some extent, even to Liberal Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson. What multiculturalism has become today was certainly not the vision that Pearson used to “sell” the Canadian people on the concept in the mid-1960s.

So a nation must hold something socially and culturally in common to be a nation. Does this mean that Canadian identity can be constituted, for example, out of an allegiance to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (a document brought into the Canadian constitutional structure in 1982)? It would appear that such an abstract, legalistic definition of a nation cannot operate too well. There has also occurred—in a fashion perhaps similar to what has happened with “multiculturalism”—a precipitous evolution of the Charter and its social and cultural impacts. Indeed, the effect of Canada’s juridical apparatus has been to turn what may be the more common-sense meanings of the various Charter rights into a

blunt instrument for social engineering. When one actually reads the Charter, it does not necessarily give the impression of being an “ultra-politically-correct” document. However, when one considers, for example, the atmosphere of “impermissibility” (of its use) with which the so-called “notwithstanding clause” of the Charter is approached, this suggests that a massive “rights-dogmatism” or “rights-absolutism” has overtaken the Canadian system. (The invoking of the “notwithstanding” clause permits federal and provincial legislatures to pass legislation “notwithstanding” the Charter.)

There is certainly some correlation in a nation between the life of a nation and the life of a given ethnicity. The correlation may not be as tight as has been envisaged in some of the almost stereotypical nineteenth-century nationalisms of Europe, but it must nevertheless be there. Much of the life of a given nation flows from its ethnic kinship, kindredness, consanguinity, homogeneity, sense of separateness, and of exclusion of “others”. To a large extent, a nation is a distinct people, and a distinct people is a nation. Though it would be ridiculous to say that they are tightly coterminous, there is indeed some correlation between the existence of a nation and the perpetuation of a given ethnicity.

One can see today that much of the West, the English-speaking world, and Canada in particular have spectacularly deviated from this notion. Insofar as this Western deviation is ever more intensified into the future (while other peoples and nations of the world do not follow this course), the future of the West may move in an increasingly untenable and attenuated direction. Certainly, we see increasingly ageing populations and birth-rates below replacement levels, especially in some Western European countries.

It should be further stated that much of the underpinning of the so-called “welfare-state” (defined particularly here by the author as certain people in the population making sacrifices on behalf of other people) is based on the population having something socially and culturally in common.

To the extent that a nation is effectively felt to be in existence among its members, it can readily demand and receive sacrifices in personal well-

being and lifestyle from them—which can include anything up to and including dying for the nation’s sake. The recompense for the members is to assure them the sense of belonging to a meaningful community with real character. To assure them they are a genuine people with their own history, heroes, and icons, existing across time and space—or, at least, carrying the hope that their descendants will inherit or regain the land and maintain the national culture and traditions intact. It could be argued that the very essence of a nation lies in the willingness of the people to make these sacrifices in personal well-being and lifestyle for the sake of this higher, shared group-consciousness, for a way of life, for a genuine culture, which is to exist across time and space. Any real nation is therefore constituted by a group consciousness that must be in some sense at least particular and exclusive. Sacrifices in personal well-being and lifestyle can usually only be expected when a nation [ul]is[ul] such a meaningful collectivity, linked generation-to-generation, and rooted in its own immemorial traditions.

Obviously, we are very, very remote here from what Canada or the typical Western country is like today. Canadian culture has been annihilated from at least three directions—from the American mass-mediated pop-culture, from the fractured cultural landscape of the current-day Canada, and from the politically correct drive emanating from what are the supposed custodians of Canadian culture today.

The main question which faces real traditionalists, conservatives and nationalists in Canada is what, if anything, can be done to preserve certain worthwhile, meaningful cultural residues and remnants of communities in this northern half of North America? (If one indeed views the sense of belonging to a genuine community, and having a place to call “home,” as one of the most important human needs.) Indeed, it is particularly annoying today when one finds so-called “ethnic nationalism” so

vociferously condemned by the politically correct, when it is plain to see that virtually every minority group in Canada is today practising and celebrating what could easily be termed as a form of “ethnic nationalism.”

The author of this article has referred in other pieces to ideas such as “provincialization” or “cantionization” as a possible way of restoring some balance to the Canadian polity.

Indeed, one could call this idea of a radical purgative, “creative fragmentation.” It might be envisaged as a series of cascading regionalist/devolutionist scenarios.

The baroque and colorful politics of these regions are to be welcomed with zest, as the realization of true social, political, and cultural diversity in the northern half of North America—allowing persons to live in the society and community in which they feel best—and hopefully restarting real history and a more genuinely worthwhile existence here.

Those who fear that disruptions or violence might accompany such a break-up into natural regions, should reflect that all of Canada today seems to be unavoidably heading in the direction of receiving very extensive immigrant populations, and can presumably expect comparatively much greater racial and ethnic conflicts in the future, as a result—if current-day trends continue.

Indeed, a tempered patriotism on the local level has to be delimited between the burgeoning tribal and sectarian extremisms often found in the non-Western world, and the self-hating administrative moralism now centered in the West.

Canadian traditionalists, conservatives, and nationalists could indeed view with equanimity the “localist” dissolving of what could be considered as the artificial, current-day Canada, in order to attain genuine pluralism, and ensure the tenuous persistence of at least some meaningful local cultures in northern North America. ■

