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Canada — Troubled Neighbor

A Year-end Report

By Mark Wegierski

Though much of its territory remains barely habitable because of icy climate and poor soils, Canada is still a vast country with incredibly abundant natural resources, including the world's largest supply of fresh water. But it is in a very difficult position today because of its politics. The traditional Canadian deference to political authority has contributed to a situation of broad acceptance of whatever Canada's Ottawa-and-Toronto-centered managerial, media, and therapeutic elites dish out.

The Political Setting

Ottawa (with Hull across the river) is Canada's federal center, once carved out of the wilderness like Brasília, a place for politicians and civil-service mandarins. The greater Toronto area is Canada's largest metropolis (the final destination of four out of eleven immigrants) and media center, as well as the political capital of Ontario, Canada's second-largest but wealthiest and most populous province with 10 million people. Quebec, first in territorial size, second in population, tends to be one of the poorer provinces. Montreal is Canada's second-largest city, one of the largest French-speaking cities in the world, and relatively cosmopolitan, especially in relation to Quebec City, once the main fortress of old French Quebec and now the political capital. Vancouver, on the West Coast, is the only major truly international city in the Western Canadian region, having a flavor of Seattle or even California. With the large migration from Hong Kong, it increasingly looks to the Pacific Rim.

Canada is a federal constitutional monarchy of the British Commonwealth with a parliamentary system. The head of the national government and the primary decision maker is the prime minister, the leader of the party with the majority of members in the federal House of Commons which is divided into geographic "ridings" from which members are elected on a "first-past-the-post" basis. Executive and legislative functions are conjoined in the Canadian Parliament, and a prime minister with a full majority in the House of Commons is formally much stronger than an American President. The prime minister — for good or for ill — is effectively the epicenter of the Canadian political system, even though he or she

exercises authority with the symbolic permission of the monarch (Queen Elizabeth II, who is represented by the governor-general at the federal level and by lieutenant-governors at the provincial level. There is a Senate, or upper house, which can only delay legislation, whose members are *de facto* appointed by the prime minister (effectively for life) as vacancies arise.

Canada is a federal state, a national government which has jurisdiction over the sparsely populated northern territories as well as the ten provinces with their own elected governments and premiers (who play a role similar to the prime minister's, within their own jurisdictions). Balancing off the competing regional interests of the Maritimes, Ontario, Quebec, and Western Canada is a crucial aspect of Canadian politics.

The provinces are similar to American states, but, generally speaking, they are larger and have more extensive effective powers. The larger provinces would approximate major regions in the United States. A possible analogy for the importance — and potential disruptiveness — of the Quebec situation would be to try to envision the American South existing under one large and possibly independence-minded state government but having the combined number of representatives and senators in the federal Congress as it does today.

National Identity Attenuated

Canada (including Quebec) currently has a population of 27 million. Its immigration policy foresees receiving about a quarter-million persons a year for many years to come. According to official statistics, 75 percent of all immigrants to Canada between 1981 and 1991 were from non-European countries. This trend is expected to continue or increase. (A quarter-million persons a year, incidentally, means that, over ten years, roughly 8 percent of the country's total population will consist of new arrivals, over 20 years, about 16 percent, and over 30 years about 22 percent, not including the children borne by these generally young immigrants, and a possibly quite-substantial illegal immigration.) Quebec's population now is around 7 million, with a

non-French population of about 1.5 million. Some among the latter group, notably the English of Montreal and the Eastern Townships, have long-standing traditions in the province, but others are very recent arrivals.

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English-Canadian national identity, never very strong to begin with, has grown increasingly attenuated in the late twentieth century. Consequently, the French of Quebec have been able to exercise ever-increasing degrees of influence in the Canadian state, both by playing on English-Canadian guilt (French Quebec had been conquered by the British by 1760, and the French had been second-class citizens for many years) and through their own authentic cultural identity, which — once expressed in fervent Roman Catholicism — now has come to reside almost exclusively in their language. But the unfolding modernization of Quebec, like that in nineteenth-century Europe, has created a fully self-conscious Québécois people who, unlike their devout ancestors, no longer are able to accept playing an equal or even dominant role in a Canadian state. The Québécois increasingly desire a linguistically pure nation-state of their own, an impulse that former Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau had attempted to fight (in the late '60s, '70s, and early '80s) by offering French Quebec the aforementioned coast-to-coast influence.

In the last few years, the Québécois position has come under increasing attack, partly because of such actions as the anti-English language and education legislation, which have come to be seen as markedly intolerant by the rest of Canada (and by non-French minorities inside Quebec) as well as because of the very fact they seem very close to becoming a territorial nation-state themselves. They would move from looking like the oppressed minority in Canada to being seen as the oppressive majority in Quebec.

Canada had moved briefly into the international spotlight with the defeat of the nationwide referendum of October 26, 1992, and its aftermath. The referendum was based on expressing straight approval or disapproval for a new constitutional deal reached by then-Prime Minister Brian Mulroney (from the Progressive Conservative party), all ten provincial premiers, and aboriginal and northern-territorial representatives. The crux of the referendum was to bring Quebec into Canada by offering a constitutional package acceptable to the province, which still has not signed the new version of the Canadian constitution Trudeau "patriated" from Britain in 1982. The 1992 Charlottetown Accords had been reached in the wake

of the failure in 1990 of a somewhat similar package: the 1987 Meech Lake Accord.

The irony is that the Québécois now effectively defend the British principle of parliamentary sovereignty or supremacy (that is, that a lawfully elected majority in Parliament generally is bound in its legislation by customary traditions, but not by having to conform to explicitly stated provisions of individual or other rights in a written document, as interpreted through judicial review). Quebec's language legislation clearly challenges the spirit of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which was attached in 1982 to the other written and customary parts of Canada's constitution, most notably the British North America Act of 1867. The act formally constituted the federal state from the provinces and preexistent historical regions of Ontario (Upper Canada), Quebec (Lower Canada), New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. Tiny Prince Edward Island (in the Gulf of St. Lawrence) joined in 1873. Except for Newfoundland (a Crown Colony until 1949), the other parts of the country — most notably the Western provinces of (going east-to-west) Manitoba (1870), Saskatchewan (1905), Alberta (1905) (these three called the Prairie provinces) and British Columbia (1871) — had come in by 1905.

Reflecting the deep-seated malaise of the Canadian polity, the proposed constitutional package of 1992 was solidly defeated. Forces for the "no" side included Quebec separatists (or *sovereigntistes*) and, among others in English Canada, critics from the Left such as feminist and aboriginal women's groups (and Trudeau), and critics from the Right (for example, Preston Manning's Reform Party, based largely in Western Canada). Since the "yes" vote was concentrated in the Maritimes (consisting of relatively small and poor provinces that traditionally look to the federal government for benefits and programs); Ottawa-Hull; West Montreal, where most of the non-French minorities of Quebec live; and the Greater Toronto area — it might be generally read as an inchoate revolt of the heartlands of the country against the elites who now run it.

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The 1993 election was called in early September by Progressive Conservative Prime Minister Kim Campbell. After Brian Mulroney's well-timed resignation after ten years as leader of the party, and nine years as prime minister, she had been chosen out of five contenders on June 13, 1993, as leader of her party (and thereby prime minister) at the party's

leadership convention. The Tories were very unpopular because of their carrying through of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement over which the 1988 election was waged, and which won a second term for Mulroney (it had perceptibly deepened the impact of the onrushing recession), as well as for the implementation of the Goods & Services Tax (GST), the Canadian version of a value-added tax. Despite some sharp rhetoric, the opposition to NAFTA of Jean Chretien, the newly elected Liberal Prime Minister, has been minimal, as is seen in his choice of a pro-NAFTA Trade Minister and so-called fiscally-conservative ministers in his economic portfolios.

Open Refugee Policy

In immigration policy since 1984, the numbers — after about two years at 80,000 or so — suddenly exploded in a curious policy shift to about a quarter-million a year. This was exacerbated by a ridiculously open refugee policy, which meant that anyone claiming to be a refugee had to be given a full judicial hearing, and, during the time they were waiting for it, welfare, food allowance, free housing, free medical and dental care. It was the activism of Canada's Supreme Court which decided that anyone claiming refugee status had to be accorded an individual hearing, under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and that the Charter applied to any person being in Canada, citizen or not. It also established that any person born in Canada was automatically a Canadian citizen. A whole refugee adjudication infrastructure was brought into existence, with refugee-court judges receiving salaries of at least \$80,000 *per annum*. The Canadian government has had to pay the legal costs for the immigration lawyers representing the refugee claimants — a figure running into the hundreds of millions. There were further expenditures such as paying legal aid for refugee-claimants that had committed crimes during their stay in the country — costs which have apparently already run into the tens of millions. It might finally be said that the rejection rate for refugees was very low, and that less than 1 percent of deportation orders were actually carried out. In other cases the refugee-claimant either became an untraceable illegal immigrant, melting into the grey economy, or even continued to collect government support in some different fashion.

Canada A Nation of Immigrants?

Canada's current immigration policies are related to its elites' embrace of multiculturalism as official state policy and *credo*. This promulgates the notion that Canada is and has always been "a nation of immigrants," and that therefore any opposition to large-scale dissimilar immigration is both racist and "un-Canadian." The fact is that the briefest glance at demographic statistics will show that Canada (or those historical regions in the East which would constitute the Canadian state) were, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, almost exclusively European, and

that persons descended from the British Isles (most of whom explicitly defined Canada as a British North American country) constituted almost three-quarters of the population at the turn of the century, while the other quarter consisted mostly of French-Canadians. There is also the fact that, although Canada did receive large numbers of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe and other places during its history, these were generally people who neither asked for — nor were offered — government handouts of any sort. The embrace of high immigration levels, welfare for all, and multiculturalism — or what, more honestly, should be called multiracialism — was never really put to a popular vote or test. It basically came along in the baggage of the over-all welfare-state delivered to all Canadians by the Liberal and New Democratic parties.

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One Party Talked Immigration

In English Canada, there was only one major political party which addressed these and related issues during the 1993 election, if in a *sotto voce* way: the Reform Party, which had emerged in 1987 as a Western-Canadian-based, populist protest-movement. The Reform Party did its best to embrace a deliberately moderate program, and quickly expelled members who were too blunt — perhaps the safest course to follow in a society like Canada's today. For example, William Gairdner (never formally a member of the Reform Party) who has published two controversial bestsellers, *The Trouble With Canada*, and *The War Against the Family* (both by Stoddart) is no longer invited to address Reform gatherings, because of one quote in one of his books — drawn to attention by the media — which suggested limiting Asian immigration to Western Canada. Recently, a campaign manager for a defeated Reform candidate, was quickly expelled after publicity about his letter that referred to women's and minority groups as "parasites of society." Reform also got burned when members of Canada's tiny neo-Nazi group attempted to infiltrate several riding associations. Though they were booted out immediately upon discovery, the media did its best to tar Reform with the neo-Nazi brush. Yet, despite all the ongoing criticism and hand-wringing of the media about the allegedly "extreme right-wing and racist" Reform Party, in the federal election, held on October 25, 1993, Reform won 52 seats in the 295-seat national Parliament, and came in second in 79 other ridings — 56 in Ontario.

However, the really big story of the election was

the annihilation of the Tories down to only two seats (including the defeat of Prime Minister Campbell in her own riding.) The recipients of a vast flood of votes were in fact the Liberals (in many ridings, Liberal candidates received more votes than all the other contenders *combined*) which allowed them to form a commanding majority in the House of Commons (177 seats), including 98 out of 99 Ontario seats.

Immigrants "Good" — Buy Cars

Despite their over-all victory, the Liberals had failed to win the support of the majority of French Canada, who voted for the Bloc Québécois, a party which was going to take the case for Quebec sovereignty to the federal Parliament. They won 54 seats in Quebec (which gives them Official Opposition status in the House of Commons), that being, of course, the only area in which they ran. (One ex-Tory running as an independent was also elected in Quebec.) Although their leader, Lucien Bouchard, said in the big televised debate (October 11, 1993) that he "loved immigrants," Quebec today exercises a far greater degree of independent control of its immigration policy than the rest of Canada. During that debate, it was suggested by three of the five participants that an immigration rate of 1 percent of a given country's population is virtually a scientifically infallible optimum. Taking compounding into account, this would mean that in 10 years, 10.5 percent of the population would be foreign-born, in 15 years, 16.1 percent, and in 20, 22 percent. (Since immigrants tend to be younger than the native-born population, their death-rate would also be lower, and they could probably have more children, thus further increasing their proportional weight in the country.) Preston Manning also professed to love immigrants, but suggested that immigration might now be lowered to about 150,000 a year, if it were to be generally driven by Canada's economic needs, and more geared to its absorptive capacity, in a time of severe recession. Chretien responded by stating categorically that immigrants are good for the economy, since every new immigrant is a new consumer, buying a car, fridge, etc.

The New Democratic Party (NDP), Canada's left-wing third party, had a bad showing in the election, being reduced from 43 to 9 seats, though virtually their entire vote went to the Liberals.

One could examine who voted for the Liberals as a way of analyzing Canada's current crisis. First of all, virtually all workers in government, including those in the expansive social sectors, teaching, etc., fearful of even the most minimal deficit-cutting — which would hurt their privileged position. (Canada has the second-largest over-all government sector *per capita* in the industrialized world — next to Sweden's.) Second, virtually all well-paid, highly-unionized blue-collar

workers, fearful again of economic retrenchments that would hurt their position. Third, virtually all immigrants, especially recent immigrants, fearful of immigration cutbacks by either the Tories or the Reform Party. Fourth, virtually all persons receiving welfare, etc., fearful of cutbacks in social payments. Fifth, many seniors, who were frightened by Liberal scaremongering that they would lose their pensions and Medicare to Tory or Reform cutbacks. Sixth, virtually all erstwhile NDP supporters (partially coterminous with above groups), because of resentment at Ontario NDP Premier Bob Rae's so-called "social contract" cutbacks against government workers. Seventh, there were unemployed or underemployed persons who placed their hopes in the mirage of Liberal "job-creation." (The Liberals began backtracking on these promises in their first few weeks in office, pleading that they had no prior knowledge of the real size of the Tory deficit they had inherited.) Eighth, a surprising portion of Canada's big corporate elite swung its support behind the Liberals, as evidenced by such events as the \$2,500-a-plate fundraising dinner in Montreal. Ninth, there were many young people, correctly brought up by Left-liberal-leaning education systems (particularly in Ontario where education is under provincial jurisdiction). Tenth, there were persons who, without examining issues, simply felt a change in government was due. Finally, there were those who still believed in the Liberal party that their forefathers had voted for of yore, and could not perceive the sea-change it had undergone.

The Québécois of French Canada — fervent in their nationalism — generally voted against the Liberals. In Alberta and British Columbia (the two westernmost provinces), the Reform vote extended across the entire social spectrum. However, in Ontario (where Reform won the single seat that didn't go to the Liberals), the main social sectors who by and large did not vote for the Liberals were the independent, thrifty, hardworking, modestly-living urban and rural small-property-holders (or lower middle-class) and part of the working-classes (including many of the working poor). They certainly had no interest in supporting higher taxes, bigger government, lax laws, and more immigration. Like them, the pensioners, white ethnics, blue-collar workers, and English-Canadians outside Southern Ontario (as well as the numerous, already too-well-qualified but unemployed or underemployed white-collar workers), who *did* vote mostly for the Liberals, likely will find themselves largely excluded from the new Liberal regime.

The new Liberal regime (in power for up to five years) will be driven by two main interests: following the megamedia trends set by Greater Toronto, and pacifying Quebec. It is unlikely to care very much about the rest of the country, or about social sectors outside of urban Southern Ontario and West Montreal. So Canada is in an age where English-Canadians

outside Greater Toronto and Ottawa, small-property-holders, and white ethnics like Ukrainians, Poles, and Portuguese are "out" (the Chretien Cabinet has *no* Eastern Europeans, and only one, particularly liberal, Southern European, in charge of immigration). Urban elites, government bureaucrats, welfare activists, and persons of color are "in." The supposed "pincer-movement" of Reform from the West, and the Bloc Québécois from the East, is still many years away, if it will happen at all. Such is the condition of Canada at the end of 1993. ■