

Report from Canada

Reflections of an earlier Canada and Toronto that are now passing away

BY MARK WEGIERSKI

On October 22, 2014, shots rang out in Ottawa at the National War Memorial, and at Parliament Hill—probably for the first time ever. A soldier standing guard at the War Memorial was shot and killed. A short time later, the terrorist was taken down and himself killed at the Centre Block of Parliament, by the highly adept Sergeant-at-Arms.

Two days earlier, two Canadian soldiers in Quebec had been run down by a terrorist in a car. The terrorist was shot to death after a car-chase, while one of the soldiers, who had been critically injured, died shortly afterwards.

Violent Jihad had arrived in Canada.

Despite the general rallying now occurring, it cannot be denied that there is a massive “culture war,” an “ideological war of position,” taking place in Canada and other Western countries, the understanding of which will doubtless dictate our responses to the Islamist threat.

Ironically, the preponderant reactions of various police services in Canada consisted of reassuring Canadian Muslims that they would do their utmost to protect them from any “backlash.” A lot of official and media commentary was also very evasive about establishing a link between extremist Islam, and the killings. It was also suggested that the Ottawa perpetrator was a “lone gunman.” Decades of boosting multicultural notions prevented much of the official and media commentary, from giving a straightforward account of the situation.

It seems, more generally speaking, that Canada has indeed embarked upon a unique “multicultural experiment”—one which it is hard to think of as having any precedent in history. The extent of the sea change represented by this multiculturalism was impressed on me in vivid fashion at an event I attended a few days later.

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On October 25, 2014, I attended the Annual Alumni Dinner for University of Toronto Schools (UTS)—a unique model school that extends from Grade 7 to Grade 12. The dinner was held on a Saturday evening at the elegant Marriott Bloor Yorkville in the very heart of downtown Toronto. UTS had been founded in 1910 as a model school that was supposed to embody the best of Ontario public schooling. (The plural in the name derives from the fact that, in the original scheme of things, there was supposed to be a school for girls, as well as boys.) Over the decades, UTS has undergone various permutations. In the 1970s, for example, the tuition was a mere \$300 (Canadian) a year, whereas today, it is approaching \$22,000 (Canadian) a year. This has come to pass mainly because in the early 1990s the socialist New Democratic Party (NDP) Ontario government of Bob Rae, responding to accusations of “elitism,” withdrew all public funding to UTS. Under the Canadian system, it should be mentioned here, education is strictly a provincial responsibility. Amid all the projects on which the Ontario government has squandered vast amounts of money over the years, UTS—a genuine centre of excellence—was singled out for cutbacks and was, ironically, made far, far less accessible.

Now, UTS has to fight to keep its large, elegant historic building (located slightly north-west of the extensive downtown campus of the University of Toronto), as well as to maintain its affiliation with the University of Toronto, which regrettably seems to want to jettison its links with the school.

As is obvious, I am myself an alumnus of UTS (Class of '79). Among the more prominent alumni known to Americans is David Frum (Class of '78). It actually so happens that my first year in the school (1973-1974) marked the advent of the first fully co-ed classes. Entrance into the school is by writing a competitive examination. Typically there had been at least ten times more candidates writing the exams, than places available. In my year of entry, the contest was even more competitive, since half the incoming places had been reserved for girls. At that time, a total of only about 70 persons ended up being accepted.

It has to be said it was a rather bittersweet, almost sad, dinner. Adding to the poignancy of the occasion was a startling contrast in demographics. The aging alumni of the earlier decades were almost entirely WASP men, while the alumni of later years were almost entirely of Asian descent. I suppose it can be said that, in an act of historically unprecedented generosity and self-abnegation, the WASPs had handed Canada over to waves of newcomers. The aging WASPs seem to have quite enthusiastically acquiesced in the transformation of a more traditional Canada.

In the UTS of the late 1970s, there was what was then considered diversity. Apart from the WASPs, there were English Catholics, Jews, “white ethnics,” and a few Asians, Latin Americans, and blacks—as well as “gender parity.” But nowadays a class of such composition would be derisively called “lily white.”

I find it hard to understand what particular motivation has impelled the WASPs to throw open the borders of Canada to the most heterogeneous newcomers. And, it must be said, in contrast to what is the case in the United States, many of these are very highly achieving Asians—which sometimes tends to give the impression that the “multicultural experiment” is actually working.

Nevertheless, ominously, much of the more recent, Muslim immigration may simply be so alien to real Canadian traditions, that it stretches the “multicultural experiment” to the breaking point.

I do also recall that the new immigration policies of the 1960s and later had been devised by the federal Liberal Party, in order to undermine what had, up to the 1950s, been called “Tory Toronto.” Indeed, the Toronto of the 1950s had been very socially conservative. It has been snidely said of those times that, on Sunday, you could fire a cannon on Toronto’s main street and not hit anyone — because everybody was at church!

Obviously, the UTS of those times was rooted in that earlier city. UTS was said to embody the principles of academic excellence based strictly on merit, in contrast to Upper Canada College (UCC), a very expensive private school. Nevertheless, UTS may have been only slightly less WASP than UCC. Certainly, UTS embodied highly idealistic principles, but principles that in the end may have turned out to be self-negating.

It may surprise some that UTS has also had a memorable sports history. Notably, the school’s hockey team won the Toronto-wide secondary school championships in 1953 and 1954. All the surviving members of those teams—as well as the 103-year old former coach—were in attendance, to be inducted into the UTS “Hall of Fame.”

Also speaking at the dinner was Michael Spence (Class of ’62), who had, among numerous other accomplishments, won the Nobel Prize in Economics, and was

being given the H.J. Crawford Award, named after the illustrious first headmaster of the school.

In another memorable, emotion-laden speech at the dinner, a former hockey team member from those winning teams, who was also a former principal of UTS, said that the institution of UTS would go on, long after all the people in the room were dead—certainly a noble sentiment, but one redolent of poignant ambiguity. Endure it may, but as an institution so radically transmogrified, that it might be unrecognizable to the oldsters.

This put me in mind of the argument that America is a “propositional nation,” which holds that various heterogeneous newcomers would continue to uphold the “founding principles” of America. Perhaps, perhaps not.

These days, one sees Toronto in the throes of a massive transformation, one that seems to have been in progress for decades. Literally hundreds of new condo buildings are being built every year. The population and vehicular traffic of the city are increasing at a markedly rapid pace without any corresponding improvements in the infrastructure. Notably, the extent of the subway network is more or less unchanged from what it was many years ago.

The Toronto public school system is dominated by notions that, not that many years ago, might have been characterized as belonging to the “radical left.” The Toronto public library system has also become a bastion of “political correctness.” While the University of Toronto retains its high place in world university rankings, it, too, has become a much different place from what it was when I obtained my three degrees there in the 1980s.

As the well-known Canadian band Rush sang—“constant change is here to stay.”

For those who cherish the sureties of a more rooted existence, this massive wave of change creates an overwhelming feeling of alienation from their country, province, and city. It is the feeling of living in an environment of continual, drastic change—change that one has not given one’s consent to, and that one has not been consulted about. Unlike many of the WASPs, some people do not adjust too easily to the new and multifarious kinds of diversity, possibly because they do not have various “cushionings” readily available.

The current Prime Ministership of Stephen Harper was supposed to be the culmination of a decades-long effort to somehow turn around the “ship of state” from the course on which it had been launched by the “Trudeau revolution.” Following in the steps of “progressive” innovations launched by Liberal Prime Minister Lester Pearson, the Liberal Pierre Elliott Trudeau held power in Canada between 1968 and 1984 (except for nine months in 1979-1980). The system and struc-

tures that Trudeau created are sometimes dubbed “the Trudeaupia.” It could be argued that the longest-serving Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, a Liberal of the pre-1960s period, would have found most of those “innovations” highly questionable, and, in some cases, simply ghastly. Although the Liberal Party had mostly held power in Canada since 1896, until the 1960s they hewed to what could be called a “traditionalist-centrist” consensus—some aspects of which persisted, in fragmentary form in the Liberal Party, into later decades. However, these piecemeal survivals have now been almost completely expunged. Actually, in fact, the Old Left CCF (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation)—the precursor to the much-different NDP—while economically socialist, was largely socially conservative. Many in the CCF might have found at least some of the notions of the Sixties questionable.

It would be a long process that could lead to challenging the “Trudeaupia.” First, Preston Manning co-founded the Reform Party in 1987, in order to challenge the Progressive Conservatives (as they were then called), who were so-called “ultra-moderates” and who acquiesced in most “small-l liberal” policies. This resulted in over a decade where the Liberals could win easy majorities in the federal Parliament, because of the “vote-splitting” between the Reform Party and the Progressive Conservatives. This was especially accentuated because of the “first-past-the-post” system of geographically-based electoral ridings. In the 1997 federal election, for example, the Liberals won 38 percent of the popular vote; Reform, 19 percent; and the Progressive Conservatives, 19 percent—but the Liberals won a comfortable majority of seats in the federal Parliament. Being out of power was seen as the price that had to be paid by the Reform Party, to push the Progressive Conservatives towards embracing a more genuine conservatism.

Then, in December 2003, there occurred the merger of the Canadian Alliance (the successor to the Reform Party), and the federal Progressive Conservatives. Harper was elected leader of the new Conservative Party which had significantly dropped the adjective “Progressive.” In 2004, the Liberals were reduced to a minority government (a plurality of seats in the federal Parliament), while, in 2006 and 2008, the Conservatives won a minority government, and finally, in 2011, a majority government. Many so-called “small-c conservatives” expected a major turnaround under this parliamentary majority, but they have been quite disappointed. Most notable has been the absence of any attempt to temper the multiculturalism and high immigration policies.

And now, whatever counter-tendencies Harper might have been able to generate, are likely to be extinguished, if Justin Trudeau (Pierre’s son) and the Lib-

eral Party come roaring back to power in the upcoming federal election, expected in October 2015. Most of the Canadian media radiates an enthusiasm for Justin that can be compared to the adulation in favor of Obama evinced by most of the U.S. media, which achieved its high water mark in the atmosphere of euphoria seen in the 2008 election.

In the decades since the 1960s, Toronto has become an overwhelmingly “progressive” city, of which it has been said that, “there were more believing Marxists in Toronto, than there ever were in the Soviet Union.” In more recent years, Toronto has also become renowned for its Gay Pride parades, which are said to regularly attract crowds of close to a million people.

The election of Rob Ford in 2010 as Mayor of Toronto was something truly unexpected. However, as a result of personal issues, Rob Ford managed to bring enormous discredit on himself, even though many of his policies were highly sensible. Towards the end of the long, drawn-out 2014 mayoral campaign, doctors discovered he was suffering from a cancerous tumor, which resulted in his withdrawing from the campaign, and prompted his brother Doug to run in the mayoral race in his place. (At that point, Rob Ford chose to run in his old ward in Etobicoke, a western suburb of Toronto—where he was able to win on October 27.)

However, the mayoral election (held on Monday, October 27, 2014), was won by the professed “moderate” John Tory, who had run for the office of Mayor in 2003 and lost, and had also led the Ontario Progressive Conservative party (the provincial party has retained the adjective) to a disastrous defeat in 2007. John Tory, as well as his father and grandfather, were alumni of UTS.

It is to be hoped that John Tory can lend his business acumen (he was a former executive at Rogers, one of the largest Canadian corporations) to turning the city around, at least in some aspects. But the dilemma of Canada’s “multicultural experiment” appears to be intractable. It seems to have arisen out of some character traits of Canada’s old WASPs, which, while they may have seemed very decent and honorable and humane, could lead, it might be said, to little else than having them being played for fools.

One supposes that those WASPs who are wealthier or better connected or remain perfectly “politically correct” can still insulate themselves quite well from the various negative consequences of their multicultural orthodoxies (which have also included an elaborate system of “affirmative action”-style hiring and promotion policies—what’s called “employment equity” in Canada), and that they continue to live lives of pronounced comfort. However, the lower middle and working classes of Canada (including the so-called “white ethnics”) are less able to so insulate themselves. ■