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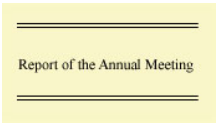

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CANADIAN NATIONALISM — IMMATURE OR OBSOLETE?

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CANADIAN NATIONALISM — I should perhaps begin by apologizing for bringing up this hardy perennial once more. Through the years this Association has repeatedly been addressed on various aspects of the subject. The pages of the *Canadian Historical Review* have frequently dealt with it. Our general histories are full of it. Public figures, authors, critics constantly regard it, in a sort of ritual contemplation of the Canadian navel. Even Royal Commissions sit to inquire into the state of our national consciousness. In fact, the thought comes to mind that this particular plant might possibly thrive better if Canadians were not always anxiously pulling it up by the roots to see whether it is growing.

Nevertheless here I am, the latest and the least to examine Canadian nationalism. And my only defence is that, in the world of today, we face an interesting problem in this regard. Our nationalism, we are often told, is immature; we must develop it. Yet equally we hear that nationalism in a world of super-powers and hydrogen-bomb warfare is outmoded, and not only obsolete but downright dangerous. We must think beyond nationalism to world government: there is no room for an antiquated nineteenth-century concept such as the sovereign nation-state.

The problem even appears to be reflected in our schools. And while I make no claim to such an extensive and devastating knowledge of the curriculum as Professor Hilda Neatby, it does seem that the guardians of the young minds have become entangled in the question. Thus there is a tendency among them to suggest that nationalism is a bad thing — for other people, especially Europeans. But for us it is quite all right. Is it? That is the question I hope to consider. Is there some value to be found in Canadian nationalism in the contemporary world — leaving aside for the moment the question of how far a distinctive Canadian nationalism exists at all?

As for immaturity, there is of course a good deal of evidence that our attributes of nationhood have not gone far beyond a complex political mechanism that seeks to reconcile British Columbia to Newfoundland and Ontario to Quebec (and everybody else to Ontario), an equally complex transportation system, and a booming Department of External Affairs which every bright young History undergraduate aspires to join. But what of the Canadian national identity? Can one tell a Manitoban from a Minnesotan? Or a Torontonian whose spiritual home is Buffalo, New York, from a citizen of any large northern American city? Where is our painting aside from pine trees, our music aside from O Canada? We are a young country, we know, but this kind of eternal youth may start to look a little haggard.

True, there are always our boundless resources. Wait till we develop our oil and iron wealth to the full. Then every part of the country can be like nickel-rich Sudbury, with a municipal arena larger

in proportion to population than Toronto's Maple Leaf Gardens, two dozen outlets for beer and one book store. And if we are good and work hard — or rather are lucky and work less — we may all have a television set, two mortgages, and all the finer things in life. Surely we are immature when so often the popular aim seems to be to make this nation a second-best United States in terms of bath-tubs and Buicks, with little awareness of the cultural growth which gives that country bone, fibre, and a vigorous national life of its own.

There is no need to labour this theme of national immaturity further, except to point to the evident fact that Canada's division into two language communities — to say nothing of the regional divisions — has severely limited the growth of a common nationalism. And yet, beyond the question of immaturity is the further question raised by the terrifying modern age: whether the very aim of shaping a national personality is not hopelessly out of date. For what place has one more nationalism in a supra-national world — a world beyond nations, but not, unhappily, a truly international world?

It is by now a truism that we live in a two-power world, where very few nations can hope to count as entities in the bleak pattern of world power. The leading nation-states of the past have been replaced by giants that are in themselves vast continental empires rather than nations in the old sense. And by the side of the American or Soviet super-states we may see only two other potential Great Powers, China and India, themselves continental empires in character. Canada, for all her transcontinental sweep, cannot by virtue of her limitations in climate and barren soil be considered as a candidate for this class, nor Brazil or Australia, the only other territorial units comparable in size. Indeed, Canada, for all essential purposes of the power balance, counts as part of the North American continental unit that weighs in the scales against the Eurasian land-mass controlled by the Soviet Union.

Today, as we know, the non-Great Power nations, from the greatest of these, Britain, through middle powers like Canada to small powers like Colombia or Egypt, tend to act in world affairs through formal or informal groupings, whether they be NATO, the Latin American block, the Arab League, or the hearty comradeship of the people's democracies. Agglomerations, not separate nations, are the primary factors in international politics. Those nations that seek to stand aloof, cherishing dreams of independent sovereignty, too often show by their very sensitivity that their ancient pride or youthful hopes are shot through with an uneasy awareness that sovereignty has become a luxury they may not be permitted to enjoy. It might almost be said that in our supra-national world only the insignificant can hope to have national independence. And Canada is not that insignificant.

Consciousness of the limits of nationalism of course has long been growing, in the western world, at any rate. Thus the United Nations was planned as a supra-national authority that could to some extent bind and direct the nation-states of the world. That positive side of supra-nationalism may have failed to fulfil the early hopes for its development. But in a negative sense the supra-national age is very much upon us, as big and small nations find themselves swept along in the currents of super-state diplomacy, and even the super-states are

integrally linked with allies — despite go-it-alone throwbacks in our neighbour to the south.

None of this will seem very new; but it does underline the basic point: that in the present age that is making nations obsolete, an ardent effort to shape a strong Canadian nationalism may at least be open to query, while a concentration on mere forms and symbols of national independence may have little meaning at all. Settling our national flag question, for instance, will not affect world realities. We could mount a beaver rampant on a codfish, and Russians would still be sure that we were an American satellite, Americans that we should be glad to serve at once under the inspired command of the Pentagon. Flags and anthems are the result not the cause of national identity, and the still divisive flag issue in Canada is an internal not an external aspect of the state of the nation.

Yet nationalism, fully considered, is very much a matter of a people's internal development; and that rather obvious point leads on to an answer to the query posed above. For in any case, within this country, something has been taking shape which can only be called a Canadian national identity — whether this development is good or bad, fruitful or futile, in the world of today. It is there, and it continues to grow, whatever its immaturities or shortcomings may be in terms of older ideas of nationalism. And I think it may be shown that this Canadian version of nationalism is by no means ill equipped or out of place in the modern supra-national world.

Demonstrating such a statement involves examining the great inscrutable, the Canadian national character. Professor Malcolm Ross, in his stimulating introduction to a recent collection of Canadian essays, *Our Sense of Identity*, finds the key to our national character in "opposites in tension"; and that, I think, is a most effective suggestion. That is, he explains the Canadian identity in terms of the strains and pulls between the two widely different French and English-speaking communities in Canada, a special relationship which more than anything else distinguishes this North American country from the North American nation to the south. This tension is "our natural mode" [1] — we take it for granted. Yet for all the surface appearance of calm, even dullness, in Canadian national life, our experience has been one of constantly adjusting strains between the divergent groups, in the knowledge that there is no ultimate resolving of tension to be foreseen.

The tensions between the two main language groups are repeated on lesser scale between the various regional or ethnic communities also found in Canada. The United States knows similar regional and ethnic variations, but there the standard, at least, is not so much an acceptance of continuing differences as an ideal of absorption in a common and basically uniform national culture. No doubt wide regional variations exist in the American republic, wider perhaps, as regards range of environment and length of regional tradition, than are found in many parts of Canada. Nevertheless it is plain that the United States has much greater cohesion, because it has one dominant language, and culture, and much greater economic unity and mobility

[1] Ross, M., ed., *Our Sense of Identity* (Toronto, 1954).

of population. Despite qualifications, therefore, American nationalism is far more based on fusion and uniform standards. It is more like the older, monolithic, nineteenth-century variety of nationalism than is the Canadian type, which exists and grows in the changing relations between groups that do not become assimilated to one another.

Can we speak of national growth in this connection? I think so. Did not Baldwin and Lafontaine achieve a broad measure of self-government out of, and in part because of, the tensions? Did not Macdonald, Cartier, Brown and others go forward to a federal union largely because of them, and did not King work with them in reaching national status? Canadian nationalism then takes shape in the balancing and adjusting of forces within Canada. Though it looks vastly different from the usually accepted variety, there is no reason not to call it nationalism, since it distinguishes the whole Canadian people, has moulded their very growth, and is expressed in their dealings with the outside world. There have, of course, been other nations founded on differing language communities; but the scale, and indeed the world significance, of a Belgium or a Switzerland do not make them adequate parallels for Canada; while the racial problems of a South Africa add a complexity — and perhaps an ominous degree of difficulty — which fortunately we lack.

In consequence, Canada may be said to embody a largely new kind of nationalism, perhaps a twentieth century version, wherein basic community differences continue to exist and the whole national structure recognizes that fact. This pattern informs Canadian political life, and is bound up in the Canadian federal system, through which the two main communities and the several regions can satisfy both their need for unity, so that they may survive apart from the United States, and their divergent tendencies that seek autonomy within the nation. But both aspects fit together, as the Rowell-Sirois Report well pointed out:

> National unity and provincial autonomy must not be thought of as competitors for the citizen's allegiance, for, in Canada at least, they are but two facets of the same thing — a sane federal system. National unity must be based on provincial autonomy, and provincial autonomy cannot be assured unless a strong feeling of national unity exists throughout Canada. [2]

Accordingly the Canadian may learn from his own federal system a sense of the interconnectedness of local and general affairs, which he can transfer to the world at large. His nationalism does not close doors for him to other peoples; indeed, it almost opens his eyes to world variety, for the Canadian scene at home is essentially compounded of diversities that yet are linked together. In comparison, the American has a different experience at home, where in his federal structure the central power has loomed so large since 1865, and where, again, a uniform standard of "one hundred per cent" nationalism is far more in evidence. The American, as a result, tends to project his own established standard to the world, to think of bringing the American way to foreign peoples. Thus he may recoil in dismay when he finds the foreigners have little desire for this particular brand

[2] *Report of the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations* (Ottawa, 1940) II, 269.

of export. The Canadian would not know what the Canadian way was, if he did have the power to export it, though he might know the Nova Scotian way, or the Albertan way. Having less desire to project himself, he perhaps can get on better with the world.

Because the Canadian lives amid differences and complexities at home he is not notably surprised to find them on the world scene. It may be that the American gives more earnest attention to world affairs, that the Canadian is more apathetic. But equally it might be that the Canadian does not expect, from his own experience, any straightforward solutions or reconciliations between opposed groups, whereas the American, because of his success in fusing differences within his own nation, is cast down when he finds that no similar acceptance of common standards can be won in the world outside.

Certainly a Canadian nationalism that dwells in a tension of opposites at home, will not be ill-suited to face a world of tensions abroad, even though these tensions be many times more acute. Pulls and counter-pulls between ethnic communities, regional interests, religious groupings, underlie the Canadian's very existence. Hence he can still comprehend them in their far more aggravated form on the international scene.

In sum, I do believe that the Canadian version of nationalism is well qualified to persist in the present kind of world. In the first place, being bound up with and limited by Canada's internal divisions, it plays no aggressive or unsettling part in world affairs as the older variety of nationalism has done. Instead it leads Canada to accept quite readily the existence of fundamental and enduring differences in international politics and to work forward from that point for day-to-day adjustments, for practical, even superficial, easings of world tensions in the same way she has found necessary in her own national life. Her faith is in the *modus vivendi*, for it has worked and grown steadily more viable in her own case.

In the second place, the fact that Canadian nationalism is anything but monolithic, uniform, or clearly defined, equips this people for dealing with a supra-national world where the tight, self-contained national entity is out of date and where increasingly the actual situation is one of combinations of nations around super-powers and ties and commitments that override national sovereignties. Metropolitan economic connections, for example, more than ever before make it impossible for a country to manage its own economic life, whether they are expressed in patterns of trade, Sterling and Dollar blocks, or the plan of Marshall Aid. Mutual security arrangements like the Canadian-American Joint Defence Board or the European Defence Community limit national independence at its very core, the control of military action.

In such a world of complex relationships between communities, older nationalisms may be ill at ease, but the Canadian finds a good deal of his own experience reflected in it. He has never really known the now vanishing concept of wholly self-contained national sovereignty, having always been integrally linked with other countries — Britain, the Empire and Commonwealth, and now with the American super-state and the United Nations. Thus by recognizing the real

limits of national independence today, and the inevitability of outside ties, Canada is able to function more effectively as a nation in a world dominated by super-powers.

At the same time it is vitally important in this world that there should be something more than just opposed super-powers. The world needs nations that can, through their own limitations of size and power, offer a basis for truly international action in a way that super-states leading mere power blocks perhaps can never do, and which also can work as far as is possible to keep the talking war going and the shooting war between super-states from starting.

The Canadian, moreover, has known outside metropolitan economic controls throughout his own history. He can accept the inevitabilities of an economically interconnected world to a greater degree than his North American neighbours who today find themselves with the privileges of metropolitan ascendancy but are none too ready to accept the corresponding duties. The Canadian also has always had partners in maintaining his own security, and has never taken substantial military action in isolation, on his own. Looking in, therefore, he can look out, finding in his own past a preparation for the interconnected, interdependent world of today.

Finally, it might be urged that in the Canadian national personality (and here I mean something beyond the dual French-and English-speaking personalities) there are attributes which fit the people of this country as a whole for an age of constant threat and crisis. Canadians, we are told, are conservative and cautious, and they are not given to defining national ideals, to searching analyses — or to much creative thinking at all. Their caution may be called either apathy or stability; their lack of clear ideals and original philosophy, superficiality or practicality: it all depends where you stand. Nevertheless, it seems that these characteristics are rooted in the Canadian historic experience, and they may not prove bad qualities for the present age.

Canadians, in very origin as weak remnants of the defeated French empire or the shattered First British empire in America, were by their necessities impelled to caution, in a way unknown to their powerful, confident and well-endowed American neighbours. Canadians, too, in their divided and difficult country could hardly afford to penetrate their problems too deeply: besides, there was so much to be done. Thus the culture-heroes of Canada are practical men, builders and technicians, political or otherwise; and it is astounding how much success they have had in keeping this country united and growing. Understandably, therefore, Canadians have shown an abiding faith in pragmatic ways, in treating matters piecemeal as they arise in the hope that the big enduring issues will never come to debate. With a few notable exceptions — to prove the rule — it may be said that this cautious, pragmatic, surface approach largely explains why Canadian history has been full of the grumbles of the multitude and the moral indignation of the few men of doctrine; but has been singularly lacking in violence and bloodshed.

In the turbulent, deeply divided modern world, the pragmatic approach that concentrates on the immediate consequence and not the "great debates" of principle is not wholly without merit. From his

own historic experience of success within grave limitations of environment and national unity, the Canadian tends to hope always, but never too broadly: to be, perhaps, complacent and tough-minded at the same time. Hence he can show resilience in a succession of world crises, without a pendulum swing from bright dreams of world brotherhood to suspicion of everything foreign. And even the Canadian lack of well defined national ideas and doctrines may not be such a debilitating handicap in a world surfeited with ideologies.

Accordingly, with all its shortcomings, there is no reason to write off Canadian nationalism as obsolete today. However immature it still may be in the cultural sense, those among us who look for its advance need not feel that the road to Canadian nationhood has yet become a blind alley in this supra-national age. As long, I might add, as atomic warfare does not transfer mankind from the realm of the supra-national to that of the supernatural.

DISCUSSION

Professor Lower felt that there were no grounds for apology in again examining Canadian nationalism. Like lovely woman, we are frequently absorbed in self-contemplation. He preferred the word "community" implying the binding together by ties, to the term "nationalism". He was disturbed by a constant flux which upsets whatever developments are in train. Values established, are knocked over again: hence our constant debates on education. It is most important that we establish a set of values. *Professor Soward* admitted to being described as a nationalist. The two world wars had accelerated the development of nationalism, a development within our own environment but under concentration. After 1918 Claxton, Rogers, MacKenzie, F. R. Scott etc. dived into nationalism. The second World War increased our self-confidence. In his mind there was no problem, we have a nationalism and had maturity; with all parts of Canada contributing. The role of the C. B. C. in this connection has still to be told. We have a regionalism blended with a centralized maximum unit, and we have carried this sense of blended nationalism into commonwealth affairs. We distrust too strong a centre, be in Ottawa, London, Geneva or Washington. *Dr. Careless* agreed with *F. D. Blackley* that our experience of divisions within Canada did influence external policy. It gave us superior qualifications to share in the adjustment of differences between world communities. Monolithic communities did not do this so easily. *Dr. Norman MacKenzie* asked about the effect of the continued impact of American culture on Canadian nationalism, and upon our youth in particular. *Dr. Careless* was conscious of the problem on two levels. In the shared North American environment, and with mass media of communication, the impact was inevitable, and would become stronger. But, again, Americanization with its industrialization, democracy, capitalism, technology and accompanying values was a world-wide process in the twentieth century. We must be aware that the United States has a full culture. We must suffer through a "cultural recession" as we, like others, take the

less valuable elements first. The United States herself, has emerged from this mediocratization. He did not fear the disappearance of Canadian cultural identity so long as we remained a bi-cultural community. There was a continuing British ingredient in our midst, and ties with Europe continue. More difficult was the danger of economic and political integration. *Mr. Mason Wade* believed that the monolithic aspects of the United States had been over-stressed. There were many divisions in the United States which made the adoption of a common foreign policy very difficult. And the question of cultural impacts was a two-way process. The C. B. C. in general, *"La Presse"* in New England, and the influence of Canadian-born upon American life, were cited. *Professor Underhill* wanted to end this complacency. We had worn out the theme of "3000 miles of undefended frontier" and were now engaged with a new theme of "special fitness" to solve the problems of others, because we have problems of our own. The United States is not monolithic. The Civil War, the colour problem, Dixiecrats, and McCarthyites witness much deeper differences than our own. French-English differences were quite superficial and the quarrels of Duplessis and St. Laurent were mere shadow boxing. The United States was well qualified, from experience with its own deep internal divisions, to deal with world affairs. We don't know the depths of tragedy; witness France still divided on the issues of 1789. We should tell ourselves that we are *un*fitted. Mr. Pearson was a contemporary Benes buzzing around with a formula. It would be demonstrated as futile. *W. J. Rose* hoped that we would not think of nationalism as obsolete. He liked nationalism, but not professional nationalists with chips on their shoulders. The world admires our accommodation to our tension. He entirely agreed with Dr. Careless. *Mrs. McKellar* felt that we were regional in our loyalty while at home, but Canadians when abroad.

Le *R. P. Adrien Pouliot* désire exprimer la pensée des Canadiens de langue française. Educateur par profession, voici comment, à son avis, les éducateurs canadiens-français, d'un océan à l'autre, contribuent à l'établissement d'un nationalisme canadien: c'est en donnant aux jeunes gens dont ils sont responsables la meilleure formation possible, selon l'esprit de leur race et de leur foi. De même que le rendement national d'un individu est en fonction de son perfectionnement personnel dans tous les domaines, ainsi le rendement national des groupes ethniques qui composent le Canada se mesuret'il à leur perfectionnement culturel spécifique. Pour illustrer la préoccupation qu'ont les éducateurs canadiens-français d'insuffler à leurs élèves un esprit canadien, le P. Pouliot raconte le voyage à Ottawa effectué récement par les Rhétoriciens du Collège de Jésuites de Québec: coup d'oeil sur les ambassades et les résidences d'Etat, audition de deux procès à la Cour suprême, visite prolongée aux Archives du Canada, déjeuner au Café du Parlement, en compagnie d'un ministre, d'un sénateur et d'un député, contact avec le parlementarisme de la Chambre des Communes et du Sénat, entrevue d'un quart d'heure avec le premier ministre dans son bureau. Non seulement cette excursion d'une journée restera pour nos collégiens un agréable souvenir, mais ils ont pris conscience, avec admiration, de la réalité nationale canadienne.