

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Now and then something will cross our desk which leaves an indelible mark because it puts traditional understandings into a new light. At first glance this essay, presented at the 35th Anniversary Symposium of the Canadian Studies Center at Michigan State University in April, appears to be only peripherally related at best to contemporary public policy issues in U.S.-Canada relations. But appearances are deceiving. Professor Stewart, an historian, deliberately takes a long view of the entire Canadian political process rather than zeroing in on the details of this or that contemporary dispute affecting steel, autos, beer, lumber, pork, or energy. Yet he is well-attuned to the restructuring of national economies along global lines in recent years, and as a result he is able to relate the traditional features of the Canadian political system to transnational economic forces in a provocative way. What many consider to have been a major flaw in the Canadian political process, he concludes, may turn out to be a blessing in disguise. Read on....

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CANADIAN POLITICS IN A GLOBAL ECONOMY

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A case can be made that the historical record of Canadian political leaders is a dismal one. In the one hundred and twenty-five years since Canadian Confederation was established in 1867 numerous attempts to find a constitutional framework acceptable to all Canadians have failed. No other modern, industrialized, urbanized, high per capita income country has such a record of futility in so fundamental an aspect of national life. The 1992 referendum has been the most ambitious attempt so far to address this basic feature of Canada. It was comprehensive in nature, addressing not only the ancient vexation of Quebec's place in Canada but other central issues that have been opened up by the ten years of constitutional debate since the patriation of the British North America Act in 1982. The Charlottetown Accord on which the referendum turned proposed to recognize Quebec as a distinct society, thus providing a legal setting within

which Quebec could continue its efforts to preserve its language and culture within Canada and anglophone North America. It proposed a wide-ranging recognition of the autonomy of aboriginal peoples, and it tried to encompass reforms of the Senate and the working of Parliament which would allow for more influence and recognition of Canada's regions.

The overwhelming defeat of the referendum drafted with well-orchestrated fanfare in Charlottetown (site of the first agreements on the 1867 British North America Act) seems a confirmatory sign of the ineptness of political leadership. This is especially so since post-referendum polls showed that a common discontent among voters across the country was a sense of distrust in the politicians who had devised the scheme. There were, of course, a range of other factors at work to explain the failure of the referendum. Inside Quebec, polls found that voters thought Robert Bourassa had made too many concessions, including Quebec's historical weight in the Senate. Outside Quebec the "no" voters thought Quebec had won too much, including a permanent fixed number of seats in the Commons irrespective of future demographic trends which would likely reduce the percentage of Quebec's population in Canada. Some voters in the West were fearful that the aboriginal clauses would give too much power to Native peoples. In the end, the aboriginal peoples remained the only group in Canada which gave unequivocal support because they believed correctly that they had finally secured territorial recognition and legal rights denied to them since the period of conquest and the absorption and marginalization of the 19th and 20th centuries. Yet behind this array of explanations for the failure of the referendum there was one common thread—dissatisfaction with the political leaders who devised this ungainly solution. As *Maclean's* remarked in its post-mortem editorial, "the referendum campaign stands as the most sweeping rebuff to elected politicians in the country's 125 years."¹

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The constitutional debacle can be seen as a consequence of the poverty of thinking by the nation's political leaders. There was a good deal of criticism, for example, that throughout the decade of constitutional debate the political leaders had proceeded by closed-door meetings which created a culture of deal-making ensuring that any product of those meetings would seem complex and expedient rather than uplifting and appealing to Canadian people, wherever they lived. Negotiations between the prime minister and the provincial premiers (the "first ministers" as the *Guide to the Meech Lake Constitutional Accord* calls them) have been the locus for decision-making on the constitutional issues of the 1980s. In a recent survey of public opinion Thomas Courchene, Director of the School of Policy Studies at Queen's University, has pointed out that during this decade of fundamental discussion about the future of Canada the federal Parliament in Ottawa and the provincial legislatures have played a small role. The prime minister, the provincial premiers and their advisors have largely usurped the policy-making functions of elected representatives in the legislatures.² There was a sense that the politicians were simply not up to the occasion, perhaps even not aware of the occasion. To be sure, in the latter stages of the decade of debate an attempt was made to open up the process and give Canadian people from Halifax to Vancouver the opportunity to participate in framing a new constitution by means of Joe Clark's forums across Canada. However, the entire decade of constitution-mongering was characterized by politicians and their advisors trying to work out solutions *in camera*.

An illustration of the frustration this caused comes in remarks made by Jack Granatstein of York University, author of many books on Canada and her international relations and, it is worth adding, no meek defender of Canadian nationalism. In a recent article in a collection on *Canada: the State of the Federation* Granatstein remarked that "what makes all this insufferable is that these measures are proposed directly in the face of the expressed wishes of the people. The Spicer Commission's report made crystal clear that Canadians want a strong central government; every opinion poll since Spicer has said the same. No matter, our federal and provincial negotiators, existing in a dream world of their own making, know better. So much for the openness and responsiveness of this process, put in place to correct the perceived flaws of the closed-door bargaining that gave us the Meech Lake Accord." In Granatstein's view

Mulroney's actions throughout all this may well have been informed by rather narrow and personal partisan goals. While conceding that the prime minister genuinely wished to find a solution which would satisfy Quebec, Granatstein thinks that there were purely political motives which led Mulroney to push things too far. "He also aimed at solidifying the Progressive-Conservative party's hold in Quebec, at entrenching his own position at its head, and in eradicating the image and memory of Pierre Trudeau in the province. Those latter reasons while politically potent were more than slightly self-serving. No one...should accept Mulroney's endlessly repeated claims of virtue on constitutional questions at face value."³ In his intriguingly and tellingly titled *One Eyed Kings. Promise and Illusion in Canadian Politics*, Ron Graham offered a similar appraisal of Mulroney, remarking that he did not think Mulroney "sought office for any other reason beyond his own need for glory" and that Mulroney's "approach to policy is too partisan and event-driven...." Even within the system itself candid observers were troubled by this phenomenon. Canada's ambassador to the U.S. Allan Gottleib, remarked in an interview on November 7, 1992 that people in Canada were "alienated from politicians."⁴

The Granatstein and Graham critiques, the Gottleib observation, along with the post-referendum polling results of *Maclean's*, present an unflattering view of Canadian political leaders—their ideas, their motives and the procedures they chose to use. The indictment is that they are self-serving, unwilling to open up the debate, a prey to special interests and lacking the vision to present a fresh perspective that might develop creative concepts of Canadian federalism and nationalism. It is fair to note at this point that political leaders in other democracies in recent times have suffered from similar criticisms and that confidence in political leadership from Germany, to France, Italy, Britain and the United States is at low ebb. But the case in Canada seems more serious because the doubts center not on issues of economic policy, corruption, law and order and so on but on the very existence of the state itself. The issue in Canada seems terminal rather than transitory. If agreement cannot be secured now, if one hundred and twenty-five years of political experience is inadequate for addressing these issues, what hope is there for the future of Canada?

The inadequate performance of political leaders in 1992 seems to fit a pattern that has been evident since the creation of

Canadian Confederation in 1867. At no point in modern Canadian history has a prime minister been able to articulate an attractive vision of Canada that has appealed to Quebec and Canadians in the different regions. Insofar as prime ministers have tackled the problems of Canadian diversity, they have done so by compromise and expediency. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of Canadian political culture has been taken to be this genius for compromise which, it is argued, has led to the survival of Canada and a useful international role for Canada as a facilitator of understanding. The downside is that this political tradition, as was evident between 1982 and 1992, is unlikely to find creative solutions that will catch the imagination and push thinking to a level where permanent constitutional answers might be found.

The culture of compromise certainly has its merits. Inside Canada, the tensions between Quebec and English Canada and the tensions between regions have been contained historically by careful allotment of cabinet posts in Ottawa, the deployment of federal patronage and contracts, and other such accommodations between regional, provincial and federal elites. The process is not unique to Canada and is characteristic of other democracies with linguistically segmented societies. So much so, in fact, that the Dutch scholar Arend Lijphart has developed a theory about elite accommodation as the foundation for stability in such polities as Holland, Belgium and Canada.⁵ It is too easy for academics to deplore this way of conducting business which may well be an indispensable means of keeping intact countries which are difficult to govern because of linguistic divisions. The strength, ingenuity and success of the tradition must be recognized, but in the wake of the 1992 debacle perhaps it is worth asking whether these features of Canadian political culture have run their course and are no longer as fruitful in outcomes as they once were.

The issues at stake here can be illustrated by looking at the record of Canada's most successful political leaders and the ways in which those records have fallen short. To begin with the most renowned of all, John A. Macdonald, it is clear that he simply hoped that in the long run the French problem in Canada would go away. He thought time would solve all. While he accepted the absolute necessity of collaboration with French-Canadian leaders to run Canadian governments—indeed, his entire career was built on that successful collaboration—he viewed the duality of Canada as a

passing phenomenon that might last as long as a hundred years but would eventually yield to the assimilationist forces of anglophone North America. Macdonald was the major figure behind the success of the Confederation scheme in 1867 and was prime minister for twenty of the first twenty-four years of the new Confederation. Throughout that time he worked with politicians from Quebec (George Etienne Cartier before Confederation and Hector Louis Langevin thereafter) to keep French- and English-Canadians in harness at the national level. Through these leaders French-Canadians secured access to cabinet offices, federal jobs, contracts and a range of other opportunities and could join with English-Canadians in thinking that the federal system had pay offs that benefitted their economy and society. Macdonald appreciated French-Canadian political support as the key to keeping him in power for so many years. He described the French-Canadians as his "sheet anchor," and he acted on that reality by attending to their concerns as far as he could without alienating too many voters in English Canada. His career was characterized by ingenious balancing acts. He refused to prevent the execution of Louis Riel because he knew the majority of Ontarians wanted his blood, but shortly afterwards he refused to disallow the Jesuit Estates Act of the Quebec Legislature which that same majority detested as papal intervention in Canadian affairs because he understood the need to re-establish his standing with Quebec voters let down by the Riel decision.

His approach worked. The new nation held together. In spite of discontent over various issues, Quebec accepted the federal state of Canada. But while this success must be noted, it is also worth observing that no constitutional legacy was left by Macdonald, either in terms of structure or of rhetoric, that has been of any help in the modern debate. The British North America Act itself is a telling example in this context. The sections dealing with the two languages are not featured as core elements but are dealt with in section 133 under the heading "miscellaneous provisions." There has always been a debate about what Macdonald had in mind in 1867. At one end of the spectrum are those who see him simply as a politician trying to get a piece of legislation through; at the other are those who see Macdonald working alongside Cartier to create a beginning moment of Canadian political culture in which French- and English-Canadians viewed themselves as two founding peoples. Whatever section of the spectrum one concentrates on, it is difficult to point to any

declaration or speech by Macdonald that might be used in the present debate. It is true that Manitoba entered Confederation as a bilingual province in 1870, but it did so not because Macdonald envisaged a bi-cultural Canada from coast to coast but because he was forced into the solution by the first Métis rebellion. When the Manitoba legislature did away with the rights of its francophone minority in 1890 Macdonald was not energetic in fighting for their restoration. Such an arrangement in Manitoba had never been part of a national vision for Macdonald.⁶

Macdonald's successors continued this pattern of balancing and compromise in the interests of national unity. Wilfrid Laurier, the first French-Canadian prime minister (in office from 1896 to 1911), raised the art to an even higher level in the sense that he presented leadership by compromise as the glorious and quintessential attribute of Canadian political leaders. During the 1896 election campaign he reminded Canadians of Aesop's fable about the struggle of the wind and the sun to determine who was stronger. The more the wind blew and tried to force the man to take off his coat the tighter the coat was held, but the sun's warmth encouraged the coat to come off. So it was with leadership in Canada—the sunny ways of compromise could achieve much more than the futile attempts to force recognition of rights. In keeping with this philosophy Laurier was prepared to negotiate a solution in Manitoba which watered down the terms of the 1870 Manitoba Act and the 1867 British North America Act which had provided rights and assurances to the francophone minority in the West. When Alberta and Saskatchewan entered Confederation in 1906, Laurier did not fight for the retention of language rights for the French-speaking groups in those new provinces.

Laurier's great challenge came from the revitalized imperialism which swept across Britain and its colonies in the two decades before World War I. Most English-Canadians wished Canada to play a more active role in the British empire; most French-Canadians, while remaining loyal to the colonial state in North America, disapproved of an active role for Canada in British imperial expansion. Laurier steered his way through these shoals with great skill. His government introduced an intermediate tariff which gave preference to British imports over those from non-empire countries, thus showing he was willing to support closer imperial economic ties. He turned up at Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee celebrations in Lon-

don in 1897 and cut a fine figure as a colorful and grateful colonial statesman dedicated to the greatest empire the world had seen. When the South African War broke out in 1899, he refused to send official Canadian contingents but he did allow the raising of volunteer units which the government would send to South Africa to serve under British command. When naval rivalry between Britain and Germany heated up after 1900 Laurier declined to provide Canadian money for a more powerful Royal Navy (as Canadian imperialists wished), but he did promise to fund a small Canadian navy that would be available to the empire in the event of war. This solution was derided by nationalists in Quebec led by Laurier's erstwhile colleague, Henri Bourassa, as simply covert support for the jingoism of English Canada.

Buffeted by the winds of French-Canadian nationalism and English-Canadian imperialism, Laurier, even more than Macdonald, raised compromise to the point where it became the hallmark of successful leadership. His efforts were often criticized from opposite perspectives in Quebec and Ontario and he could sound somewhat plaintive at times about the lack of understanding accorded to his tacking course, but he did articulate a philosophy of compromise which had been instinctual and rhetorically terse in the case of Macdonald. As he went down to defeat in the 1911 election (in which his opponents depicted him as having sold out the empire and, through the reciprocal trade agreement, having opened Canada to annexation by the United States) Laurier gave eloquent voice to his credo. "I am branded in Quebec as a traitor to the French," he declared, "and in Ontario as a traitor to the English. In Quebec I am branded as a Jingo, and in Ontario as a Separatist. In Quebec I am attacked as an Imperialist, and in Ontario as an anti-Imperialist. I am neither. I am a Canadian. Canada has been the inspiration of my life. I have before me as a pillar of fire by night and as a pillar of cloud by day a policy of true Canadianism, of moderation, of conciliation. I have followed it consistently since 1896, and I now appeal with confidence to the whole Canadian people to uphold me in this policy of sound Canadianism which makes for the greatness of our country and of the Empire."⁷

Laurier lost the election, suggesting that his attempt to define a Canadianism that transcended current preoccupations with empire in English Canada and with cultural Catholic nationalism in Quebec was not appreciated by contemporaries no matter how much it

appealed to subsequent generations of academic historians down to the 1960s. Laurier's paeon to moderation and compromise in spite of his electoral failure in 1911 became the standard course for his successors, although they were not quite so verbosely eloquent in their description of it. This was certainly so for William Lyon Mackenzie King, Canada's prime minister for most of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. His was more of a cheeseparating approach than Laurier's. As Frank Scott, poet and legal philosopher, co-founder of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation and political gadfly in Quebec, said of him in a memorable line, "he did nothing by halves that he could do by quarters."⁸

Mackenzie King's main achievement was to restructure the relationship with Britain in ways which defused the imperial controversy in Canada. Along with other colonial prime ministers such as Jan Smuts of South Africa he worked with the imperial government to re-define empire as commonwealth. By 1927 Canada had its first direct diplomatic representation in Washington at its own embassy and in 1931 Britain formally recognized the complete autonomy of the dominions in foreign affairs. Throughout the inter-war years Mackenzie King sought better ties with the U.S. as a sign that Canada had a new sense of her North American priorities in external relations rather than the old Atlantic and imperial ones. This helped in Quebec where such a North American outlook was taken for granted. As Henri Bourassa observed, French-Canadians were "American by ethnical temperament"—meaning geographically Amerian.⁹ Mackenzie King's course and methods ensured that when World War II broke out Canada made her own separate declaration of war on Germany in contrast to 1914 when it had entered automatically as a colony of Britain. When the prospect of a French-English split over the conscription issue loomed, King, recalling the crisis in 1917 when Quebec had been alienated from the rest of Canada, adopted an ambivalent stance ("conscription if necessary but not necessarily conscription") and with the intervention of other factors succeeded in avoiding a repetition of 1917.¹⁰

In recent times the one prime minister whom seems to be an exception to this pattern of keeping peace by accommodation is Pierre Trudeau. His active policy of seeking to strengthen bilingualism in Ottawa and across the country appears to be an attempt to address the concerns of Quebecois by actual structural change which dealt with their fundamental complaints about their place in Canada.

However, the more Trudeau's leadership on this matter is seen in its historical perspective the less worthy it actually is as an exercise in disinterested statesmanship seeking a solution based on a new definition of what Canada is about. In retrospect his emphasis on bilingualism at the federal level did not address the basic issue. The rise of modern nationalism in Quebec, and above all its reformulation in the 1960s, meant that the old issues of bilingualism throughout the federal structures were no longer center stage. For Quebec after the 1960s the key question was how Canada's constitutional and political system could be altered to allow Quebec to cultivate and defend its francophone culture. In particular the question now became one of ensuring that Quebec could deploy language legislation that would protect its distinct society.¹¹ Quebecois were no longer concerned as they had been in the days of Henri Bourassa with francophone minority rights outside of Quebec or even with the significance of bilingual federalism throughout Canada. Trudeau's policies, far from taking this seismic shift into account and trying to incorporate it into a new constitutional arrangement, were designed to destroy modern Quebec nationalism as it had emerged after the 1960s.¹²

Trudeau's view of Quebec nationalism had been formed during the struggle against Maurice Duplessis's corrupt Catholic nationalism as articulated through the machine of the Union Nationale party from the 1930s through the 1950s. Moreover, Trudeau believed that ethnically based nationalism in general was a 19th century phenomenon that was the unhealthy product of particular historical conditions in Europe and which was bound to disappear from the world stage. The upsurge of the *Parti québécois* and more generally the sharpened demand (which cut across party lines inside Quebec) to defend the French language in the province were taken by Trudeau to be latter-day manifestations of this old-fashioned nationalism rather than contemporary forces reflecting actual social and cultural goals in Quebec that had to be reckoned with. His policy of federal bilingualism was designed to undermine the new nationalism in Quebec, reconcile Quebecois to the existing constitutional structures and so turn the province away from separatist thinking. His actions during the so-called October crisis in 1970 were a powerful illustration of this dynamic. There was no evidence that a revolutionary situation existed in Quebec but Trudeau appeared solemnly on television to declare that there was indeed such a threat and that the War Measures Act, which had not been invoked since its passage

during World War I, was necessary to save the country. The disproportion between the rhetoric and the reality suggested to nationalist critics inside Quebec that Trudeau was intent on destroying the new nationalism by linking it with state-threatening terrorism in order to eliminate his political rivals from the Quebec and Canadian landscape.¹³ In much the same way that Granatstein has detected in Mulroney's case, a desire to shore up his political position in Quebec, so Trudeau's approach to the Quebec problem was affected by his goal of weakening his Quebec critics. It is essential to appreciate that the reaction against Trudeau's view cut across a wide spectrum of opinion in Quebec and was not confined to more radical nationalist circles. The federal government policies under Trudeau were designed to extend Ottawa's powers and to constrain and even roll back provincial power.¹⁴ This direction threatened to weaken further Quebec's ability to mould its society and culture. Trudeau's entire approach undermined the possibility of a strong province which most Quebecois regarded as critical if they were to remain part of Canada.

It is telling in this context that it was Trudeau who as prime minister was responsible for the patriation of the British North America Act in 1982 without securing conditions that would have reassured Quebec that the province would not be subject to the English Canadian majority on basic matters such as language rights and community rights as distinct from individual rights. Trudeau, in short, was intent on undermining Quebec nationalism rather than seeking a constitutional environment within which Canadian and Quebec nationalisms could co-exist. The entire decade of debate since 1982 was started because of this failure at the outset to get Quebec's acquiescence to the terms of patriation. Because of Trudeau's history on these matters the patriation (with its accompanying Charter of Rights and Freedoms) was viewed in Quebec as a device to thwart Quebec's ability to protect its special culture within Quebec itself. As Christian Dufour put it in his essay *Le défi québécois* "...la société québécoise est depuis 1982 en compétition avec une vision constitutionnalisee du Canada qui ne lui est pas compatible."¹⁵ Thus even Trudeau's exceptionalism turns out upon closer scrutiny not to be a radical break from the pattern. Like all national leaders since 1867 he had failed to put the constitutional debate beyond the level of political manoeuvring.

The commonalities in this pattern from Macdonald to Trudeau and Mulroney suggest that there are some deep structures in Cana-

dian political culture. To be sure, each of these leaders was working within particular historical conditions which led them to chart their own course to preserve political stability and hold the country together, but in spite of the variety of conditions the parallels are striking. One line of explanation for these common responses that is illuminating concerns the origins of Canadian politics. The political culture of contemporary Canada has been molded by many economic, social, institutional and international factors that have only made their presence felt in recent decades, but there are some orientations that were formed at the point of origin and still make their mark on the Canadian political landscape. A good example of the kind of phenomenon we are discussing here comes from the field of American politics. During the colonial period there was a constant struggle for power between the British-appointed governors and the local colonial legislatures. Because the governors did not possess the income and patronage deployed by the crown's ministers in Britain they were not able to build up sufficient influence to manage the colonial assemblies as the executive managed Parliament in Britain. For their part the colonial assemblies watched carefully for opportunities to assert their powers. Thus in contrast to 18th century Britain where executive and legislative spheres were intertwined, in the American colonies there were separate spheres for the executive and legislative functions. Long before the explicit written imprimatur was placed on this separation during the revolutionary struggle and its attendant constitution making, American politics had been characterized by a separation of executive and legislative powers. In short, actual conditions in colonial politics had established a particular orientation which left a permanent mark on the American political landscape.

Looking at the origins of Canadian politics prior to Confederation in 1867, some consequences stemming from the actual working of politics left permanent marks on Canadian political culture in a similar manner to the separation-of-powers feature in U.S. politics. Those that concern us here include the tendency of Canadian political leaders to use executive power rather than democratic consultation to address constitutional issues, and their penchant for using patronage to support policy initiatives. During the struggle for local control of colonial government between 1790 and the 1840s political leaders mobilized their popular support by promising that once the narrow British-supported ruling groups had been displaced, the reformers

would take over and staff the public service with like-minded individuals. Since the American option of fighting a war for independence was a non-starter in Canada, the reform impulse centered on getting the patriots into power. Once in office the new regimes needed to distribute patronage to their supporters throughout the constituencies in order to make sure the old ways had been buried and that local Canadian control had indeed been accomplished. There was no other way of securing local control if a revolutionary break from Britain was not to be the solution. These political developments were underway before the concept of a neutral public service was in place and even before there was a movement to articulate and defend such a concept. Thus the public service became the arena in which parties shored up their strength and extended their reach into society. The forces seemed so natural that Macdonald could declare openly (in a manner that no contemporary British or American politician could have done) that "in the distribution of government patronage we carry out the true constitutional principle that whenever an office is vacant it belongs to the party supporting the government."¹⁶

Because of these origins the Canadian parties were not well prepared to deal with issues of principle as they arose in various periods of tension between English- and French-Canadians. The preferred method was to defuse the tension by offering more cabinet positions to the aggrieved group and prescribing a range of patronage medicine that would soothe the patient.¹⁷ Political leaders were most successful when they were able to keep at the margins the big, divisive issues between the two cultures. Within this culture it never crossed the minds of political leaders, for example, that the federal public service might have been used as an arena for experiment in connection with the dual nature of Canada. To the argument that such a critique is anachronistic, it can be replied that some contemporaries did indeed see these possibilities and remarked upon the obtuseness of politicians in not seizing them. In 1877 William LeSueur, speaking before a Parliamentary Select Committee on the federal public service, pointed out that "in a service where two languages are used it is obviously unfair that a man who brings to the Service a knowledge of both, and whose knowledge of both is made use of by the Department in which he serves, should derive no advantage whatsoever from the fact. Such, however, is the fact. In the Department in which I serve a man who knows both French and

English is made to do work requiring a knowledge of both those languages and do it for his seniors. A senior clerk may send to a junior clerk that portion of his work which requires knowledge of a second language and the junior gets nothing at all in the way of promotion for this special qualification."¹⁸ The failure of Canadian political leaders to respond to this possible line of development is one example of how the origins of Canadian politics gave a certain cast to the way in which Canadian leaders thought about Canada, blinding them to more creative structural solutions which might have prepared the ground for more fruitful outcomes in the twentieth century.

The question that naturally arises is why Canada has survived so long if these disadvantageous features existed within the political culture. The answer lies at two levels. First, as we have suggested, in spite of the critique that can be made of Canadian political leaders, they were successful in terms of their own times. For every William LeSueur there were nine Ontarians and Quebecois who were perfectly happy with the way in which cabinet ministers dispensed patronage. Indeed, deployment of patronage in this systematic and comprehensive manner was a shared value between English- and French-Canadians and contributed in a major way to the loyalty of both groups to the Canadian colonial state. The methods of Macdonald, Laurier and Mackenzie King worked and kept Canada intact. Second, for much of the nineteenth century and arguably down to the 1960s, Canadians of both language groups shared an important common assumption that it was important to keep Canada intact to prevent too much Americanization. Recent work on the history of national identity has drawn attention to the importance of the "other" in providing common ground for such an identity. In her account of the origins of modern British nationalism Linda Colley has shown how the disaggregated Scottish, Welsh and English regional identities were fused into a British one in the heat of the world wide struggle, including several wars, against France between 1688 and 1815.¹⁹ In the case of Canada, in contrast to this pattern, most English- and French-Canadians had only a fragile basis for a common sense of nationalism. Many of the historical experiences which forge a national identity have worked in the opposite direction in Canadian history. Wars, for example, have often been unifying forces, but Canadians were divided by the Boer War in South Africa (1899-1902), by the Great War (1914-1918) and again in

World War II (1939-1945) as the two major ethnic groups disagreed about where Canada's national interest lay in these imperial and European conflicts. There was no common attachment to a flag or to the 1867 parliamentary legislation which provided only a serviceable rather than an inspiring "constitution" which all Canadians could regard with reverence. Canadian history itself was told in two versions.

The single most important historical force holding the country together in the nineteenth century was created by the view of the United States as the "other" against which definitions of Canadianism were invented and cherished. English-Canadians remembered the Revolution and the War of 1812 as influenced by loyalist mythology, and French-Canadians, fearing absorption into a secular levelling republic, both saw the colonial state of Canada as an entity worth preserving. As Jacques Monet pointed out in his study of Quebec in the 1840s, the Quebec people were ready to defend the British colonial state of Canada to the last cannon shot.²⁰ While this fear of the US lessened in the later decades of the 19th century, it remained the case that the more conservative political culture in Canada saw benefits in marking out a different course in North America from that of the United States.

It was because of these factors that Canadian political leaders were successful in holding the country together after Confederation in 1867. They worked within the political culture assumptions of their day, they addressed issues by a range of compromise techniques, and they held a common view that the struggle to keep Canada separate from American influence and control was a worthwhile national goal. French- and English-Canadians shared these things in spite of tensions and periodic crises over language issues, the West, the empire and federal-provincial relations. Identification of these forces at work in Canadian history enables us to appreciate the type of political leadership that became characteristic in Canada. Once that understanding is in place, then the crude condemnation of Canadian leaders as failures as constitution makers can be put in a fairer perspective. However, to explain and to understand still leaves the indictment that these political traditions that have held the country together for so many years have a downside to them which makes political leaders curiously lead-footed when it comes to devising contemporary solutions that would inspire Canadians to think afresh about the future of their country. Canadian political traditions

have made the national parties and the national leaders dinosaurs with lots of weight and reach in society but only small amounts of intellectual flexibility that would enable them to come up with new approaches to a new environment. Back in 1968 Pierre Trudeau thought that Canada's constitutional problems would be solved because "we have politicians who we hope will get better and better all the time."²¹ The record since then suggests that the old patterns have not changed.

The new environment has developed over many years but the main features have become most apparent since the 1960s. The contemporary secularized Quebec nationalism which emerged in that decade no longer saw the need to keep up a united Canada in the face of perceived threats of Americanization. On the contrary, it was the continued existence of the unreformed Canadian system and the possible assimilative consequences of the patriation of the constitution in 1982 which threatened to undermine their francophone culture. Above all, most Quebecois saw the urgent necessity for extraordinary power at the provincial level to protect and promote the French language inside Quebec. They insisted on recognition of the concept later summed up at Meech Lake in the phrase "distinct society" so that they would have a constitutional basis upon which to justify language legislation. Moreover, as Canada (including Quebec) found in the post-1945 era that its economy was coming to be more and more bound with that of the U.S., the old argument that the Canadian east-west economy (begun with Macdonald's National Policy in 1878) was the best option for economic growth made less sense. Attempts by Ottawa in the 1970s and 1980s to seek a so-called third option by increasing trade with Japan and the European Community did not alter the fundamental linkage of the Canadian to the U.S. economy. The signing of the Free Trade Agreement in 1988 was the culminating moment here. With prospective access to a freer North American market (subsequently enlarged by a North American Free Trade Agreement which includes Mexico as well as the U.S.) there was less need for the traditional federal political structure of Canada within which provinces and regions could pursue economic growth. Thus, in the new context of international economic forces and of the modern nationalism shared by most Quebecois, the historical pattern of Canadian political leadership seemed to have ground to a failure in 1992. Conditions had changed to the point where the traditional qualities of behind-the-scenes mediation, elite

accommodation, and deployment of patronage no longer worked. Even worse, such features of the system were now viewed (as was revealed by the *Maclean's* poll) as harmful.

But perhaps Canadian politics, far from being inept, is in fact remarkably appropriate for the world of the late twentieth century. The root of the criticism directed towards the futility of constitution-making in Canada rests on the assumption that the nation state is a necessary, desirable and permanent feature of the landscape and that Canadian political leaders since 1867 have failed because they have been unable to construct a Canadian nation state. Current developments around the world call the assumptions underlying this critique into question. The internationalization of the economy in the late-twentieth century has meant that many countries no longer control their economic destiny in the way that was once considered the *sine qua non* of statehood. The ways in which European states are giving up aspects of sovereignty in order to create better economic conditions in Europe is a powerful sign of the receding importance of nineteenth century concepts of national sovereignty. Moreover, those national sovereignties that seemed so deep-rooted in the nineteenth century are turning out to be creations of their times rather than permanent historical phenomena. In current scholarship nations are treated as imagined communities or invented associations which are studied in a skeptical rather than a celebratory mode. Historians examine how traditions are invented to sustain a particular nationalist value system, and how historical myths and fictions have been deployed to convey a version of history that underlies what purports to be an actual reality of national identity. As David Cannadine points out, "this scepticism has been much underscored by recent events in Europe, as old and not-so-old nations have disintegrated before our very eyes, and as the Brussels bureaucracy, the Hague judiciary and the open market erode what remains of national sovereignty, with the result that the classic late-nineteenth-century nation-state seems to be passing into history, if not into oblivion."²²

National identity is, in short, contingent, relational and oppositional rather than immutable; it is an outcome of internal circumstances and the prevailing international order of things. The ways in which British national identity is eroding in the face of changed international circumstances—the loss of empire, the need for the European market—is a particularly telling case because British na-

tionalism has been such a powerful force on the modern world stage. As J. G. A. Pocock observed in a recent wide-ranging thinkpiece on history and sovereignty, "in both Europe before and after 1989, and in the Pacific region as viewed from the southern hemisphere, can it be said that what is going on is the emancipation from state sovereignty of the global operation of market forces—a process institutionalized in the European Community, but in the Pacific region not institutionalized but let rip."²³ If this internationalizing of the economy is indeed to be a major characteristic of world history for the next several decades, then the old need for viable, unitary states is weakened.

In this context the inability of Canadian leaders to achieve agreement that will invent Canada anew is irrelevant. The forces which will determine how well people in Quebec and the other provinces of Canada will live will not be determined by the continuance of a traditional Canadian state but by the ability of Canadian leaders to negotiate effectively in the new hemispheric and international economic order. In this setting the federal government in Ottawa can function as a kind of holding operation, negotiating optimal terms for Canada's participation in the North American and world economies while simply keeping in place a tenuous domestic stability which never reaches an ultimate solution.

The case can be taken even further than this to argue that the very qualities in Canadian leadership which I took to task in the earlier section of this paper are qualities which will wear well in this post-modern world we have entered. Ottawa has lost a great deal of its ability to control the Canadian economy (as has the government in London, the British economy). The trade flows and investment patterns are so powerful that the Canadian government can adjust direction here, add an emphasis there but cannot change the fundamental direction of the Canadian ship as it navigates the rapids. Canadian leaders can try to understand the forces at work and mediate as far as their influence goes to ameliorate the negative impacts upon Canada. As I have argued, on the domestic scene Canadian leaders have since 1867 been unable to define a solution to Canada's regional divisions and the perennial problem of Quebec. What they have done is to be a mediator of discourses. They have set up innumerable ingenious forums where nationalists, federalists, regionalists, and aboriginal spokespeople can present their perspectives. Leadership takes place at the point of intersection of all these

discourses about history and the future and consists chiefly in keeping the dialogue in motion as a kind of permanently active public discursive safety net which makes enough people think that there is a framework within which the country continues to articulate itself. It is this discourse which keeps Canada politically operational. And perhaps that is all that leadership can achieve. The historical traditions of Canadian leaders have prepared them well for this role. Already academic conferences are hailing Canada as the first post-modern state for precisely this reason.²⁴

In the end, of course, it will not be academics who shape the future. In the pleasant settings of academic meetings the positive attributes of the post-modern state—mediating the discourses developed by nationalist, regional and ethnic demands and thus providing the illusion of a center, the illusion of a state—will be admired. But the big question, notwithstanding the ideological and economic explanations for the fading away of the nation state, is whether such an outcome will be welcomed by the peoples of Canada. If there is an economic pay-off perhaps the question can be left unanswered, but if there is not, if the international economy continues to struggle, then the demand for stronger states might take on a new lease of life. The proposition that nationalism is a spent force in world history (as Trudeau thought) is certainly being called into question in eastern Europe, Russia, the Middle East and parts of Asia. If the world system underpinned by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade [GATT] and good working relations between the emerging trade blocs in Europe, North America and Asia assures general economic well-being, then the style of Canadian political leadership will fit the bill nicely. If the world reverts to a jungle of competing nation states, each seeking to control its own economic destiny, then the inability of Canadian leaders to forge a strong federal Canadian state within which Quebec can live will begin to matter.

NOTES

¹ *Maclean's*, November 2, 1992, 12.

² Quoted by Mary Janigan, "Shaping the Future," *Maclean's*, July 3, 1989, 58-59.

³ J. L. Granatstein, "The Great Canadian Crap Shoot," in Douglas Brown and Robert Young, *Canada: The State of the Federation* (Toronto: Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, 1992), 110.

⁴ Ron Graham, *One Eyed Kings. Promise and Illusion in Canadian Politics* (Toronto: Collins, 1986), 435-436; *New York Times*, November 7, 1992. It is worth pointing out in defense of Mulroney that he understood Quebec's exclusion from the patriation of the BNA Act was a constitutional problem that required attention and could not simply be ignored. His act of opening up negotiations was therefore an act of statesmanship, whatever other motivations can be identified.

⁵ Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Explanation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). Application of Lijphart's approach to the Canadian case is best appreciated through the work of Kenneth McRae in his two books: *Conflict and Compromise in Multilingual Societies* (Waterloo: MacLelland and Stewart, 1983) and *Consociational Democracy. Political Accommodation in Segmented Societies* (Toronto: MacLelland and Stewart, 1974).

⁶ Macdonald's career, his impact on Canadian political culture and his view of the British North America Act can be assessed in a range of books and articles. The most sympathetic portrayal is Donald G. Creighton's two volume biography, *The Young Politician, The Old Chieftain* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1952, 1955). The issues raised in this paper are dealt with at greater length in Gordon T. Stewart, *The Origins of Canadian Politics* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986) and "John A. Macdonald's Greatest Triumph," *Canadian Historical Review* LXIII (1982): 3-33. See also Peter B. Waite's *Macdonald. His Life and World* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1975) and the same author's summary of current thinking on Macdonald in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* XII (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 590-612.

⁷ J.M.Bliss, *Canadian History in Documents* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1966), 220. Laurier's legacy is suggested by the title of Barbara Robertson's biogra-

phy Laurier: *The Great Conciliator* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1971). Other standard interpretations are John W. Dafoe, *Laurier: A Study in Canadian Politics* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1922, 1963) and Joseph Schull, *Laurier: The First Canadian* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1965).

⁸ F. R. Scott, "WLMK," in A. J. M. Smith, *The Blasted Pine: An Anthology of Satire, Invective and Disrespectful Verse, Chiefly by Canadian Writers* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1957). The last verses of Scott's poem read:

He seemed to be in the centre
Because we had no centre,
No vision
To pierce the smoke-screen of his politics.

Truly he will be remembered
Wherever men honour ingenuity
Ambiguity, inactivity, and political longevity.

Let us raise a temple
To the cult of mediocrity,
Do nothing by halves
Which can be done by quarters.

⁹ Henri Bourassa, "The French-Canadian in the British Empire," *The Monthly Review* IX (October, 1902): 53-68, quoted in Carl Berger, ed., *Imperialism and Nationalism 1884-1914: A Conflict in Canadian Thought* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1969), 73.

¹⁰ The best overview of the Mackenzie King period is Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond and John English, *Canada: 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987). The World War II conscription issue is analyzed on pages 331-335. The standard scholarly biography is H. Blair Neatby, *William Lyon Mackenzie King* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958, 1976) and a breathless, popular one is Bruce Hutchison, *The Incredible Canadian: A Candid Portrait of William Lyon Mackenzie King* (New York: Longmans-Green, 1953).

¹¹ The change came during the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s when nationalists feared that if current trends continued Quebec would gradually become increasingly anglophone, especially in the business world and the workplace, unless measures were taken to make French by law the working language of the province. A flavor of the times can be gained from Raymond Barbeau's *Le Québec bientôt unilingue?* (Montreal:

L'Éditions De L'Homme, 1965). An informative survey of the evolution of nationalist ideology and politics since the 1960s is provided in Alain Gagnon, *Quebec: Beyond the Quiet Revolution* (Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1990).

¹² Trudeau's career is treated in Walter Stewart, *Shrug: Trudeau in Power* (Toronto: New Press, 1971), Richard J. Gwyn, *The Northern Magus: Pierre Trudeau and Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980) and Stephen Clarkson, *Trudeau and our Times* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990). His ideas on Canadian nationalism are dealt with in James Laxer, *The Liberal Idea of Canada: Pierre Trudeau and the Question of Canada's Survival* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1977) and the fault lines that developed between him and Quebec nationalists in the 1960s are described in Gerard Pelletier's *Years of Impatience, 1950-1966* (Toronto: Methuen, 1984).

¹³ Dan Daniels, ed., *Quebec, Canada and the October Crisis* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1973) provides a critique from the left. Jean Provencher, *La Grande Peur d'Octobre '70* (Montreal: Éditions de l'Aurore 1974) gives a good sense of the atmosphere at the time. A characteristically balanced assessment is given in Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond and John English, *Canada since 1945: Power, Politics and Provincialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 392-394, where they point out that Trudeau took pains to acknowledge the legitimacy of the *Parti québécois* and distinguish it from the terrorists who had kidnapped Laporte and Cross.

¹⁴ David Milne, *Tug of War: Ottawa and the Provinces under Trudeau and Mulroney* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1986), 2.

¹⁵ Christian Dufour, *Le défi québécois* (Montreal: L'Hexigone, 1989), 13.

¹⁶ Stewart, "John A. Macdonald's Greatest Triumph," 21; Norman Ward, "Responsible Government," *Journal of Canadian Studies* XIV (1979): 3; Alain Gagnon, ed., *Democracy with Justice* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992), 157-173.

¹⁷ Jeffrey Simpson, *The Spoils of Power* (Toronto: Collins, 1988), written by the national political correspondent of *The Globe & Mail*, is a comprehensive examination of the role of patronage in Canadian politics. Ralph Heintzman, "The Political Culture of Quebec 1840-1960," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, XVI (1983): 3-59, makes the case that "Quebec's traditional political culture was shaped by the dialectic of patronage. Economic need encouraged Quebecois to exploit the political process for

advancement. The result was the preoccupation of the political process with patronage."

¹⁸ Notes on Civil Service Reform by William Dawson LeSueur, Select Committee on the Present Condition of the Civil Service, *Canada House of Commons Journals*, XI (1877), Appendix 7. For LeSueur's place in late nineteenth century Canadian culture see A. B. McKillop, *A Critical Spirit* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977).

¹⁹ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), *passim*. The conceptual starting point for Colley is taken from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

²⁰ Jacques Monet, *The Last Cannon Shot: A Study of French Canadian Nationalism 1837-1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969).

²¹ Pierre Trudeau, *Conversations with Canadians* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 210.

²² David Cannadine, "Penguin Island Story," *Times Literary Supplement*, March 12, 1993; T. O. Ranger, ed., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Max Beloff in the *TLS* of March 26, 1993, points out that Cannadine makes some factual blunders in this statement. There is the Court of the European Communities at Luxembourg which, some might argue, does intervene against old definitions of national sovereignty but the International Court of Justice at the Hague has not usually interfered with national sovereignty. On the contrary, its very existence is based on the notion of national states operating in the context of international law. The criticism does not, however, undermine the point being made about the transformation in the concepts of and workings of national sovereignty in late 20th century Europe.

²³ J. G. A. Pocock, "History and Sovereignty: The Historiographical Response to Europeanization in Two British Cultures," *Journal of British Studies* 31 (1992): 388.

²⁴ The 19th annual conference of The British Association of Canadian Studies has for its theme "Canada: The First Postmodern State?"

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