

# TORY MYTH AND CONSERVATIVE REALITY: HOROWITZ REVISITED

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It is scarcely surprising that Professor Gad Horowitz should choose to defend his thesis of the significance of the Red Tory in Canadian politics against the arguments and evidence adduced against that thesis.\* What is surprising is that Horowitz should choose to defend his thesis in a manner which, in effect, concedes everything which any opponent may wish to contest.

I doubt it is an unfair criticism to claim that in his attempted rebuttal of my arguments Horowitz chose to avoid the most telling evidence against his thesis and to concentrate on the whole on peripheral matters. In order to be scrupulously fair to Horowitz, however, I shall deal with his defence entirely in his own terms, in which Horowitz's position, though perhaps at its strongest, may still be shown, I believe, to be essentially untenable.

Let me then deal with what appears to be the two sole substantive points which Horowitz makes in his response with regard to the nature of Canadian conservatism. "I have never denied", he writes, "that Meighen, Bennett and Drew were business liberals. Preece can therefore quote their individualistic rhetoric . . . without refuting my statement that 'theirs is not the characteristically American conservatism which conserves *only* liberal values' ". Does Horowitz not remember that in his *Canadian Labour in Politics* he described American conservatism as "purely individualistic, purely liberal"<sup>1</sup> and that it was this individualistic characteristic which, he claimed, differentiated American from Canadian conservatism?<sup>2</sup> Surely, Horowitz must deny individualism to Meighen, Bennett and Drew, for otherwise his thesis has certainly no significance and probably no meaning (i.e. in principle nothing is allowed to stand as evidence against the thesis). Horowitz must logically either deny, that Meighen, Bennett and Drew are individualists or he must relinquish his claim that they are in some degree "corporate-organic-collectivists" — a degree which must be greater than that present among Canadian liberals to carry the significance Horowitz intends for his thesis. Horowitz must either claim that the individualistic rhetoric of Meighen, Bennett and Drew is a facade — *and* he must tell us what lies behind that facade — or he must accept that they have far more in common with their American counterparts than his thesis can afford to

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\* "The 'Myth' of the Red Tory?", *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. 1 (Fall, 1977): 87-88 in response to Rod Preece 'The Myth of the Red Tory', *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. 1, (Spring-Summer, 1977): 3-28.

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allow. Certainly, at face value, Horowitz's present acceptance of Meighen, Bennett and Drew as business liberals concedes precisely what he denied in *Canadian Labour in Politics* when he contrasted them with "purely individualistic, purely liberal" American conservatives.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Horowitz's plea sounds suspiciously like *noli contendere*, which is not an evasion of guilt but a refusal to countenance it. Horowitz ends his refutation of 'The Myth of the Red Tory' with the assertion that "the discussion of Robert Stanfield as a Burkean, with which Preece concludes his piece, is not a refutation but a confirmation of my argument." Thus we are expected to believe that Stanfield is an example of the Red Tory phenomenon — a real, live, practising politician of the "corporate-organic-collectivist-variety" in our midst.

But what behaviour patterns, what attitudes should we expect of a "corporate-organic-collectivist"? One would scarcely expect him to be a friend of private enterprise. Yet, for Stanfield, although private enterprise is not "the central principle of conservatism", nonetheless he attaches importance "to the economy and to enterprise and to property".<sup>4</sup> He opposes measures which would "undermine self-reliance"<sup>5</sup> and considers one of the functions of government to be to provide for a social order "in which enterprise can flourish".<sup>6</sup> These are not the words of an economic collectivist who would in principle prefer public to private ownership and control.

Horowitz's use of the term "corporate-organic-collectivist" has been restricted almost entirely to the economic sphere and thus in adopting the term I have always used it in quotation marks in order to signify that I am accepting Horowitz's restricted usage. The term, however, does have more interesting connotations when applied in the broader spectrum.

Thus we may ask whether Stanfield is a corporate-organic-collectivist when we apply the term to the nation or the family. Someone who thinks of the nation as analogous with an organism would believe that no constituent part of the whole has the right to secede, whatever the wishes of the individual members of that constituent part. Stanfield is, however, rather more *liberal* than most of his Progressive Conservative colleagues on the Quebec issue, on the *right* of Quebec to secede if it so chooses. In other words, from the perspective of the nation, Stanfield is rather less of a collectivist than are his more economically individualistic colleagues.

Someone who regards the family as an inviolable unit, as an organic whole, would be intractably opposed to legal divorce, would at least consistently condemn any attempt to introduce easier divorce laws. Again, Stanfield is more *liberal* on the issue — and hence less of an organicist — than the majority of his colleagues. We might thus fairly conclude that either on a broad or a narrow interpretation of Horowitz's "corporate-organic-collectivist" philosophy Robert Stanfield simply doesn't belong.

At this point, however, the perceptive reader is entitled to wonder whether

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in my denial of the organicist label to Stanfield, I am not thereby attributing it to other members of the Progressive Conservative caucus. Is Preece not now implying, it may be fairly asked, that certain Canadian Conservatives are indeed corporate-organic-collectivists and that Horowitz's error lies only in ascribing the label to the wrong Conservatives? Certainly, many Canadian Conservatives are collectivists — if that is the right word — about the family and the nation, although they are decidedly not so in economic matters. But the point of departure for their apparently collectivist ethic is not some abstract organicist philosophy but a belief in discipline, authority and sterner virtues.

Be that as it may, the point at issue here is the supposed contrast which Horowitz detects between American and Canadian Conservatives. Insofar as it makes sense to talk of Canadian Conservatives as collectivists because of their belief in the inviolability of the nation and the family, so American Conservatives are collectivists *a fortiori* — and the crux of the Horowitz thesis is the belief that American Conservatives “conserve *only* liberal values”, in that they are “purely individualistic”. Thus, if one were to accept the label ‘corporate-organic-collectivists’ for certain Canadian Conservatives it would not in any manner involve concurrence with the Horowitz thesis, for those to whom it would be applied are those who correspond most closely to their American counterparts.

In a nutshell my point is this: *insofar as* American Conservatives are economic liberals, so too are Canadian Conservatives, although the latter are generally more tempered with Burkean pragmatism and moderation. *Insofar as* American Conservatives are national and familial collectivists, so too are Canadian Conservatives, although again the latter are generally more tempered with Burkean pragmatism and moderation. In short, Horowitz fails to understand *both* Canadian and American Conservatism.

John A. Macdonald set the tone for the future of Canadian Conservatism in a speech at St. Thomas concerning the coalition of 1854. “It is well known, sir,” he said “that I have always been a member of what is called the Conservative Party. I could never have been called a Tory . . . I have always been a Conservative-Liberal”.<sup>7</sup> In order to understand the nature of Canada's liberal-conservatism since the 1840's it is worth contrasting the European liberal-conservative tradition with the feudalist tradition of thought.

Would not every Canadian conservative, just as much as every American conservative, side in principle with Montesquieu's preference for equilibrium based on the separation of powers against the Vicomte de Bonald's argument for the unity of power? Béla Menczer may have exaggerated when he wrote that, “*L'Esprit des Lois* was, of course, the great book of 1789 and of almost the whole Liberal School of the nineteenth century”.<sup>8</sup> But it is at least clear that liberal-conservative thought had a role to play after the liberal revolution without it being thought of as a negation of that revolution. To be sure, it is

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unlikely that Montesquieu would have stood alongside even the moderate revolutionaries had he lived that long, and the liberal-conservatism of Edmund Burke found its strongest expression against that revolution. But it is not surprising that the revolutionaries found Montesquieu's writings a handy lexicon and that they fondly expected Burke to be one of their greatest admirers. Indeed, in the opening months of the revolutionary age Burke was quoted often and with admiration — sometimes without attribution — in the political speeches of revolutionary leaders.

Thus I find it impossible to accept Horowitz's contention that "there is no major disagreement between us on the question of the character of British and Canadian Conservatism". Canadian Conservatives, of whatever hue, have more in common with Liberals than they have with socialists. Common sense, we might say, is once more vindicated against the abstractions of fabulous philosophy.

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### Notes

1. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968, p. 10.
2. Loc. cit.
3. Op. cit., pp. 18-19 and 10.
4. 'Some comments on Conservative Principles and Philosophy', Leader of the Opposition's Office, November 14, 1974, p. 4.
5. Op. cit., p. 5.
6. Op. cit., p. 14.
7. *Public Archives of Canada*, Macdonald Papers, Vol. 158, 64021.
8. *Catholic Political Thought 1789-1848*, London: Burns Oats, 1952, pp. 38-39.