

Task Force (farce) : Liberal tokenism

Comment is an opinion column open to members of the university community who wish to present an informed opinion on a topic of their selection.

by Thomas A. Rose

During the past year, as a direct result of the separatism issue in Quebec, a federal Task Force was formed to study the problems confronting Canadian Unity and hopefully to come up with some recommendations as to how these problems can be solved.

On September 22 there was a meeting of this Task Force at King's College. This meeting should have been of great concern to all students as it consisted of a panel of people from the educational sector of society expressing their views on the question of national unity. These people consisted of representative professors, administration, and last and yes least, students.

It was my displeasure to sit on this panel and discover what I deem to be the true mission of this so called task force. The whole set up of this meeting reeked of tokenism in the worst sense of the word. I sat on this panel along with two other Dalhousie students, Peter Mancini (vice-president of Dal Student Union), and Ioan Astle, a Political Science student. Unlike the other members of the panel, all of the students did not receive a chance to speak. As a matter of fact only one student did get to speak, that being Peter Mancini. Now get me straight, I place no blame on Mancini himself, he is just the first example of a well planned form of tokenism which was all too clear, to me at least. For by listening to Mancini, the task force had a token by which they could say they had listened to the opinions of students in this region. Although Mancini gave a serious speech calling for economic, social and governmental reform I am afraid it was falling upon ears of the Task Force that were only pretending to listen. As for the two other sectors of the Educational community that were represented it is my opinion that their views also fell upon the ears of pretenders.



Dal Photo/Morris

One may ask why this very cynical view concerning the task force (note I say force and not on members). It is very very simple, for after 75 minutes of formal presentations by the panel which contained good ideas concerning education and the problems of Canadian Unity, we were given 13 minutes to discuss them. How can one accept this as a serious approach to solving a problem? I suppose it could be argued that there was a time factor, but in an attempt to solve such a serious problem concerning the future, time should not be the factor, results should. To add more fuel to the already raging fire, the thirteen minutes that were available were used by the more important members of the task force such as

Jean Luc Pepin and John Roberts. Their time was used to express a short liberal viewpoint of unity.

The one interesting thing that occurred to me during this meeting was that it was a perfect example of the problems confronting Canadian Unity. Professor Haney of Kings College pointed out that there was not one member of the task force from Nova Scotia and that they were ignoring maritime opinion just as the populous Upper Canadians have and are doing in the Canadian System of Government. To carry this one step further, I wish to point out that the panel of speakers representing Nova Scotia were people living or working in Halifax at this time. By this are we supposed to believe that Halifax is

the only place where educational viewpoints exist in Nova Scotia? It seems very ironical that in a task force meeting designed to help solve the problems of Canadian Unity we find two very clear examples of the major cause of the problems facing Canada in her struggle towards a harmonious confederation.

Now we must evaluate just what this meeting accomplished. It is here that I must make the distinction between force and farce. For after sitting through 75 minutes of so-called ideas and solutions followed by 13 minutes of discussion dominated by politicians it would be hard for me to believe that this is a
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Canada: a three headed hydra!

by John Leonard

The official crisis of the Canadian body politic is the "unity" crisis, the codeword used to refer to the imminent possibility of succession by the Francophone majority of the province of Quebec. But this is a dangerously simple minded and incorrect misreading of the compound crises facing the Canadian state.

Canada as a nation faces what can best be schematized as a three-headed hydra tearing at the fabric which binds the state together: (1) the multi ethnic split and the refusal to recognise its place in the nation, (2) the de-Canadianization of Canada by the importation of American culture and influence, and (3) the exploitation of the periphery of the nation by the core. These crises are simultaneous and not watertight with respect to one another, if for no other reasons than that geographic and ethnic fractures partially coincide, and the same elite is involved.

The first two crises are related in that the cultural communities from which we come are being threat-

ened by assimilation and erosion from within and without. All face the same pressure from the American megalith, so pervasively spread by the dominant institutions, both public and private, in this country. It is of course important to realise that this is not a "natural" or "inevitable" process carried on without regard to human volition; it is the result of human action and decision—not only is man a socially created being but social "reality" is man made.

The de-Canadianization of Canada, the process by which our popular culture, ideology, standards of behaviour and views of each other is being determined less by the interaction of Canadians with one another than by the mass manipulated culture machine of the United States, is being carried out by the dominant institutions of our society. These dominant institutions are the bureaucracies of the corporations and the state, which import wholesale American attitudes, techniques, values and materials, while they make the "domestic creations" of Canadians

inaccessible by their monopoly of the distribution system (which is carrying the American product instead). By now all Canadians are aware of some aspects of this process and its effect of erasing aspects of the Canadian or local sub-cultural identities. Upon all the "minorities" in Canada, which means all groups, Francophone, English or native, outside Ontario must be added the impact of the "Ontario" based cultural machine, which controls most of what passes for a domestic source of "content".

It is against the extinction of their collective selfhood that Quebec Francophones have been reacting and reacting quite successfully, since the early 1960's. The clear meaning of the "separatist crisis" is that the Quebecois at least, intend to survive the onslaught of the Americans and the Anglos, even if they have to wreck the Canadian state to do it. If the country is to survive it is imperative that Canadians understand that once we accept the legitimacy of the Quebecois fact, we have common cause in trying to defend

what we are against the homogenizing influences our own actions have subjected us to. That the unity of Canada requires us to accept our cultural diversities as a fundamental aspect of our identity (which, not only is worthwhile to preserve, but which is essential to holding the country together) is no longer possible to ignore.

Thirdly, it is no longer unusual to recognize the fact that the political and economic power of the country functions to drain wealth from the periphery of the country to the center (just as the branch plant economy draws wealth out of Canada to enrich the centre of international capitalism, the U.S.). That the tensions that derive from the exploitation of East and West by central Canada are divisive to the unity of the country seems now trivial to point out, except that awareness does not seem to have spawned action to remedy the problem.

Thus to suggest that the crisis of Canada is the Quebec problem represents a dangerous distortion of the full range of crises which face the nation, and so prevents the rethinking and restructuring of the Canadian state which is essential if there is to be a Canada.