

# Achieving a stronger identity...

By Louis Balthazar

The publication of a special document on Canada-U.S. relations, signed by the Secretary of State for External Affairs, must be greeted as an important step in the development of Canadian foreign policy. From now on, Canada's policies with regard to the United States may be something more than the reaction of the moment; indeed, one may hope that they will be part of a general, well-defined policy. At the very least, we shall now have an instrument enabling us to judge these policies in terms of specific objectives and a serious evaluation of the situation.

This recent document is an "in-depth" study whose content shows marked progress over the 1970 review, *Foreign Policy for Canadians*. All aspects of the Canada-U.S. problem are described in their full complexity and correctly situated in the context of the international system. The options open to Canada are analyzed closely and realistically, as are the reasons for the choice proposed. One can undoubtedly find shortcomings in various chapters. In this paper, however, I shall merely deplore a certain brevity with regard to the assumption underlying the basic objective and to the means of achieving that objective.

## The Canadian identity

It is clear that reduction of the vulnerability of the Canadian economy is justified only by the desire of Canadians to constitute a distinct society "because they want to do the things they consider important and do them in their own way" (*International Perspectives*, Autumn 1972, P. 20).

The true postulate of Canadian foreign policy towards the United States is not, therefore, one of economic growth, which could, after all, be achieved at the cost of greater integration with the American economy. Rather, it is above all "to strengthen our capacity to advance basic Canadian goals and develop a more confident sense of national identity" (P. 17). The document returns to this point on several occasions:

"The pursuit of a distinctive identity runs through the process of Canadian nation-building" (P. 13). "(The real ques-

tion . . .) is whether interdependence with a big, powerful, dynamic country like the United States is not bound, beyond a certain level of tolerance, to impose an unmanageable strain on the concept of a separate Canadian identity . . ." (P. 13).

"In essence, distinctness should be implicit in any relationship between two sovereign countries such as Canada and the United States. The very fact that it has to be singled out as an objective of foreign policy says something about the Canada-U.S. relationship" (P. 20).

It is quite true that in most relations between sovereign countries, this question of separate identities is self-evident. Why is this not so in the case of the Canada-U.S. relation? On several occasions, the document mentions the "affinities" between the two countries. In the case of American cultural influence, for example, "Canadians generally find it more difficult to focus on it than on the U.S. impact on the Canadian economy, perhaps because the many affinities between Canadians and Americans tend to make any concept of a threat unreal" (Pp. 19-20).

Is this not the crux of all Canadian policy with respect to the United States? The question is, to what extent do Canadians constitute a population distinct from the American population? Undoubtedly, other quite separate nations also face the problem of the economic and cultural influence of the United States. Undoubtedly, Canada's geographical location is a factor that aggravates the problem. But is this question of identity as acute in Mexico as it is in Canada?

## Ambivalence toward U.S.

Here it is absolutely essential to consider first English-speaking and then French-speaking Canadians, a matter the document wished to avoid as much as possible. This ambivalence toward the United States lies at the very heart of the history of English Canada. The tragedy of the Loyalists is that they were forced to define themselves as British while at heart remaining Americans. It has been shown that the American Revolution divided a homogeneous people in two and that fidelity to the myth of the British Crown has

*'Is this question of identity as acute in Mexico as it is in Canada?'*