

INTRODUCTION

Belatedly, Canadians have begun to bring into focus the two lenses of their binoculars on the future. One, inward-looking, has borne down mercilessly, and too long, on the divisive ambitions and grievances (mainly those of the political classes) in this country whose citizens rank second on the planet in their quality of life.¹ The other lens — on the outside world — has opened wide in the past few years to the astonishing torrent of global change which will undoubtedly have dramatic impacts on the people of one of the most “international” of nations.²

In principle, it is a fine thing for Canadians to try to bring these two sets of prospects together. The pursuit of knowledge and understanding is a good thing in itself; in practice, however, it looks as though the debate on the international dimensions of “the Canadian crisis” may be turned by protagonists and opinion-moulders into merely one more weapon in their parochial domestic struggles.

Analogies between Canada and other integrating or disintegrating political and economic communities (the EC, Soviet Union, Yugoslavia) have been used and abused in the complex and fevered debate at home. Some serious people have suggested the need to “think about the unthinkable” — that reason and non-violence will not necessarily prevail in the resolution of Canada’s future — as one means of helping to avoid such an outcome. Others have then tried to turn this thinking into threats or the perception of threats — just more grist for the enemies of the enviable Canadian tradition of peaceable compromise. Happily, the Chief of the Defence Staff, General John de Chastelain, received wide attention with some calming remarks on the scrupulous respect of the Canadian Armed Forces for their constitutional roles and limitations, and the strict confines of their law and order functions.³

Informed foreigners have awakened to the fact that Canadians have got themselves into an even more difficult corner than before. They are mostly bewildered and impatient, since they know that Canada is one of the world’s best communities for its people, and that in relative terms we have few excuses for getting ourselves into such a mess. Some foreigners are worried, fearing the loss, diminution or paralysis of one of the most