

THE CANADIAN WAY.....NO EXIT ?

This article is a reprint from RAMPARTS magazine. Permission to use it was granted by the author Edgar Friedenberg. Dr. Friedenberg is on the faculty of Dalhousie University.

I have been living near Halifax, Nova Scotia, and teaching at Dalhousie University, for nearly five years now. At the end of the fifth year, in August 1975, I shall be eligible to apply for Canadian citizenship which, if granted, would terminate my American citizenship, for the American people are a jealous prince — Canada, like Britain, accepts dual citizenship but the United States does not. This is an even greater step than most Americans believe.

Emigration, in any case, is a difficult act for most Americans to imagine — like suicide, it is embarrassing to those left behind who prefer to believe that it must have been undertaken while of unsound mind. That, surely, is what President Ford's highly publicized repatriation program for war resisters — amnesty, it isn't — is intended to convey. Resurrection on these terms has not proved attractive to many; and certainly, if I am as fortunate in my ambience in the next world as I have been to find myself in Nova Scotia, I shall conclude that God is merciful indeed, though perhaps more merciful than just.

It has often been pointed out, as by Jessica Mitford, that Americans deal with their abhorrence of death by pretending that it is not really a major change of condition, and that the cemetery is a kind of suburb with a very low rate of violent crime and everybody on perpetual care instead of welfare. Emigration is a riskier business altogether; yet Americans think the change will be minimal for those who are only moving to Canada. Those of us who chose to leave the United States because we found its social and political policies both repugnant and deeply rooted in the nation's structure and its culture are unlikely to have made this error; if we had thought Canada would be like the United States, we would never have come here. But for most Americans emigration is unthinkable and Canada a political artifact, available as a refuge only because of the conservatism or cowardice of the people who lived in the region in 1776, but essentially similar in its customs, economics if not political institutions, and basic values.

There is just enough truth in this to be highly misleading. True, in nine of the ten provinces the natives mostly speak English; we shop in supermarkets in shopping centers; and even the Canadian Corporation, depends on frequent and awful commercials for its short-range operating costs. True, Canadian entrepreneurs are often brash and more vulgar versions of their American contemporaries; Sinclair Lewis characters held over miraculously

for half a century. But life here feels totally different from the way it does in the United States; and while not all the comparisons are favorable to Canada — and whether any will be depends on what you want from life — no American who comes here to stay is likely to doubt that choosing the path less traveled by has made all the difference.

(CAVEAT EMIGRANT)

There are certain qualities of life that Americans are likely to miss in Canada, and these are real deficiencies. I found it especially embarrassing, having meant my departure from the United States as a political gesture as well as a search for a better life, to be forced to confront the fact that Canadians enjoy far fewer and weaker formal civil liberties than Americans do. Less than three months after my arrival here, Prime Minister Trudeau had invoked the War Measures Act which suspended most civil liberties in the country for 90 days and legalized horrifying if temporary detentions incommunicado of key political figures in Quebec at a time when the perfectly lawful separatist Parti Quebecois was campaigning for seats in a general election. The episode that led to this proclamation was atrocious enough: the murder of a government official and the kidnapping of a British diplomat in Quebec. But the motivations of the Liberal Government seemed to me clearly political and it was not reassuring to discover that 90 percent of the Canadian people approved while John Mitchell, the U.S. Attorney General, spoke enviously of Mr. Trudeau's powers in combatting subversion. By the time the 90-day period expired, however, the media — more elitist here than in the United States and with no Spiro Agnew to harass them — had made the government's action the butt of ridicule; the detainees, terrifying as their experience had been, had long since been released; the actual criminals who had murdered M. LaPorte and kidnapped Mr. Cross had been given safe conduct to a reluctant Cuba; and the conspiracy trial undertaken by the Crown was well on its way to ignominious collapse, occasioned by the acquittal of all but one of the alleged conspirators who, as the press acidly pointed out, could hardly be convicted of having conspired with himself. The government, in short, blew it. The most serious permanent victims of the invocation of the War Measures Act were some American war resisters whom the infamously authoritarian government then in power in



Vancouver — 3,000 miles from Quebec — arrested and turned over to American authorities. Nevertheless, it is shameful that this could happen here and did. Canada did not even pass a Bill of Rights until 1965; and it is only statute law, not a part of the Constitution and not paramount. That is, it does not automatically, as in the United States, preempt the authority of other statutes in cases in which there is a conflict. Each must be decided on its merits before anotably conservative judiciary, and the tiny if fairly scrappy Canadian Civil Liberties Association does not regard it as very useful. In Canada, moreover — and this I find really shocking — there is no principle of law forbidding double jeopardy; the Crown may, and in important cases does, appeal against an acquittal, and the accused may find himself convicted in appellate court. I could give further examples, all favorable to the United States on balance; but what they add up to is the fact that Canadians, by and large, retain a measure of basic trust

in their government and have never defined it as a potentially lethal adversary against which formal and formidable defenses must be vigilantly maintained if liberty is to be preserved. I think they have learned a lot and become observably more militant during the past few years. But it must be recognized, too, that Canada did not become a nation by rejecting the authority of a putatively tyrannical government, as the United States did. It assembled itself, nearly a century later, out of colonial fragments subject to the same government, to which the United Empire Loyalists here, though by now reduced to a few nests of elderly WASPs (remarkably like the daughters of the American Revolution), remain fiercely devoted. Upper Canada, as what is now Ontario was then called, had its revolutionary moments in the early 1840s when William Lyon MacKenzie led an unsuccessful revolt against the entrenched Orange aristocracy of the region. But there have been none since the nation

itself was formed a quarter of a century later. The ongoing separatist movement in Quebec is fueled by a degree of revolutionary sentiment; but Quebec remains the eastern stronghold of the Liberal Party — which is why the War Measures Act was invoked to forestall the erosion of this indispensable base of the status quo — and Lower Canada's three centuries of Jansenist tradition have left a legacy of rural Catholic cultural conservatism that has not yet been dispelled, though it is waning.

Canadians, then, have had less practice than almost any nation in the world in learning to view their government as a real or potential evil from a consistent ideological point of view. And it has, indeed, never possessed the power to distinguish itself as an independent source of evil in the world. As Barrington Moore, Jr. pointed out in his *Reflections on the Sources of Human Misery*, nations with relatively small resources are likely to deceive themselves as to the possibilities of survival in the

world while behaving decently in foreign affairs, since they are protected by the dirty work of the major power of which they are a client. That protection is dubious in that it leads to their involvement in their Godfather's affairs; but it also tends to keep them from getting blamed. Canada has been notoriously supportive of American interests in the Indochina war while maintaining a posture of moral superiority that war resisters have found most convenient. The result has been that it is seldom blamed for its complicity in American aggression, and its people have been permitted to retain certain liberal beliefs — I should say illusions — about the possibility of using government to further the interests of social justice that few Americans can still hold.

This is changing. The two major Toronto dailies have recently completed a major expose of incidents of police brutality in that city; instances of collaboration between Canadian security forces and the CIA are now regularly exposed

and readily acknowledged. Canada, unlike the United States, has an Official Secrets Act which permits government bureaucracy to conceal by investigation — that is, it creates a commission to study anything there is a public outcry about about and then sits on the report which cannot be lawfully published even if somebody leaks it. But this no longer works very well. Since December 1971, when the independent journal *Canadian Forum* published substantial sections of the Gray Report — the name refers to its author rather than its style — on the domination of the Canadian economy by foreign investment after the government had withheld it for six months, aggressive reporting, especially on the CBC, has been much more notable in Canada; and though Canadian officials still waffle and procrastinate, they are having to come to terms with a rising public willingness to confront them, and a growing tendency to regard them, like politicians in the rest of the world, as unindicted co-conspirators.

Their image, and perhaps their reality, is very vulnerable, since an even higher degree of collaboration between industry and government has been acceptable here than in the United States. Leftish Americans tend to regard Canada, enviously, as a nourishing hotbed of socialism; but the Canadian willingness to undertake through Crown Corporations services that in the United States would be left to private enterprises has worked largely to further private interests.

All this has been meant as a form of stipulation: let it be agreed, before the discussion proceeds, that this is not only an imperfect nation, but that there are no formal grounds for regarding it as a society morally superior to that of the United States. Nor do immigration patterns suggest a consensus on this point. While, for the past few years, the absolute net balance of migration between the two countries has been northward a far larger proportion of Canadians still emigrate to the United States than vice versa — though growing restrictions on immigration to either country in response to economic difficulties of the Western World are making such comparisons meaningless as indicators of how people feel. Nevertheless, invigorating as I find visits to the United States to be I have never returned to Canada without an immediate and substantial sense of improved well-being. This is not euphoria, such as I used to feel going back to the University of California at Davis during my first two years there, before the sheer malevolence of the government of California and the Regents of the University freaked me out — such a rich and beautiful place, and so promising. Returning to Canada from the United States is more like the first fever-free day after a hectic illness. I just want to relax and feel sustained by a lower-keyed and more humanly-scaled environment. This is true even when I am not coming from New York, but from rural northern Minnesota where I was on my last journey to the States. It isn't that the place is so crowded; it's the way the people come on as if the world were an unending convention and they had one eye on your name tag to see if you were important, because they had no way of knowing from listening to what you said, when they had no intention of doing anyway. The first thing I noticed when I come to the States is that my assumptions about conversation which work in Canada are naive there. In Canada, if people ask you a question, they wait for you to answer it — though, as I have indicated, if you are government official they may grow impatient after the first six months. In the United States, they don't; they

interrupt you to talk about something else if you try.

Canada, which makes more modest promises and arouses lesser hopes, is less riven by anguish and torn by rage, though there is quite a bit of petty malice. Anger is not the basic context of life here; indeed, there is too little; the people have been trained to be too docile. Canadian schools are even more oppressive than American schools, though physically safer; and this is the first year since I've been teaching here where my students, even in the University, have mostly felt free to talk back. (Maybe they're just beginning to really believe I like it; maybe, too, we're on a different part of the curve from the United States, where reports from the campuses indicate that there is now widespread satisfaction among administrators at the diligence and grade-grubbing of the students of the Seventies. The editors of *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, the professional journal, or house organ, of the American university industry, to take a notable example, often sound like *Rigoletto* exulting over the assassination of the wicked Duke, before he looks as the body.)

For the first few years here, I was quite impatient with what seemed to me the passivity of the Canadian people in the face of obvious exploitation by local elites and by Americans acting through them. Meanwhile, as usual, everything was changing including me. Canadians were getting more impatient and outspoken, and certainly no one would accuse them today of being docile in their attitude toward American domination, real or fancied. And I was coming to see that I had misinterpreted a vital aspect of Canadian socialization. What I had taken for docility was not just the consequence of having been trained to inhibit one's resistance to authority — though there is still too much such discipline. It is also the consequence of not having been trained to believe that one is, or ought to be, the master of the universe, to whose technical wizardry in the social and natural sciences all difficulties should yield. Americans, I am now frequently informed, are freaking out in large numbers because they are increasingly aware that they do not know how to solve their social problems: poverty, unemployment, racism, crime in the streets. But in Nova Scotia these aren't problems; they're what we've got; though not, as with nicer things, in quite the abundance that Americans have come to expect. Nobody expects them to go away. Meanwhile, our lives go on; our friends drop in, not unexpectedly; they may not phone but, then, we are familiar with their habits. Most of the people we deal with know who we are.

Not much of this, I am sure, can be true of Toronto or Vancouver. Yet even these cities are still coherent in a sense in which major American cities no longer are. Toronto just re-elected, sweepingly, a mayor who had earlier sponsored a bill limiting new construction to a height of 45 feet, against the opposition of a powerfully organized construction industry; while New York City, the last I heard, had not even been able to regain from the State the authority to inspect nursing homes and condemn them for violation of health and safety regulations. Canadians are not good at Final Solutions but they are much better at defining and attacking specific and legitimate problems. Indeed, one of the great threats to the Canadian way of life lies, I think, in the fact that Canadian success in solving problems within the limits of its political system may lead Canadians to retain their faith in liberalism, and even Liberalism, until it is simply too late, in a time of apocalypse, to resolve pressing moral dilemmas related to welfare and liberty. The Canadian system of social services is so much more fully developed than the American that it is difficult for most people here to realize either how inadequate it still is — that is, how poor the poor still are — or how much it has encroached on individual freedom already. The social-worker mentality can be a real threat to the freedom not only of the poor here — as in America — but to the middle classes as well. A declining faith in legitimacy may lead the body politic to develop a healthier resistance to the meliorist intrusions of authority; but it cannot take the place of a genuine reassessment of social priorities in which the claims of welfare and of liberty are coolly contrasted. This has never been done in either Canada or the United States, which has suffered a precipitous loss in the physical quality of life without compensating gains in either community or individual freedom — indeed, it is the simultaneous loss of all these things that is terrifying. To many Americans, this terror manifests itself as a fear of becoming the victim of senseless war of treating objects you do not value, and whose possible humanity does not concern you; especially in a society that has always cherished violence as an instrument of political coercion and legitimized it until its institutions lost their power to legitimize anything. Nothing has happened, or will happen, in the streets of New York that William Butler Yeats did not predict in a single, familiar poem — though one might have expected a more impressive, rough beast than Gerald Ford, his hour come round at last, slouching toward Washington to be born.