

Premier Blakeney and the Myth of We and They

The following excerpts are from the Jodidi Lecture delivered by Premier Allan Blakeney at Harvard University in May, 1979. He was commenting on what he termed the "myth" which divides Canadians into those who speak French and an "undifferentiated English-speaking collectivity."

"The fact is that Canada is a collection of quite diverse minorities—and the alliances among these minorities shift on almost every issue.

"My own province of Saskatchewan very effectively refutes the concept of a great English collectivity outside Quebec. Saskatchewan is the only province in Canada in which neither those of French or English origin make up a majority of the population. Indeed, taken together, the French and English account for less than half the population. And this diversity in large measure extends across the West.

"We in the West—and here I speak particularly of the agricultural Prairies—feel very much that we are a minority. We have an historical set of grievances against something we call Eastern Canada. Now, we don't really mean 'Eastern' Canada, because the Atlantic Provinces are not involved. And we don't even mean—when we think about it—all of Quebec and Ontario. Our hostilities—our historical grievances—are really focused against the industrial and financial heartland of Canada—the Toronto-Montreal corridor. And with this enemy we are inclined to include a federal government which does the bidding of the owners of that corridor to the detriment of the West.

"So we in the West have our own myths. Our 'we-they' formulation is the Western minority against the Eastern Canadian majority. And we lump French Quebec and English Ontario into an undifferentiated collectivity.

"Our myth is no more valid than [the other] but it is embedded in a set of realities."

The Dry, Dry Prairies

A group of Ontario citizens founded the city of Saskatoon as a Temperance Colony in 1882. Settlers were asked to sign a bond which read in part:

"In consideration of my acceptance by the Temperance Colonization Society (Ltd.) as an applicant for land . . . I hereby for myself, my heirs, executors, administrators and assigns, covenant and agree . . . that I, my heirs, executors, administrators and assigns will not: sell or exchange any wines, beer, ale, spirits, intoxicating liquors, or intoxicants of any kind whatever on or upon any of the lands covered by the agreement aforesaid."



Premier Allan Blakeney

Palliser's Triangle

Mark a map of Canada with dots to show population clusters and, with one exception, the dots will be thickest along navigable waters—the ocean shores, the Great Lakes, the banks of the St. Lawrence and other rivers.

The exception is Palliser's Triangle.

In 1857 the British government, concerned that if it didn't settle the interior plains Americans would, sent Captain John Palliser, a buffalo hunter, to check out the possibilities of the grasslands.

Palliser's party traveled the prairies for two years, covering what would be known as Palliser's Triangle—most of southern Alberta, southern Saskatchewan, and the southwest corner of Manitoba.

He reported that the land was far too dry to support farming. He was, as it turned out, wrong.

Why There Are No Trees on the Prairie

Grasses, including wheat, have roots that find and use every last drop of moisture in the soil.

Trees are less efficient. If one is planted in the semi-arid prairie and left to its own devices, its leaves will lose more water by evaporation than its roots can find and it will die.