

## SECOND WIND

Second Wind is an occasional column of opinion by Gateway staff

by David Marples

After six years of trying, I still cannot decide whether Multiculturalism is a worthwhile policy.

Those in favour of Multiculturalism argue their case as follows. First, Canada is ruled by an elite consisting of people of Anglo-Celtic-French background, which is preventing people of other nationalities and Native people from having an equal voice in the affairs of the country. Second, North America is a "melting pot." The giant nation to our south has little time for those who wish to preserve an "ethnic" identity. Thus ethnic groups in Canada are being pressured to assimilate, often against their will. Third, it is important to preserve one's "cultural heritage," which is in danger of disappearing within Canada, but also often in the homeland itself.

Let there be no doubt that Multiculturalism, as far as it has been allowed to go, is popular in this province. One need only to witness the throngs at the two-day Heritage Days festival. But there is a divisive side to this policy that rarely receives attention.

The term "ethnic" is one that has been overused, but it is perhaps the only one to describe one's ancestral background. It implies that a person is a representative of a minority group in Canada. It also implies that Canada is irrevocably divided into many ethnic groups. The *Globe and Mail*, for example, writes about Toronto's Portuguese community; it does not refer to Canadians of Portuguese ancestry, since it is easier to conceive of all the Portuguese acting as one group.

Let us carry this one stage further. If one happens to be a Portuguese in Toronto, ostensibly in danger of being assimilated into what is perceived as a mainstream culture, then is it not important (if not essential) to preserve one's culture, not only by innocuous rites such as folk dances, but also by associating with and marrying people of one's own kind? In short, one would ensure the segregation of a group on ethnic lines. The Portuguese, of course, are not always physically distinguishable, but supposing we speak instead

of a "visible minority"?

There is another aspect to this sociological phenomenon, of course. In the case of the Chinese, for example, they were treated so abominably in the past that they were obliged to live in ghettos and associate with other immigrants from China. We also know that racism is rampant in this province, whether in Eckville or Rocky Mountain House. But is the answer a policy that works along ethnic (race) lines?

The key question is how one perceives of Canada. If one sees Canada as a British historical relic that is now the property of the USA, or as an economic satellite that is dominated by international finance, or even (as mentioned) as a country dominated by a class elite along ethnic grounds (some would say ruled by "non-ethnics"), then Multiculturalism in its most political form may well be the answer.

But isn't diversity the reason behind Canada's vibrancy? Is it not conceivable that a nation constitutes the sum of its people? One must concede that the two languages give advantages to certain groups, but it is surely possible that when one stops looking at a country's makeup along ethnic lines, then people will also cease to regard their fellows from an ethnic or racist viewpoint. This is not to say that a Vietnamese can arrive at the International Airport embracing wildly his new-found Canadianism - he would probably never get through Immigration if he did so - but it may mean that his origin is of less consequence than at the present time.

Simply put, I would argue that one's place of origin is significant. One should be encouraged to know the history and customs of one's native land. But at the same time, it should not be the dominant factor behind one's every action.

Having made this noble comment, I am obliged to admit that as one who came to Canada from Britain, I have found the transition a relatively easy one. But having worked for Ukrainians (whose Mother nation is denied an independent existence) and married into a Chinese family, I have some experience of the problems encountered by Canada's minority groups.

If Multiculturalism did not exist, it would be necessary to replace it with another policy. After all, it has given many Canadians a foothold in the establishment that they lacked hitherto. But there is always the inherent danger that a policy devised with the best of intentions could take an unfortunate course, breeding dissension among Canadians simply because they have been encouraged to perceive themselves, first and foremost, as representatives of an "ethnic group."

## Speak up

Though the importance of the recent upheaval within the students' council is undeniable, because of it another serious issue has been ignored. The recent cutbacks in student parking, not a high profile issue such as impeachments and political intrigue, has found itself shoved into the back rooms of administration.

I wish to draw peoples' attention to the greatest display of poor planning to rear its ugly head within this institution of "higher" learning since some budget restraint minded provincial cabinet minister cutback university funding. Recently the Stadium carpark was closed for repairs that have been attributed to faulty construction. This resulted in the loss of 1000 student parking places. Now the city, in reaction to residents' complaints, is posting "NO PARKING" signs in two areas close to university, the Garneau area and four blocks south of University avenue. This would result in conservatively estimating the loss of another 1000 places. This amounts to a total loss of 2000 places. This figure is deceiving in that it doesn't account for car pooling, and in considering this, we double the figure, averaging two persons per vehicle. Now the number affected has risen to 4000.

Now comes the crunch. Putting 4000 more people on an already strained bus system has been suggested as a solution, but with this every student who now takes the bus is affected by over crowding and longer lines at peak hours. The shortage of parking on campus will raise the price of spots within walking distance out of the reach of many students. Places now \$20 to \$25 per month could be as high as \$40 to \$50 per month. I am under the impression we live in a democracy and the will of the majority should be the course of action taken by elected officials and the public servants under them. The prime impetus for the city's move says Scott Mackie, City Traffic Planning Section, has been a petition of "over" 300 names and numerous complaints. Considering the figures I mentioned earlier and that 13 times that number will

be directly affected I find this ludicrous. I appeal to each and every one who has ever received a parking ticket in the university area to write a short note to university parking services and/or the city (put it with the cheque) and let the powers that be know our displeasure with their inability to foresee and react to this pressing problem.

Guy Lapierre  
Arts II

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