

# The Canadian Crisis-Nationhood

By Ron Duffy

Canada is undergoing a crisis as is the United States. However, where the U.S. crisis is one of race, ours is one of Nationhood. An important body of French-speaking Canadians has become dissatisfied with Confederation. The extent of its dissatisfaction first became apparent to the nation at large in 1962. In the General Election of that year, the voters of Quebec expressed their diversion by voting in large numbers for a fiery demagogue who made no secret of his admiration for the methods of Mussolini and Hitler. "You do not have to understand Social Credit to vote for it," Real Caouette told his followers, and he urged them to vote Social Credit because "you have nothing to lose". Many agreed with him. Their desertion of their traditional political allegiance did as much as anything else to make us English-speaking Canadians conscious of the resentments and aspirations of our French-speaking compatriots. It helped to make us aware that these are widespread and mostly justified, and induced a struggle, in a sort of enfeebled desperation, to make amends.

This crisis of nationhood presents to a Prime Minister of Canada an issue transcending all others in urgency and importance. For many years it was his main concern so to conduct his countrymen's affairs that there would continue to be two sovereign governments in North America, not one. Today, his main concern is that there continue to be two sovereign governments, not three. No Canadian Prime Minister, least of all an English-speaking Prime Minister, wants to be remembered as the man who presided over the liquidation of Confederation.

If there are not to be three sovereign governments in North America, we must put our heads together and act. It is easy to sit back and say someone should do something. However, it is much harder to act in a constructive way. Strong words alone, of course, do not make meaningful policy, they must be backed both by a will and action that are equally strong. Woodrow Wilson said, "We are not put into this world to sit still and know; we are put into it to act." If we no longer provide safe shelter, Quebec is likely to conclude that there is more safety in independence than in Confederation.

Canada faces the danger of a fundamental cleavage arising from history and ethnic division. The time has come for us to be Canadians--not English or French Canadians but just plain Canadians. Our ancestral past should be respected but we should not worship it. If we could look at our citizens and accept them as Canadians without searching for an accent or some clue to their ancestral past, Canada would make sense to the rest of the world as well as to herself.

Good natured ignorance is not enough to achieve a successful relationship. We will comprehend the rest of the world much better if we work harder at understanding the factors and forces that are fashioning our own relationship. The understanding will only be achieved as individuals by actively considering more knowledge and fresh ideas.

Most Canadians love their own country and cherish its independence. We know instinctively how great are the problems that must be solved if Canadian nationhood is to be sustained and strengthened. In particular, we know that the implicit contract between English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians, on which the country has been so largely based, has now, for a number of reasons, been plunged in ferment; and most of us--yes, most of us, I think--realize what skill and strength and forbearance will be needed if the contract is to be reinterpreted successfully in the light of new conditions and made ample enough to accommodate the aspirations of all Canadians of whatever race or language.

Our relationship is full of difficulty. It will take much patient thought and work on both sides to handle the difficulties constructively. But it may prove easier to summon the necessary intelligence and good will if it is realized that the questions at issue are by no means all parochial. In truth, the relationship contains within itself most of the problems of the whole planet, on which we are all adrift together.

And there lies ahead of us now only one common-sense choice. We are part of the world, and if we are to live well in this world we must at once set about educating ourselves in the affairs of our own people. We must understand what motivates each other, what our hopes are, what our difficulties are, and how our way of life can be mutual. We must work together to a common end. The late President Kennedy said on June 1, 1961, "A few years ago it was said that the optimists learned Russian and the pessimists learned Chinese. I prefer to think that those with vision study French and English."

So let us not be blind to our differences, but let us also direct attention to our common interests and to the means by which those differences can be resolved.

## Doug Fisher Interviews

**MR. FISHER:** You shifted, in the last decade at least, away from the CCF and enthusiasm for it. Have you pinned your... political hopes upon another party?

**PROF. UNDERHILL:** No. I had 25 years of somewhat tempestuous wedded life with the CCF. I broke off that connection, and I am now conducting an affair with the Liberals, but it is a purely platonic relationship that I have with them. I don't intend to commit myself to political matrimony again. I'm going to stay an independent bachelor.

**MR. FISHER:** This platonic relationship to the Liberal party, does it have anything to do with a respect or an admiration for Mr. Pearson?

**PROF. UNDERHILL:** Yes. I have a great personal admiration for him. Of course, I am affected by our personal relationship. We were colleagues in the history department at Toronto--we were friends then, and we have been friends ever since. I am unwilling to accept a good many of the criticisms, well, that people like you make of him. I think he is going to establish himself as a genuine leader. I think he needs to listen to himself a little more and not so much to some of his lieutenants--but it seems to me he is gradually learning to do that. And you have to be terribly patient in Canadian politics; I have learned that from my own experience. We started off as young impatient people in the thirties. I realize now things move in this country very slowly. So I think I would say more for him now than I would have said for a man like him in the thirties in the Liberal party.

**MR. FISHER:** You have known Mr. Pearson personally and as a colleague. Has he ever been aggressive in any line, sort of in a sense of trying to create or do something on his own?

**MR. UNDERHILL:** Well, I suppose not, maybe. He has always been so sensible, modest, decent and clear-headed--that is what I have liked about him--and never rhetorical, never putting on (airs), never pompous. Now there is a manufactured Canadian taste for the rhetorician, I think, in politics, and he isn't that. And when he tries to be that, he isn't successful. And I think Canadians are becoming mature enough to accept the man who isn't rhetorical. I may be complimenting my fellow Canadians too much there, but that is part of my optimism.

**MR. FISHER:** Do you reach the stage where you feel that... the man at the centre, the Prime Minister, above all, rather than all this talk about a team, or a cluster of reform-minded people, that is important to a political party?

**PROF. UNDERHILL:** Well, I think there has to be the leader. But I think the weakness of our parties has been that they haven't had enough intellectuals in them. They haven't had intellectuals always playing a part, not as leaders, but as advisors, as stimulants, as gadflies, and so on, as analysts...

**MR. FISHER:** But... isn't there something in Mr. Diefenbaker's approach that does rivet the attention and capture the imagination of this kind of person?

**PROF. UNDERHILL:** Well, yes, but it always turns out to be phony. He is a William Jennings Bryan. He has a great capacity for stirring up our popular democracy. But I think we have reached the stage in social evolution in Canada in which we need something in addition to this popular democracy, this grassroots democracy. We need intellectual leadership... that is, we need an elite, not imposing itself on the popular democracy, but working with it and trying to supply it with ideas. Now Mr. Diefenbaker repels people of that kind.

**MR. FISHER:** Well, I agree with you. But does Mr. Pearson really attract them and is his party so arranged and operated so that it brings them in and uses them?

**PROF. UNDERHILL:** Well it has brought in quite a few of them. I think you will find far more university intellectuals now prepared to work with and for the Liberal party, than you would with and for the NDP. I think his party does on the whole express a left opinion, but not a radical left opinion, which is the dominant opinion I think among university academic people at present.

**MR. FISHER:** Where can you see this in the Liberal party? I agree with everything you said about Mr. Pearson, except that I can't see any direction to him--

**PROF. UNDERHILL:** Well, no other party has attracted a Tom Kent, for example, or a Mitchell Sharp. Now, they are both intellectuals whether you like the way their intellect works or not. They are highly qualified intellectuals. And the Kingston Conference, now famous in our party history, it's just full of people like that.

**MR. FISHER:** Mr. Underhill, in the party situation, you have indicated that you approve of Mr. Pearson, and you think he will develop as a leader; you have indicated that you think radicalism... has much future in Canada; you have indicated that the corporate community looks to you as being more intelligent than... say the labour movement. How is this going to affect... your opinion of the political parties as they now exist?

**PROF. UNDERHILL:** Well at the moment they make me vote Liberal as I voted for the last two federal elections.

Let us re-examine our attitude toward each other remembering that we are not engaged in a debate, seeking to pile up debating points. We are not here distributing blame or pointing the finger of judgment. We must deal with the country as it is and not as it might have been had the history of the last few years been different.

We must seek, above all, a country of understanding; a country in which peoples dwell together in mutual respect and work together in mutual regard; a country where harmony is not a mere interlude between discords, but an incentive to the creative energies of Canadians. The goal of an understanding country must, today and tomorrow, shape our decisions and inspire our purposes. Let it not be said of Canadians that we left ideals and visions to the past, nor purpose and determination to our adversaries. We have come too far, we have sacrificed too much, to disdain the future now.