

# Canada will lose place in Global Village if the virulent nationalists carry the day

By MURRAY G. ROSS

The following piece, first published by the *Globe and Mail*, was written by Murray Ross, president emeritus of York University, currently at Glendon College. Dr. Ross is also a director of *Time Canada*.

Nationalism may yet become an important issue in Canada. It's not that we haven't heard a lot about this subject. To the contrary, we've had "nationalism" thrown at us from so many angles that if the flow of propaganda continues we may develop a new means of greeting each other: perhaps jumping to our feet and shouting: "I'm a Canadian" in the manner of the Nazis who proved their loyalty by yelling "Heil Hitler."

What we haven't heard are the voices of the people who are becoming increasingly suspicious of the motives of many of the most strident nationalists, weary of their repetitious and exaggerated statements and fearful of the consequences of the actions they propose.

When some of these concerns are expressed publicly, we may have a great national debate on the subject. To date the arguments of the nationalists have dominated the media.

Of course, it is difficult to speak publicly against nationalism. One sounds disloyal to one's country. It's not easy to say one loves Canada and Canadians but that occasionally one finds both insufferable.

"For God's sake," said a friend recently, "don't show me another Canadian book." He was not thinking of the productions of the dozen or so first-rate Canadian authors. He was reacting to the flood of second-rate government-subsidized books, about one of which a respected reviewer recently said: "By all means go ahead and amuse yourself — but I beg you put no more stuff like this in print." One can get too much of a second-rate thing.

There are three reasons why there is growing suspicion of the rise of nationalism in Canada.

First is the belief that much of the movement is not so much pro-Canada as it is anti-American; second is the feeling that the nationalistic emphasis is leading to mediocrity in many aspects of our life; and third is the conviction that the nationalist argument is being used as a cover for personal gain, company profit, or political power.

*Nationalism is really anti-Americanism.*

Consider the following: "I confess to a desire to toss a hand grenade into every American camper I pass on the highway." Where would one expect to see such a cruel and brutal sentence? Perhaps in a North Vietnam paper, or even a revolutionary tract in Canada? Wrong. In an article in *Maclean's* magazine — the journal devoted to giving "our own Canadian view of the world."

Of course this fantasy is an extreme example of anti-Americanism, but it is the inevitable result of continuing sniping at Americans, the end product of the hostile grossip about Americans at cocktail parties in Toronto, the culmination of unfavourable comments about Americans by prominent media personalities.

David Lewis Stein in a recent article in the *Canadian Forum* suggested "Americans are becoming Canada's Jews." This seems, at first glance, an absurd proposition. But we must consider it seriously if we are not projecting our own inadequacies, our own insecurities, our own

frustrations on the United States.

I am certain the founders of the Committee for an Independent Canada did not intend any such development. But it is difficult to escape Mr. Stein's concern that "almost everywhere (in Canada) knowing little cracks about Americans are as fashionable as cracks about Jews and foreigners once were . . . If they feel like this about Americans how long will it be before they attack all foreigners? And how long will it be after that until they turn on Jews, even those who have been here for generations?"

## CHAUVINISM NOURISHED

The point is that extreme nationalism has, on the one hand, fed and nourished chauvinism and, on the other, hate and prejudice of the "outsider."

As all students of prejudice know, this is a disease that spreads rapidly and takes deep root quickly. Witness not merely the growth of anti-Semitism in Germany but the racism which appeared in the fifties in that most tolerant of countries, Britain.

Perhaps there was in the minds of many Canadians solid grounds for changing the rules in respects of *Time* and *Reader's Digest*, but the rational arguments disappeared in a sea of anti-Americanism — in what the editor of *The Vancouver Sun* called "a vendetta."

At least one federal Cabinet minister participated in this ugly spectacle and another said openly that if they (*Time* and *Reader's Digest*) met all the requirements of the law, then "the government would move to change the law."

It is not simply that the Government's treatment of this whole issue was, as Geoffrey Stevens reports, "shabby"; it is that behind the procedures adopted by the government was a vehemence, a vindictiveness and a hostility that tends to be directed only at a hated enemy.

The silence of the more reasonable nationalists on these and other emotionally-laden attacks inevitably leads one to ask if this very silence is not an expression of desire to see anti-Americanism escalate in Canada.

There is, of course, another danger to the growth and spread of anti-Americanism in Canada. There is a formidable American presence in Canada and the United States is our closest neighbor and our most important customer.

That country has endured the "ugly American" image with remarkable tolerance over a long period of time but there are indications, as witness Daniel Moynihan's new stance at the United Nations, that the United States is losing patience and is ready to retaliate and to attack. Any such response to anti-Americanism in Canada could be disastrous for us.

*Nationalism leads to mediocrity.*

Our federal government appears to be committed to a programme of aiding the arts to developing a "Canadian culture".

At the same time there is the underlying assumption that if we can protect our writers, artists, dancers, etc., from too much competition — particularly from "the Americans" — our arts will flourish and our identity become unmistakable.

The positive aspect of this policy has merit — there are many individuals and organizations in a small country like Canada that need financial support. The danger is we may frequently subsidize second-rate ability and/or



inefficiency and flood the market with the results of both.

The negative aspect ("keep out the Americans") compounds the danger, for without outside competition and universal standards we may come to believe that our own "average" is of the highest quality. Mediocrity, as long as it is "Canadian", may well be that which we will come to admire.

Most Canadians who have made significant contributions in the broad cultural field have done so without subsidy and in competition with the best in the world.

One only needs to think of scholars such as Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye, novelists such as Morley Callaghan and Robertson Davies, critics such as the late Nathan Cohen, poets such as E. J. Pratt and Douglas LePan, comic-dramatists such as Wayne and Shuster, artists such as Harold Town and Jean-Paul Riopelle.

These Canadians and others like them do not need the protection of intellectual or artistic tariff barriers. Our newspapers and magazines will be read when they are good. B. K. Sandwell did not need a subsidy to provide him with readers, nor did *Maclean's* lack influence when Ralph Allen and Blair Fraser were editors.

Our reading tastes differ but Christina Newman, Anthony Westell, William French, Norman Webster, Geoffrey Stevens, Scott Young, Dennis Braithwaite, to mention a few Toronto names, are all good writers and shrewd analysts, and can stand competition from anyone in their fields. They and others will be read.

## NARROW MOULD

Why then, the pressure to produce anything that is Canadian almost regardless of quality — to force us into a narrow Canadian mould? And with what results?

"Far from there being too little published about Canada, there are days when I am convinced there is far too much. The country's biggest publishing house habitually prints rubbish and the leading commercial houses are often forced to do so out of necessity. What prompts these

melancholy remarks? Reading the latest offerings from the Social Science Research Council and the University of Toronto Press."

The above, part of a book review by Prof. V. Nelles, a first-rate history scholar, reflects what many Canadians are beginning to realize: We are trying to create talent where none exists; we are force-feeding an industry that will now publish anything as long as it is sufficiently "Canadian" to warrant a government subsidy. We are beginning to judge performers by the country of origin rather than by the quality of their work.

The result is a narrow parochial outlook that in time may erode our ability to judge what is valuable. As the bored watcher of TV said in a recent cartoon: "I've seen so many lousy TV shows, I wouldn't know a good show if I saw one."

Even the indestructible loyalty of Robert Fulford to Canadian writers appears to be strained, as he said regretfully of a book he recently reviewed. "But in the end the satire is unsatisfactory because it's — well, it's so damn *Canadian!*"

It will be said that there is no effort to restrict competition of ideas in Canada. It is frequently said that "the reader or viewer or listener is always the judge" and he is free to choose as he wishes. But by subsidizing and pressing on us "Canadian content" we get a somewhat distorted view of reality.

And if this does not work, Secretary of State Hugh Faulkner in a recent statement to *The Vancouver Province* seemed to suggest that government censorship in publishing and in the arts may be necessary; "without controlling the importation of foreign culture — we stand a good chance of being swamped."

Does, then, the government want us to focus on Canada to the exclusion of all else, even if it means restricting what we may wish to read, write, see or listen to?

The outstanding Canadian sociologist, John O'Neill, writes, in his rather obscure style, but with his eye clearly on the central issue: "A nationalism of knowledge presents itself as a

horror to the minds of university men and women who have worked in the long tradition of Western civilization, happy indeed to make for some betterment of life but unable to understand what any national contribution might mean that did not offer itself to all men, or that could not withstand comparison with what is done elsewhere."

In the world of academe, in the world of ideas, in the world of art there should be no boundaries.

But the inevitable result of the nationalistic movement is to create such boundaries and the inevitable result of this is a narrow perspective, an unhealthy degree of introspection, and probably mediocrity in our endeavors.

*Nationalism as a cover.*

One should not venture suspicion of the motives of one's peers. Who is to cast the first stone? Yet it is clear that if competition can be eliminated or reduced those so protected may gain in status or wealth or power.

If foreign professors are eliminated perhaps a Canadian professor of lesser status can have more security. If *Reader's Digest* is closed out in Canada, perhaps there will be more advertising dollars and profit for the *Toronto Star Limited*.

The virulent nationalism of a Mathews, of a Newman, or a Chatelaine may be entirely altruistic — concerned only with Canadian development. But — and it is a big but — it is difficult not to suspect other motives as well.

There are those who seek other gains under the guise of nationalism. Most of the Marxist leaders — Mao, Tito, Ho Chi Minh and Fidel Castro who were swept into power by their own people — proclaimed the chief aim of their struggle not to be the establishment of communism but liberation of their country from foreign domination.

I would not suggest nationalism in Canada could take such a form, but it is worth noting that behind the seeming purity of nationalistic sentiments lies a wide variety of objectives and sub-objectives. One must be aware that "nationalism" is an appealing slogan which may hide many different motives.

The most likely outcome of the extension of nationalism is a Canada of socialism. This I do not say in horror, for it may be the direction in which the world is moving in any case. But the call of the nationalists "to buy back Canada" is a call for an extension of government ownership and control.

## SOCIALIST EXPERIMENT

As John O'Neill says: "If there is to be a nationalist separation — the only chance I can see is to build upon the new staples of water, oil and gas, a public domain which would be the basis for . . . a new experiment in socialism."

Nationalism may be the catalyst that will stimulate the already obvious trend to a larger government stake in the affairs of Canadians.

I happen to be a fifth-generation Canadian, with deep affection for my country and its people. I do not deny sympathy for some of the more modest objectives in Canadian nationalism.

But I am concerned that the extreme nationalists' views, now widely expressed in the popular media, represent a regressive movement which denies the reality of "the Global Village" and restricts Canada's development as a participating member in that village.