

by ANDRÉ ROSSINGER

CANADIAN DIMENSION

There has been a tremendous increase in the intensity of the political fermentation process in Canada since de Gaulle's visit to Quebec. Political and intellectual leaders and their parties have become advocates of political concepts which they loudly rejected only a short while ago. Now we are witnessing a competition in which each political leader and his party tries to outdo the other in a bid for public favour. The underlying assumption is that it is

urgent to counteract and to deflect the wave of new nationalism in Canada, and particularly in Quebec. All the slow moving political forces have suddenly become very agile in the belief they have to fight against the influential shadow of de Gaulle and the political windfall which is benefitting the RIN.

Is this assumption about de Gaulle correct? What is the true nature of this sudden political mobility in Quebec and

the rest of Canada?

If we look only at the surface of present developments in Canada, we see that the federal Liberal Party and government have finally agreed upon the need for partial revision of the BNA Act. The Conservative Party of Canada has accepted the "two nation" concept. The Quebec wing of the Liberal Party has declared that it shares the Union Nationale's view of two nations within one confederation. Some leaders of the left wing of the Quebec Liberal Party advocate two sovereign states with a "common market" arrangement under the name of "Canadian Union." However, closer examination of the events and the forces and motivating factors behind them lead us to the recognition that the real meaning of all these differs from the verbal presentation, that constant vigilance and active participation are required to avoid pitfalls which could prove to be of historic consequence to the French and English speaking people in Canada.

The Canadian crisis started and has moved ahead with increasing intensity and depth independent of General Charles de Gaulle's visit. However, his visit did make this crisis more spectacular — not because of what he said but because of certain English and French-Canadian desires to misinterpret what he said. All those who think that his outburst, "Vive Quebec libre", had the meaning of "Vive Quebec indépendante" deliberately ignore the strategic concept of de Gaulle in external policy. This inner need to distort, to close the ears and to cling to old and new versions of political mythology is a Canadian problem in general and a Quebec problem in particular. The memory of de Gaulle will fade away, but the English and French-Canadian versions of political pathology remain as long as we insist on wearing political blinkers.

Political Blinker No. one: For a long time de Gaulle has been a "persona non grata" as far as English-Canadian public opinion is concerned. This happened not for the right but for the wrong reason. He is basically a conservative man, particularly in his internal and economic policies in France, but he had the integrity and courage to learn some lessons, at least in the realm of international relationships. His strategy for the preservation of peace, even if it is a precarious one, is to build a third block made up of those states which refuse to continue to be satellites of any of the super powers. In order to reduce the danger of future cold and hot wars and prevent a Third World War, de Gaulle tries, on each of his visits, to strengthen the sense of national identity in those countries which have been willing partners or prisoners of a super power bloc. He is for international co-operation without strings attached. When he visited Poland recently and the Latin American countries before, his major line of conduct was the same. His performance in Quebec was no exception, only a local variation of the same theme: he wanted to boost the growing French-Canadian sense of Canadian identity, which is expected to stimulate the slowly emerging English-Canadian sense of Canadian identity. All this

was regarded as a dangerous concept by the majority of public opinion molders and decision-makers within English and French speaking Canada. De Gaulle's concept reminded them of their own sin of historic magnitude. For while they superficially developed Canadian sovereignty, they actually buried it economically, politically and culturally. It is a dangerous illusion to think that one can build a truly progressive Canada with a well-balanced national sense of identity and purpose when the country remains the economic and political appendix of the U.S.A., whose government is leading international civil wars against peaceful progress in every part of the world. English and French-Canadian leaders have made this country a partner in these international civil wars, camouflaging this fact with liberal slogans for use at home.

Within this framework, de Gaulle's visit to Expo was regarded as a necessary evil. During the many weeks before he arrived editorials tried to destroy any possible impact he might have while in Canada, not by genuine discussion of his political line but by vitriolic attacks on his personality.

Then came the famous sentence from de Gaulle's mouth, "Vive Quebec libre." Any sober political analyst would have known that "Vive Quebec libre" could not mean, "Vive Quebec indépendante" for de Gaulle because that would be in conflict with his basic concept. We underestimate de Gaulle's intelligence if we fail to recognize that he is aware that an independent Quebec would drive the remainder of English Canada even further into the orbit of the U.S.A. and that together the two would suffocate Quebec economically, politically and militarily. Such a move could even lead to civil war within Quebec under the leadership of those sectors of the French and English-Canadian power elites which regard the U.S. power umbrella over Canada, including Quebec, as "social security" for the rule of the established order.

However, most commentators did not analyze the situation soberly but reacted with hot indignation, completely distorting the meaning of that sentence. The supporters of a policy which, under varying parties and governments, undermined Canadian sovereignty now accused de Gaulle of being engaged in the destruction of Canadian unity. What a tragic comedy! They also accused him of interfering with the internal affairs of Canada. This has a strong political and moral basis only if the accusers are innocent of similar practices, but for the past decades official and unofficial Canadian policy has been to encourage people in many countries within the Soviet bloc to assert their national sense of identity.

If we look more deeply into the problem, we discover a "de Gaulle complex" in Canada, existing independent of the man himself. It is a stubborn refusal to mature and to see ourselves as the world sees us.

Political Blinker No. two: The most fantastic aspect of de Gaulle's visit was that the sentence he uttered, "Vive Quebec libre" was interpreted in the same way by

both leaders of the Canadian establishment and leaders of the French-Canadian separatist movements (RIN). For both it meant "Vive Quebec indépendante". The great difference was in the conflicting emotional colorations.

For the first group this false interpretation was a deliberate, hysterical shout to create hostility. For the second group this misinterpretation was the result of political naivete and wishful thinking which blinded them to the complex nature of de Gaulle's political lines, to which he adheres within and outside of France. There is another reason for this uncritical interpretation by the RIN. The RIN represents, on the whole, a new generation of French-Canadians who are relatively free of certain notions detrimental to France which have been so prevalent in the French Canada of the past two centuries. The essence of this notion is that France "went to the devil" on account of anti-clerical enlightenment in the 18th century and on account of a succession of revolutions in the 18th and 19th centuries, which eventually led to the separation of church and state, in turn affecting the education and personal development of the French people. Accordingly, the French-Canadian power elite, who feared progressive ideas, generated an attitude of deep mistrust toward France, the French value system and French men and women. There was a time when even the defeat of France during the Second World War was regarded in Quebec as divine punishment for their alleged anti-church course in the past.

It is of great importance to Quebec and French Canada as a whole that the new generation of French-Canadians is relatively free from these prejudices after fifteen years of self-criticism which revealed to them that the reactionary views of past generations of French-Canadian leaders were very much co-responsible for the social, economic and political inferiority of French Canada. It is not quite right to say that France abandoned the French-Canadian people in Quebec. The truth is that the traditional leaders of French-Canadians desired that France leave them alone. They regarded the English occupation and later their arrangement within Confederation as a lesser evil, because relative autonomy allowed them to preserve social, economic, political and cultural conservatism. France accepted this arrangement because in the 19th century she was busy building up an empire of her own in Africa and Asia, and during the first half of the 20th century she was preoccupied with the growing German menace and then with the formation of the English-French "Entente Cordiale."

Thus what is happening now in the relationship between Quebec and France is a sort of mutual re-discovery under new historic circumstances. This mutual acceptance in modern terms, however, does not mean that Quebec will become a new imperial outpost of France — as some English speaking Canadians have already suggested. French-Canadians are Frenchmen of North America — a particular entity.



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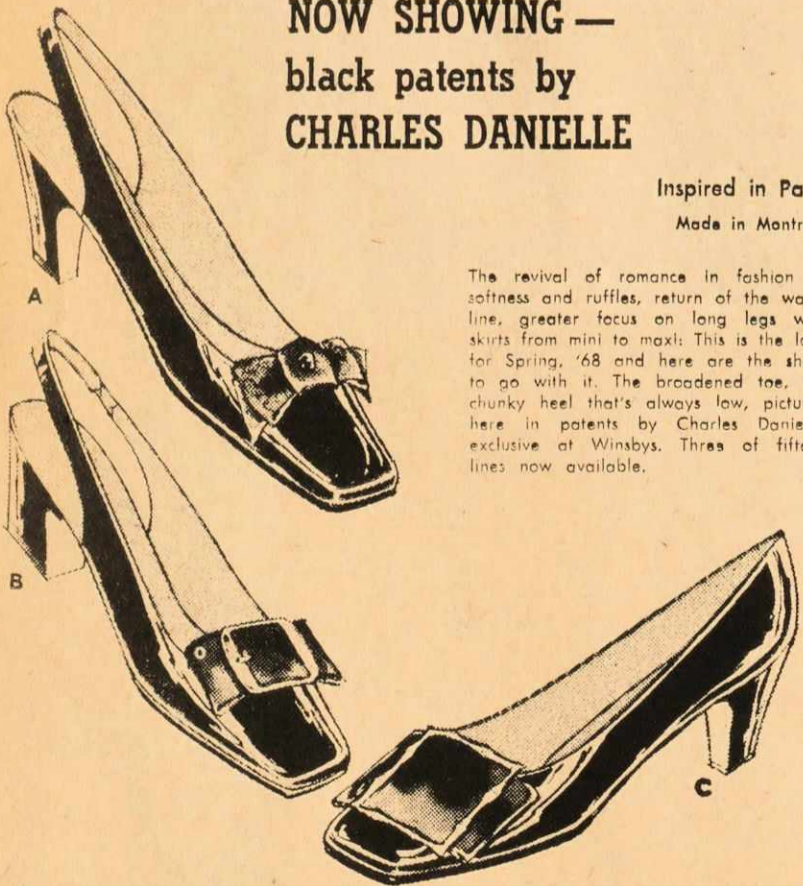
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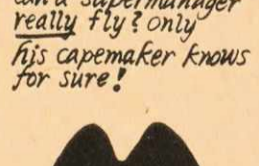
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