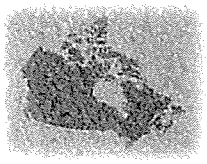
Diverse Views on a Diverse Country



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As Canada entered the twenty-first century it carried with it many unresolved questions relating to its national identity. Over the century the friction in the relationship between Canadians of British and French descent evolved into the difficult political and constitutional conflict between Quebec and the rest of Canada. The conflict resulted in the near break up of the country. Although Canada survived the twentieth century, the problems of linguistic and cultural identity continue to challenge us, and for many analysts there remains a need to reaffirm the main elements of Canada's identity. Very often these efforts call for the reconciliation of the dominance of the English and French languages in Canada and the growing cultural diversity in the makeup of the population. While some contend that reconciling Canada's linguistic duality and its cultural diversity is problematic, others maintain that duality and diversity are not incompatible.

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In the past century Canada experienced a demographic revolution. While there was an increase in the concentration of French-speakers in Quebec and English-speakers outside the province, there was a significant rise in the numbers and diversification of persons and groups whose origins were neither British nor French. These changes have given rise to the multiple attachments and an increased mixing or 'metissage' of the population, thus further enhancing Canada's already pluralistic character. By consequence, those who view bicultural models as the only solution to Canada's identity crisis face an increasingly fundamental challenge. Whether bi-national recognition models are rooted in geography or language, they inevitably confront the phenomenon of multiple identities. At this time it is difficult to say how the demographic changes will influence the policies of official languages and multiculturalism. One thing appears certain and that is that changes there will be.

This edition of Canadian Issues entitled 'Canada: Dual and Diverse?' contains a collection of papers that were given at two forums. The first set of essays on English-French Relations in Canada arise from the publication by the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) of the book As I Recall – Si je me souviens bien. Over the course of this past year, the Association for Canadian Studies was truly fortunate to hold a series of forums on behalf of the IRPP. They provided an opportunity for more Canadians to become aware of this important publication which traces the major events that have shapes the relationship between English and French Canadians over the past two hundred and fifty years. Essays by two of the major contributors to the book, John Meisel and Arthur Silver, are included in this edition.

In her text, Tradition, Perspective and Vision: English-French Relations in Canada, Official Languages Commissioner Dyane Adam maintains that there is a need for a new discourse on Canada's linguistic duality. She notes that considerable attention is directed at the conflictual side of the relationship between English and French Canadians, while the long record of cooperation and achievement between the two communities is too often neglected.

Reputed scholar John Meisel reflects upon the lessons that he drew in his work on the publication of As I Recall. He lauds the tenacity of Canadians in overcoming the many crises that have confronted English and French Canadians. Despite these problems, he reminds us that the country has remained united. But the regional political movements that are less concerned with mediating the English-

French conflict will continue to modify the political landscape. Meisel concludes that asymmetrical federalism represents the only solution to the Quebec-Canada conflict and the continued refusal to face this will further undermine unity.

One of Canada's foremost specialists on the history and sociology of the francophones outside Quebec, Robert Choquette, offers an 'opinion' on the reconciliation of policies in the area of official languages and multiculturalism. Certainly more than an 'opinion', this essay contains important insights into the relationship between the French Canadian population outside of Quebec and the presence of 'newer' francophone Canadians. Like Lafontant, he points out that the typical Canadian francophone outside of Quebec recognizes himself as a 'bilingual'. Since 1970 there has been significant change in the rest of Canada's (or ROC) francophone population. Having broken with the homogeneity of the Catholic Church, ROC francophones are fragmented and often too often balkanized even at the provincial level between the Acadian and franco-Ontarian populations. In addition, franco-Canadians have grown increasingly multicultural. In short, Choquette notes that the franco-Canadian of the year 2000 is very different from that of 1969.

For their part, the anglo-Canadian and the many ethnic communities have also changed over the last few decades as the two have come into increasing contact and as the composition of the country's recent immigration is less European. He concludes that the traditional anglophone is hard to find.

In the ROC, the 'new' francophonie often has different interests from the established French Canadian community. While the latter defends the institutional structures, at times the newer francophone migrant appears more willing to assimilate. At the same time, some of the French Canadian communities have not always welcomed the francophone immigration. In the case of the multicultural policy, it is the cultures of origin and not the language that are to be retained. Ideally the immigrants will adopt a new attachment to Canadian identity in either the English or French language. Ultimately, enhanced francophone immigration will imply that the ROC's francophonie will be very diverse. Compromise and better understanding between the older and newer francophones will be required. Choquette closes by questioning the extent to which those organizations that do advocacy for the francophones outside Quebec are truly representative of their presumed constituencies. While he acknowledges that much good work is done on behalf of francophones, there is a need to look at the way subsidies are being used in both areas of official languages and multiculturalism.

Historian Arthur Silver reflects upon whether the state of English-French relations has improved in recent years. He acknowledges that the British Conquest and the Catholic and Protestant religious divisions are no longer the dominant elements of the conflict. Silver contends that: "The secularization of French Canada and the transformation of Quebec into a multiethnic and multicultural francophone society have increased the resemblance between anglophone and francophone values and outlooks." While the idea of linguistic assimilation as a way to advance unity has long been abandoned, there remains an important number of persons who wish to make Canadians into 'one people'. Silver views the pursuit of this objective as something that will inevitably confront the feeling of a large portion of Quebecers that they are already their own people.

Writer Naim Kattan focuses on Quebec's evolution from a society where religion was the dominant expression of Quebec identity to one where language became the unifying element for the majority of the population. He points out that the transformation of Quebec into a pluralistic francophone society has, amongst other things, resulted in a significant increase in the presence of ethnic minority writers in the French language. Ideally, Kattan feels that the cultural contribution of francophone writers should belong to all Canadians and the increased pluralism should further contribute to this goal.

Historian Cornelius Jaenan contends that there are four phases in the history of intercultural relations: the aboriginal period; the French colonial period with interaction between Natives and newcomers; the British colonial period with French-English relations paramount and relations with aboriginal peoples still important; the multiethnic period with all the complexities of group interaction; and the individualistic response in this many-faceted mosaic of this region of the North American continent. There was even diversity amongst our first settlers with the various aboriginal peoples and the duality of the French presence (Acadians and New France). He goes on to describe Canada as a country of 'minorities', where the United Empire Loyalists were joined by Highland Scots and dispossessed Irish. According to Jaenan, teaching about the French Fact and ethnic diversity should take into account the growth in the force of nationalism despite globalization.

Professor Jean Lafontant shares the findings of research that he conducted on the identity of young

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franco-Manitobans. Amongst other things, his study focused on attitudes towards exogamous relationships. Professeur Lafontant affirme que les jeunes Franco-manitobains de langue française sont non seulement bilingue, mais la plupart se déclarent tels (plutôt que seulement francophones). (2) La langue française est perçue comme un héritage familial, un avantage de départ. Cependant, cet avantage est de l'ordre de la performance. (3) La langue française ne porte pas en elle des valeurs culturelles particulières. Elle est un outil de communication. Lafontant points out that young franco-Manitobans do not view themselves as an ethnic minority amongst others.

They are aware of the national status and heritage as transmitted in their family and at school. In the end, however, this advantage permits them to keep all their options open in a society whose mantra is increasingly equality within diversity.

The forthcoming texts raise a number of important issues about Canadian identity and the transformations that we are undergoing as a society. The relationship between Canadian Studies and Canada's diversity is something that we will certainly continue to explore in future editions of the magazine. As always, your input is welcome. ■

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