

otels. (Medgar Evers might have considered Perkins' notions of "redneck bigotry" somewhat dilettantish.) Finally, he obtained a researcher's post at the Federal Office of Aboriginal Affairs, his main power base for the rest of his career. In this role, he publicly castigated members of the Gough Whitlam Cabinet—most notably, his own department's minister at the time, Sen. James Cavanagh. When Perkins' superiors lost patience with his penchant for disappearing from his desk to join anti-white protests on the front lawn of Canberra's Parliament House, they inflicted on him the most severe possible reproof: a year's leave with full pay. Despite his 1974 description of Australia's anti-Labor parties (then in opposition) as pernicious racists, he happily accepted promotion at their hands when they regained government in 1975. His sole punishment for having attributed white-supremacist views to his bosses was to be named assistant secretary of the Aboriginal Affairs Department in 1978. The department's top job came his way five years later, once Labor had returned to power under Prime Minister Bob Hawke.

Perkins' contribution to the national bicentenary celebrations in 1988 consisted of hymns of hatred toward Indo-Chinese refugees from Marxist terror. "We've brought enough of these people from South-East Asia," Perkins proclaimed, to the alarm of Hawke's immigration minister, Gerry Hand, who knew the impossibility of any non-Aboriginal politician's career surviving a similar outburst. Having compounded his Adam Clayton Powell imitation with investment shell games, Perkins found himself compelled to resign—with his entire pension fund intact. Thereafter, he increasingly resembled yesterday's man, insofar as anyone can combine that role with receiving 1993's Aboriginal of the Year award and an honorary doctorate from his *alma mater*. John Howard, whom Perkins called "the worst Prime Minister this country has ever had," declared him a "Living National Treasure."

Perkins' death leaves Aboriginal affairs precisely where he found them—and the statistics are grim. The average life expectancy of full-blooded Aboriginal males remains almost two decades shorter than that of white males (54 years as opposed to 73). The infant-mortality rate is almost three times the corresponding Caucasian figure. Of course, Perkins founded his whole policy on the avoidance of serious issues of Aboriginal

health—especially Aboriginal alcoholic poisoning—in favor of advocating what he learned to call "empowerment." To be fair to Perkins, he could not have done otherwise: Although the Warsaw Pact countries discarded socialism's accoutrements 12 years back, no such purgation ever occurred in Australia. The idea that bureaucratic tyrants have a monopoly not just on virtue, but on competence, could no more be challenged by Charles Perkins (or by those who subsidized him) than polluted water can be questioned by a fish. In allowing the likes of Perkins to dwell in their driveling bliss of nanny-statism ("where," as Kipling once observed, "all men are paid for existing and no man must pay for his sins") white Australia is indeed as morally culpable as Perkins said it was.

*R.J. Stove writes from Sydney.*

## Letter From Canada

*by Neil Cameron*

### Utopia and Dystopia on the Saint Lawrence



A quarter of Canada's 30 million people live in the province of Quebec. About five million are French Canadians, largely descended from hardy Norman peasants who came here 300 years ago. A quarter of the five million want to secede from Canada. A larger (but indeterminate) proportion favor as much autonomy as possible without risking a total break. One of the two main provincial parties, the Parti Québécois (PQ), at least rhetorically favors ultimate "sovereignty" and held unsuccessful referenda to this end in 1980 and 1995. "Sovereignty" is something less than full independence; the latter word evokes much less popular support. Both referenda asked only for a "mandate to negotiate," but they didn't get one. Polls have always indicated a blunter question would fare much worse. Since about 40 percent of the province—including a million English speakers—consistently oppose sovereignty, support is unlikely to rise above 60 percent.

Many opponents of sovereignty have long argued that a real separation would

inevitably lead to partitioning of the province, with Canada retaining several portions, including the huge northern territory and at least part of Montreal. The case was first fully presented in a 1980 book, *Partition: The Price of Quebec Independence*, by Lionel Albert and William Shaw. A 1996 poll by *L'Actualité*, the main Quebec newsmagazine, showed that over half the provincial population—including voters on both sides of the referendum question—thought a postsecession partition would be likely.

The Canadian constitution makes no provision for any kind of secession by vote. Three years ago, a Canadian Supreme Court test of Quebec's referendum law garnered an opinion that a clear majority secessionist vote should launch a negotiation on Quebec's departure, but left the questions of borders open. Federal Liberals have been quoting this ever since. The Conservative Alliance, while advocating decentralization, also endorses the Supreme Court position. Thus, there has been a profound change in both elite and majority Canadian opinion since 1995. Sovereignists have also become fatigued. Lucien Bouchard, the charismatic but cautious PQ premier from 1995 to January of this year, declared that there would not be another referendum until he saw "winning conditions." His successor, Bernard Landry, is more abrasive and fond of fights with Ottawa, but shows no more inclination to enter a losing battle.

For most of Quebec's history, French Canadian nationalism was chiefly a conservative, Catholic, anti-urban movement, quite hostile to radical separatism. The most celebrated nationalist historian, Robert Rumilly, immigrated from France in the 1920's, seeking a blessed island of Latin Catholic Christianity. He lived long enough to see atheistic socialism and capitalist individualism descend on the province and died a bitter man, equally loathing Pierre Trudeau's leftish federalism and the leftish PQ. The left presented itself as the wave of the future from 1965 to 1995 but ultimately alarmed the new francophone business and professional classes as much as it did their cautious elders. The disintegration of the old Union Nationale Party left many conservative nationalists unhappily voting for the long-detested Liberal Rouges. As a UN party leader once remarked, the province is an eternal battleground of Dominicans and Jesuits.

"Partitionists" are also divided, uncertain whether separation is a real possibili-

ty, or, as Albert and Shaw argued, primarily a rhetorical threat serving to maintain a statist elite. The skeptics have a strong case: Two decades of polls, for example, consistently show that over one third of Francophones believe that a “sovereign” Quebec would still be “part of Canada” with almost as many believing it would still send MPs to Ottawa. Sovereignty is not like Irish republicanism, nor is partitionism like the “unionism” of Protestant Ulster. Analogies with the American South of 1860, while also tempting, are equally deceptive.

The border issue is further complicated by the Indians and Eskimos. When the French arrived in the 1600’s, they encountered a substantial settled population of Mohawks and other tribes. The Mohawks have been a terrific headache for “organic” nationalists ever since. They speak both French and English, and drift casually between Quebec, Ontario, and New York. Their ancestors adopted Protestantism because they disliked the strip farms that the Sulpicians vainly tried to impose on them. They also like owning guns.

In 1990, the natives blew up over a golf course they claimed interfered with their traditional land rights, blocking two of Montreal’s main bridges and carrying out a reserve territory occupation by an armed and masked “warrior society.” A raid by the SQ, the notoriously inept provincial police, led to a policeman’s death. Quebec asked the federal government to send in the Canadian Army to restore order, an embarrassing comment on sovereignty pretensions.

Unsympathetic natives also inhabit the Quebec North, ruled by the British from 1713 and never part of New France. It did not even become part of the province with the British conquest of 1760 or confederation in 1867. It was ceded by Canada to the province in 1898 and 1912, when no secessionist movement existed. Its rich hydroelectric resources keep thousands of French-Canadian Hydro-Québec employees there temporarily, but the only permanent residents are a few thousand anti-sovereignist Cree and Eskimos.

The south shore of the St. Lawrence River was never part of New France; it was added to the province by the British. West Quebec, between Ottawa and Montreal, includes land first cultivated by English farmers over two centuries ago. Most of the area now has a francophone majority, but they largely vote

with the English *against* the sovereignists. Montreal, which has hundreds of thousands of English speakers, might also be divided; a former cabinet minister has proposed that Montreal should separate on its own, becoming a sort of Singapore. County-by-county self-determination — “Swiss cheese” partitionism — has also been proposed.

Whatever the details of a negotiated settlement, there is a more fundamental reason that the rest of Canada could scarcely accept the existing provincial boundaries: Unlike the Norway/Sweden or Slovakia/Czech Republic splits, an intact Quebec departure would split the other successor state in two, cutting off four Atlantic provinces from the rest of the country. The St. Lawrence south shore would be the simplest connecting corridor; any other corridor would divide the new independent Quebec.

Even that might prove unacceptable to the rest of Canada. Former Quebec Premier Jacques Parizeau was willing to risk a potentially explosive “unilateral declaration of independence,” but this could result in chaotic consequences, without solving the territorial dispute. A stable agreement would require the new state to sacrifice something of great value to a hostile successor Canada, and territory is just about all it would have to offer. Quebec is now balancing its budget and booming economically but is about \$100 billion in debt and would have to shoulder another \$140 billion of federal debt as well.

While both partitionists and secessionists draw on the Wilsonian doctrine of plebiscitary self-determination, secessionists mean the self-determination of the province as a whole, with guarantees of minority rights. Non-Canadians have sometimes cheered on both positions. Canada has always irritated many Americans and Europeans — “an impossible country,” as one Englishman put it a century ago, “because sentiment is divorced from interest.” Peter Brimelow, an Englishman who left a career in Canadian business journalism to emigrate to the United States, made a stir a few years ago with the funniest and most penetrating of these outsider commentaries, in a book called *The Patriot Game*. His reforming impatience recalled Lord Macaulay, but Canada continued to be resolutely Tory: unworkable in theory, but successful in practice.

Separatist arguments have always been utopian; partitionist ones are a mirror-im-

age dystopian critique. Their real message is that a seceding Quebec could not possibly be created without huge cost. Partition might produce the same unhappy results as those created elsewhere in the world. But separatists maintain that intact departure would cause almost no pain at all. They also insist that the whole debate be conducted with the utmost “serenity.”

Historical amnesia is no worse in Quebec than it has lately been generally, but it led local radicals to underestimate inertia and caution. The great “world-historical” events for Canadians were not the conquest or confederation, but the two World Wars — especially World War I. Canada lost over 60,000 men in World War I; its population was then about one 15th that of the U.S. population. Quebec nationalists opposed conscription in both wars, but 200,000 French Canadians nonetheless volunteered to fight in World War II.

The dominant role of the Roman Catholic Church in French education, which lasted until the 1960’s, left an odd double inheritance. Secularization initially turned the state into a new church. Like the old one, it is more a home of bureaucrats than of firebrands. Quebecers are obsessively devoted to public-opinion polls. While Canadians have participated in many wars, neither the French nor the English have much tradition of insurrection or civil conflict, save a skirmish with British colonial rule in 1837 and an inept venture in Marxist terrorism in Quebec 30 years ago. Even the conquest came out of a battle between armies from overseas. Neither secessionists nor their opponents threaten force of arms.

On the other hand, Canada has a very substantial collective memory of patriotic achievement and sacrifice. Even astute outside observers tend to forget the assumptions they import from their own countries, overemphasizing the central political conflict and underestimating such unifying forces as climate, geography, and shared historical experience. The politics may look Austro-Hungarian, but real life here is Scandinavian. Canada would not want to wage war against a departing Quebec, but it would certainly demand *some* heavy price be paid. Partitionism bells the cat.

*Neil Cameron is a director of the Saint Lawrence Institute in Montreal and a columnist for the Montreal Gazette.*

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# Signs of the Times

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“All the News Unfit to Print”

## The Rockets' Red Glare

While the Bush administration is still in its early days, commentators of repute abroad and at home—never wavering or unsound in the old Cold War days—are complaining (sometimes bitterly) that the new administration's foreign policy defies reason and experience.

Writing in the *Toronto Star* (February 18), Richard Gwyn imagined what would happen if the dictator of “Lower Volta” acquired a nuclear missile by smuggling diamonds, despite the U.N. sanctions imposed because of the ethnic cleansing that brought him to power:

The U.N. is only an irritant . . . Your real object of anger is the United States, which insisted on the sanctions despite Russian and Chinese concerns about state sovereignty. So you set up your missile in the jungle and get your scientists to aim it at Washington. Then you push the button. About 20 minutes later, half of Washington is devastated. About 15 minutes after that, all of Lower Volta, including you, disappears from the map.

Substitute a “rogue state” like North Korea, Libya, Iran, or Iraq, says Gwyn, and you have the entire intellectual and geopolitical justification for the NMD system that President Bush intends to build:

It's absurd. It's laughable. It's surreal. Why would the leader of any of these backward, near-bankrupt, states commit suicide, even if, as is highly improbable, any of them could ever actually lob a missile across the Atlantic or Pacific? Yet Bush and his highly praised cabinet team (they are capable; they are experienced) all take this seriously. The only question about NMD, they insist, is not whether, but when.

“It's not certain that Bush's foreign policy will be less activist than Clinton's,”

Gwyn concludes. “Keep your seat belts buckled.” Robert Fisk agrees. Writing in the London *Independent* (February 18), he compared the recently renewed Anglo-American war against Iraq to “Airstrip One” and its perpetual war with Eastasia:

As in 1984, the characters in 2001 do not change. In 1991, defence secretary Dick Cheney and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell were urging the bombers on to Baghdad with the backing of President George Bush. In 2001, Vice President Dick Cheney and secretary of state Colin Powell are urging the bombers on to Baghdad with the backing of President George Bush Jr. In 1991, the Beast of Baghdad was Saddam Hussein. In 2001, the Beast of Baghdad is Saddam Hussein. And woe betide us if we feel like Winston Smith, eternally feeding old newspaper cuttings into the oven. Bin those clippings about how we ‘defanged’ Saddam in 1991. Forget the UN arms inspectors who would eliminate forever Iraq's ‘weapons of mass destruction’. Make no complaint about the half-million Iraqi children who have died under UN sanctions. Destroy all reference to the New World Order. We are engaging—an Orwellian cracker this, from the Pentagon—in ‘protective retaliation’.

Fisk ends with a note to Winston Smith: Burn at once all references to George Bush, Sr.'s 1991 call to the people of Iraq to overthrow Saddam and his subsequent willingness to let Saddam massacre the lot.

The thinking Tories' in-house rag, the *Salisbury Review*, provides a final thought. Andrew Fear reminds us that the story of the emperor's new clothes warns us that it pays to look beyond the “facts” of the day, as they often prove illusory. Take, for example, NATO, whose *raison d'être* has collapsed:

One solution to this dilemma would have been to hold a celebration party and then to disband the

organisation amid heartening thoughts of a job well done . . . In the event, as we all know, this was not the road chosen . . . A new NATO (a phrase found in NATO publications) was invented. This new NATO has performed an astounding[ly] successful sleight of hand on the general public. While retaining the outward trappings of its predecessor, it has undergone an astonishing transformation to the extent that its underlying thinking is now far more like its old rival, the Warsaw Pact, than that of its previous incarnation . . . NATO has decided to take for itself a global role. Gone are the strict limits on spheres of operation. Gone too is the notion of a defensive alliance as has been seen in the Kosovo debacle.

These changes are sinister enough, Fear admonishes, but beneath them lies an even greater problem. Cold War NATO was an organization dedicated to the preservation of national sovereignty, while the new NATO is deeply hostile to it:

The Cold War was fought to preserve our right to choose our own form of government. NATO was a means to that end, not an end in itself, and that end has been fulfilled . . . [N]ew NATO's globalist aspirations are an aspect of American geopolitics espoused by both right and left in that country . . . Surely now is time to formulate a new defence policy, or rather restate that Britain wishes to have a defence policy—a policy which looks to defend the nation from others and to further the national interest abroad—and not an offense policy whose aim is to attack others who have done us no harm in the interests of a third party.

This salient point is deemed not so much “unfit to print” as unfit even to acknowledge (let alone respond to), by Messrs. Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Armitage, *et al.*