

Becoming Canadian: Further Thoughts

Michiel Horn

In June 1993 I read a paper with the title “Becoming Canadian: A Migrant’s Journey”¹ to the annual meeting of CAANS, held at Carleton University. It did not appear in print, but four years later the University of Toronto Press published *Becoming Canadian: Memoirs of an Invisible Immigrant*, in which I tried to make sense of my personal passage from being Dutch to being Canadian.²

Recently Mary Eggermont-Molenaar suggested to me that some sort of update might be appropriate. The question she posed was something like this: has my assessment of the process of becoming Canadian changed, that is, the process of immigration and the integration and assimilation of immigrants into Canadian life? The topic seemed a bit unusual for a conference on Netherlandic Studies, but what I have to say about Canada may have relevance to the current state of affairs in the Netherlands.

As I thought about Mary’s question, the issue of ethnicity in a country of immigrants inevitably posed itself. What or who is a Canadian?

The simplest answer is that a Canadian is someone who has Canadian citizenship and a Canadian passport. As a legal definition this is fine, but it doesn’t satisfy everybody. The question is complicated by the existence of dual nationality. Either voluntarily or involuntarily, many who acquire Canadian citizenship retain the nationality of their countries of birth (I do) or that of their parents. Some of them live abroad, often in their countries of birth. There are also those who have been born here but have become expatriates, living abroad

¹ Michiel Horn, “Becoming Canadian: A Migrant’s Journey,” unpublished paper, CAANS Conference, Carleton University, Ottawa, June 1993.

² *Becoming Canadian: Memoirs of an Invisible Immigrant* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

for long stretches of time without abandoning their Canadian citizenship. This may expose them to questions about their loyalty to Canada, as Michael Ignatieff learned after he returned from the United States and entered politics. Canada has a populist streak; cosmopolitanism is not everywhere regarded as a positive quality.

At the time of the 2006 Lebanon War a good deal of critical comment focused on people, born in Lebanon and once again living there, who sought the assistance of the Canadian government because they held Canadian passports. Garth Turner, then the Conservative M.P. for Halton, west of Toronto, who seems to have coined the expression “passports of convenience”, asked: “When someone lives here for a few winters and becomes a Canadian citizen for the rest of their lives, do they have rights and privileges that Canadian taxpayers need to fulfill ... or should you have to live in Canada three years out of every ten to maintain your citizenship?”³ Judy Sgro, Liberal M.P. for the Toronto riding of York West and Minister of Immigration from 2003 to 2005, said: “I’ve always questioned dual citizenship – and I’m the former minister.”⁴

According to an article that appeared in *The Economist* in 2006, “a growing number of immigrants choose to keep their former citizenship. Of the 5.5m Canadians born abroad, 560,000 declared in the most recent census that they hold passports from another country. This feeds the belief that some are using Canada as a safety-net.” As the British handover of Hong Kong to China (1997) approached, the article stated, many Hong Kong Chinese emigrated to Canada, gained citizenship after a three-year residency, and then returned. “Today some 200,000 people in Hong Kong hold Canadian citizenship.”⁵

The concern about this issue is, in my view, related to another belief. In some Canadian circles, the assumption seems to be that immigrants (and expatriates?) are not quite the equal of people who were born here and have lived here all their lives. That notion has a long history. The children of immigrants may themselves not like other immigrants. People do not need to have been here long to begin objecting to newcomers, often on the grounds of ethnicity and religion, but also, and not least important, because of the economic competition they represent. Even immigrants from England, who generally integrated very easily into Canadian society, were occasionally subject to this kind of sentiment. According to George Woodcock, “popular resentment

³ “Dual Citizenship Faces Review,” *National Post*, September 21, 2006.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “I’m a Lumberjack, and You’re not,” *The Economist*, August 3, 2006.

against the English (as indeed against immigrants generally) was most acute during periods of economic crisis.”⁶

A concept of a British North American, later a Canadian, type arose from the process of sequential immigration, as well as an attitude of nativism that favoured those who were born here over most immigrants. Let me say at once that in English-speaking Canada the concept and attitude effectively excluded the aboriginals as well as the French-speaking settlers along the St. Lawrence, the original *Canadiens*, and the Acadians in New Brunswick. Central to the nativist image of Canada were two things. One was that Canada was a northern country, home to a hardy people capable of surviving a difficult environment and making the most of it.⁷ The other was that the country was part of the British Empire, and that its inhabitants were and ought to be British. “A British subject I was born – a British subject I will die,” Prime Minister John A. Macdonald stated during the 1891 election campaign⁸ – the words are carved into his gravestone. Until well into the twentieth century most English Canadians would have agreed.

Whether English, Scottish, Welsh or even Irish, members of the founding groups greatly valued their Britishness. The northernmost of these groups, the Scots, arguably had the greatest influence on English Canada. Almost as important to the nativist view was Protestantism, both in its Anglican and its non-conforming manifestations. Scottish Catholics, many of whom settled on the island of Cape Breton, were long marginal to the Canadian self-image. Irish Catholics, who were regarded with condescension, suspicion and even hostility when they arrived in large numbers from the 1820s into the 1850s, accommodated themselves to their new country by asserting their loyalty to the Crown and to British traditions, or were assimilated into the Catholic French-speaking community, or moved on to the United States.

When, late in the nineteenth century, a growing wave of immigration reached Canada from continental Europe, the newcomers were expected to assimilate into British North American society, though there were doubts that all of them were capable of this. The suitability of immigrants was inferred from their origins. Those who came from the “preferred countries” in northwestern Europe (Scandinavia, Germany, the Low Countries, northern France), or from those countries via the United States, were prized; immigrants from southern or eastern Europe not so much. Still, peasants from central and eastern Europe may

⁶ George Woodcock, with Patrick Dunae, “English,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=a1ARTA0002621>.

⁷ Carl Berger, “The True North Strong and Free,” in Peter Russell, ed., *Nationalism in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 3-26.

⁸ James Marsh, “Election 1891: A Question of Loyalty.” <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/featured/election-1891-a-question-of-loyalty>.

have outranked urban slum dwellers from the British Isles. Sir Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior from 1896 to 1905, famously or notoriously said: “I think that a stalwart peasant in a sheepskin coat, born on the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and a half-dozen children, is good quality.”⁹

Not everyone agreed. Many of these immigrants were Slavs, Galicians or Ruthenians, as Ukrainians were called, from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Nativists saw them as being of inferior stock and referred to them as “Bohunks” or “Hunkies”.¹⁰ Southern Europeans were held in no higher regard. Most numerous among them were the Italians, who into the Second World War were not infrequently described as “Dagoes” or “Wops”.

During the two decades ending with the outbreak of war in 1914, immigrants from continental Europe (as well as from Britain and the United States) entered Canada in numbers not seen before or since. One pressing task was to ensure that they were integrated into Canada and, so far as this was deemed possible, became “real” Canadians. The task concerned people like J.S. Woodsworth, a Methodist clergyman and social worker active in Winnipeg before the war (later a prominent socialist politician) and author of *Strangers Within Our Gates* (1909)¹¹, and J.T.M. Anderson, an educator in Saskatchewan (and Conservative premier of the province from 1929 to 1934). In 1918 Anderson published *The Education of the New Canadian*¹², a project that was identified in the book’s subtitle as “Canada’s greatest educational problem.” Only the public schools could Canadianize the children of the newcomers, he asserted, the adults being too much set in their ways to become genuinely Canadian.

To Anderson, language was the key to educating young people in Canadian ways. They had to learn to speak English and be grounded in “British virtues” such as honesty, sobriety, industry, perseverance, and loyalty to the Crown. The working assumptions were, first, that, like the English language, these virtues were part of being Canadian, and, second, that newcomers did not

⁹ <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/legacy/chap-2a.asp>.

¹⁰ The term seems to have been derived from Bohemians, inhabitants of what is now the Czech Republic, and Hungarians, who before the 1914-18 war were often not differentiated from Slovaks and Ruthenians, peoples within the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. But someone who taught in Saskatchewan during the 1930s once informed me: “Your Bohunk is your foreigner in general.” He then amended this by saying that the Dutch, although foreigners, were not Bohunks: “You are blond and blue-eyed [sic!].”

¹¹ J.S. Woodsworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates, or, Coming Canadians* (Toronto: Stephenson, 1909).

¹² J.T.M. Anderson, *The Education of the New-Canadian: A Treatise on Canada’s Greatest Educational Problem* (Toronto and London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1918).

already possess them, or at least not in sufficient measure, and therefore had to acquire them, a process in which the public schools would play a central role.

The Great War, as it came to be called, raised questions about the loyalty of recent immigrants from Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, some thousands of whom were interned. Renewed immigration from central, eastern and southern Europe in the 1920s, promoted by the railways, caused a backlash evident both in the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in Saskatchewan and in an anti-immigration campaign spearheaded by the Rt. Rev. George Exton Lloyd, Anglican bishop of Rupert's Land. Lloyd's open letter to Canada's newspapers, written in 1928 and attacking immigration from the "non-preferred countries", appeared in the Toronto *Globe* under the heading: "White Australia, Mongrel Canada?"¹³

Nativism loomed large in the free-speech controversy that agitated Torontonians from 1929 to 1931, as the Toronto Police Commission sought to ban public meetings in Queen's Park because they were believed to provide a platform from which Communist agitators could challenge British values.¹⁴ A parallel attempt to ban public meetings at which languages other than English were spoken had anti-Semitic overtones, since the language specifically objected to was Yiddish. Nativist and anti-Semitic sentiment also led the government to limit the number of Jewish refugees from the Soviet Union in the 1920s, on the grounds that they were not farmers. At the same time, however, the government also restricted the admission of German-speaking Mennonite refugees from the USSR, even though they *were* farmers.¹⁵ The restrictive policy sharpened in the 1930s, when immigration was severely limited on economic grounds, and Jewish refugees from Nazism had great difficulty getting into Canada.¹⁶

If central, eastern and southern Europeans aroused negative feelings, these were mild compared with the attitudes displayed towards Asians. The Chinese workers who arrived in their thousands in the early 1880s to construct the British Columbia segments of the Canadian Pacific Railway, were despised and discriminated against until the Chinese Immigration (Exclusion) Act of 1923 effectively ended immigration from China for almost thirty years. Immigrants from Japan and South Asia, who began arriving in the 1890s, were also despised and, like the Chinese, were in no way regarded as potentially Canadian, although

¹³ *The Globe*, April 8, 1928.

¹⁴ Michiel Horn, "Keeping Canada 'Canadian': Anti-Communism and Canadianism in Toronto, 1928-29," *Canada: An Historical Magazine* 3 (September 1975): 34-48.

¹⁵ Gerald E. Dirks, *Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism* (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977), 39-40.

¹⁶ Irving M. Abella and Harold Troper, *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1982).

they were permitted to serve in the Canadian Expeditionary Force during the Great War. They remained outsiders for decades, and during the Second World War settlers of Japanese stock fell victim to one of the greatest human-rights abuses in Canadian history, as they were removed from the West Coast and interned in camps in British Columbia's interior.¹⁷

How long did the idea survive that the ideal Canadian, or at least English Canadian, was British? Certainly into the 1950s, although this may have differed from place to place. In Victoria, B.C., where my parents settled in 1952, a Canadian was white, spoke English without a perceptible foreign accent, and sang "O Canada" and "God Save the Queen" with equal conviction. There were few children of continental European background in the two schools I attended, and virtually none born outside Canada other than Britain and the United States. There *were* several children of Chinese and South Asian background, but although they spoke flawless English – they were the grand-children or great-grand-children of immigrants – they were mostly called Chinese or Sikh rather than Canadian.

Was it otherwise elsewhere in the country? It must have been in places like Toronto, Winnipeg, or Edmonton, home to more non-British immigrants than Victoria was at that time. But shifts in opinion may not have been obvious. About twenty years ago, when I was doing research in the McGill University Archives for the book I was preparing on the history of academic freedom in Canada, I came across a letter that gave me pause and some amusement. In 1952, the same year my family went ashore in Victoria, one Louis Kon wrote to McGill's Principal F. Cyril James that, ever since his arrival in Canada in 1908, he had been seeking "not a geographical but a fully rounded definition of a Canadian, but in vain. In my early Canadian days I was told that to be a true Canadian one must have a blue serge suit, a pair of brogues, and learn to sing *Britannia Rules the Waves*; to own a [building] lot ..., preferably a corner one, build on it not a home but a house to be sold quickly at a good profit, and never to forget that a white man speaks the English language."¹⁸ Although Kon surely had his tongue at least halfway in cheek, he may nevertheless have been serious in asking James whether he could supply a better definition.

Cyril James did not reply, but his career validated to a considerable extent what Kon had written. Born in England, he had gone to the United States for his graduate studies and had stayed to teach at the University of

¹⁷ For a comprehensive study of the treatment of people of Chinese and Japanese origin in Canada, see: Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy towards Orientals in British Columbia*, 3rd edition (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

¹⁸ McGill University Archives, RG 2, Principal's Office, c.149, file 5086, Louis Kon to F. Cyril James, January 30, 1952.

Pennsylvania's Wharton School. McGill had recruited him in the spring of 1939 to be director of the School of Commerce. When Principal Lewis Douglas, an American, resigned that summer because he believed that, with war approaching, McGill would be better served by having a Briton at its head, James's English background and British citizenship facilitated his appointment to succeed Douglas.¹⁹

A passage from John Marlyn's novel *Under the Ribs of Death* (1957) comes to mind. Born in Hungary in 1912, Marlyn came to Canada as an infant and grew up in Winnipeg, as does the novel's protagonist, Sandor Hunyadi. At one point he says to his father: "Pa, the only people who count are the English. Their fathers got all the best jobs. They're the only ones nobody ever calls foreigners. Nobody ever makes fun of their names or calls them 'bologny-eaters' or laughs at the way they dress or talk. Nobody," he concluded bitterly, "'cause when you're English it's the same as bein' Canadian."²⁰ (English in this context equates with British, the confusion being a common one.) Sandor changes his name to Alex Hunter. (Cyril James obviously did not need to change *his* name.)

The action of *Under the Ribs of Death* takes place in the inter-war years. Sandor's remark was ceasing to be relevant in large parts of Canada at the time of the novel's publication. It was still relevant in Victoria, however, described with some hyperbole as "a little bit of olde England." I remember the enormous commotion that centered on the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on June 2, 1953, and the comment made by my Central Junior High School home-room teacher, Sybil Reay. We should hope and pray, she said, that this was the only coronation we would witness in our lifetimes, because that would mean Queen Elizabeth would have a very long reign indeed. Although I thought that was a bit unfair to us children, it did not occur to me to suggest that she might retire at an appropriate age, as Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands had done in 1948. As a recently-confirmed Anglican I knew that, being the anointed head of the Church of England, the British monarch has to die in the job. (In the Netherlands we had been nominally Lutheran, but the small Lutheran congregation in Victoria was mostly of German origin. Our parents wanted no part of that and joined the Anglican Church instead: English and highly respectable.)

Another sign that the old order had not yet died manifested itself in 1956. When Britain, France, and Israel attacked Egypt in late October, in the wake of Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal, the government led by Louis St Laurent soon expressed disapproval of the action and worked with the United

¹⁹ Stanley Frost, *The Man in the Ivory Tower: F. Cyril James of McGill* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 56-9.

²⁰ John Marlyn, *Under the Ribs of Death* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1957), 18.

States to bring peace to the region.²¹ In Victoria, and not there alone, the failure of the Canadian government to side with Britain prompted criticism. It probably contributed to the loss of the federal constituency, held by the Liberals since a 1937 by-election, to the Progressive Conservatives in the 1957 general election.

And yet, “the times they were a-changin’,” even in Victoria. They certainly were in the Toronto I came to for graduate studies in 1963. A key reason was the massive post-war wave of immigrants from Europe, many of whom settled in the Ontario capital. Neither in number nor in proportion was this inflow as great as the immigration during the fifteen years leading to the First World War, but, coming on top of that earlier wave, the postwar arrivals soon made their influence felt. Another key reason was that a sizable proportion of this group consisted of professionals, managers, intellectuals, and artists, who had a higher level of education than was the case with the earlier inflow, many of whom were farmers and labourers, and who settled disproportionately in cities like Toronto.

The 1960s were a crucial decade in altering the way Canadians saw themselves, although the origins of change were present well before then. Pride in Canadian accomplishments during the Second World War, closer relations with the United States at the expense of those with Great Britain, prompting the pursuit of a different policy from Britain during the Suez Crisis, the increasing self-confidence of the post-war immigrants to Canada, and changing attitudes that made racism and hostility to immigrants less respectable: all of these played a role. The Canada described and analyzed by John Porter in his book *The Vertical Mosaic* had already been overtaken by changing reality when it was published in 1965.²² Immigrants and the children of immigrants were increasingly penetrating into the upper ranks of business, the professions, and academe. A country whose elites had been dominated by people (overwhelmingly men) of British stock was undergoing major change.

One key event had taken place in 1957, when Douglas Jung, running as a Progressive Conservative, won the seat of Vancouver Centre in the House of Commons. People of Chinese origin had gained the franchise only in 1947! That same year the grade eleven students of Victoria High School chose Howard Lim to be student council president for 1957-58, something that would have been unthinkable even a decade earlier.

No event was more important, however, than Quebec’s so-called Quiet Revolution, initiated by the 1960 defeat of the Union nationale by a provincial Liberal party committed to reform. English Canadians, most of whom had

²¹ See: John Melady, *Pearson’s Prize: Canada and the Suez Crisis* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2006).

²² John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965).

habitually ignored Quebec and its concerns (except when wartime conscription was the issue), became aware that some of Quebec's reformers were sovereigntists or separatists, committed to a radical change in the relations between their province and the rest of Canada, as a means of improving the social and economic status of the Québécois.

This threat prompted a good deal of anguished debate, while it alerted English Canadians to the fact that, whether they liked it or not (and some disliked it a lot), there were at least two main ways of being Canadian. It led the government of Lester B. Pearson, which entered office in Ottawa in 1963, to appoint the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. It was active for the remainder of the decade. Although it primarily addressed the cultural dualism of Canada, it also examined the role and contribution of ethnic groups other than those of British and French stock. Among the outcomes were the Official Languages Act of 1969 and the announcement of the implementation of a policy of "Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework" in 1971. Multiculturalism received recognition in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, adopted in 1982, and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988, the initiative of a Progressive Conservative government led by Brian Mulroney. The pluriform nature of Canada thereby gained official recognition.

Multiculturalism in Canada reflected the new reality: except in those areas of the country where few or no non-white immigrants have settled, the traditional Canadian type is all but dead, even if he died reluctantly. An example: my colleague Gail Cuthbert Brandt, who grew up in Ingersoll in southwestern Ontario, once told me of the prejudice that existed against Dutch Calvinist farmers in her area fifty years ago. They were resented for starting their own schools, which made the public schools less viable, and for making a success of farms that up to that point had often been marginal. This was not held to their credit, Gail reported. Instead it was seen by the older British farmers as the result of an unseemly commitment to labour. "White people can't work that hard," was the spiteful comment.

I suspect that such attitudes have now disappeared or at least gone underground. It is no longer possible to equate the Canadian with the British (or French) type without revealing oneself to be a racist. English is the dominant language in most of Canada, but it is spoken with many accents, and many continue to speak the first language they learned, which is now much more likely to be Chinese, Punjabi or Tagalog than any European language. The 2001 and 2006 censuses revealed that Canada was becoming more multilingual, and it seems likely that the 2011 census will further confirm this trend.

Canadians reported more than 100 languages in completing the 2001 census question on mother tongue. The list includes languages long associated with

immigration to Canada: German, Italian, Ukrainian, Dutch, Polish, and so on. However, between 1996 and 2001, language groups from Asia and the Middle East again recorded the largest gains. These language groups include Chinese, Punjabi, Arabic, Urdu, Tagalog and Tamil. But there are also many others ... In 2001, almost 5,335,000 individuals, about one out of every six people, were allophones, that is, they reported having a mother tongue other than English or French. This was an increase of 12.5% from 1996, three times the growth rate of 4.0% for the population as a whole.²³

The 2006 census revealed that the allophone population of Canada had risen to 20 percent of the total.²⁴

What does this say about the Canadian identity and about the process of becoming Canadian? It means that things are in flux. Some find this fluidity disconcerting, others welcome it. Anglo-Canadians know and mostly accept that if they or the country are still in some sense British, it is so mainly in a symbolic sense, with the monarchy as a charming atavism. Our parliamentary system is British in origin, of course, as is our legal system and (unfortunately) our electoral system. Perhaps we can say the country is post-British.

In any case, there is no complete agreement about what Canada has become and is becoming, or, *pace* my colleague Jack Granatstein,²⁵ about what it means to be Canadian. Beyond the legal simple legal definition cited at the top of this article, it really is impossible to be precise. Perhaps a Canadian is simply anyone who identifies her- or himself as such.

Millions now lack any strong connection with or even knowledge of Canada's British (or French) past and can hardly be expected to understand its relevance, even if they dimly recognize its role in keeping Canada out of the United States. Yet their offspring will identify themselves as Canadian. They just won't all do it in the same way. There have always been different ways of being Canadian; recently the definitions have been expanding.

Is this a good thing? More than a decade before the 2006 Lebanon crisis, the Trinidad-born writer Neil Bissoondath created a stir with his attack on multiculturalism, which, he claimed, led some immigrants to treat Canada "as they would a public washroom – that is, as merely a place to run to in an emergency ..." The policy, he added, encouraged immigrants to treat Canada in this way because, in his words, "it emphasizes the importance of holding on to

²³ <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/analytic/companion/lang/canada.cfm>.

²⁴ <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/rt-td/lng-eng.cfm>.

²⁵ J.L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1996).

the former homeland with its insistence that *There* is more important than *Here* ...²⁶

Bissoondath's commitment to the idea of unhyphenated Canadianism reflects a wish to be treated as a citizen of the country he calls home and a conviction that national loyalties should not be divided. But for those born abroad, how can they not be? Look into your hearts, you who were born abroad, and tell me you have no love for or lingering sense of loyalty to your country of birth.

The policy of multiculturalism recognizes that this is a country of immigrants in which immigrants have often been less than welcome, especially if they failed to conform closely to the "preferred" northern and western European type. It attempts, not always successfully, to assure recent arrivals that they are welcome without having to forget where they came from. Criticism of the policy seems to have abated recently, though it would be wrong to assume from this that nativism and racism are completely dead. And the search for a Canadian identity will probably continue, even though I think it is evident that there are many such identities.

And what about the issues of dual citizenship and the divided allegiance it implied that agitated some of our legislators five years ago? It has abated. *The Economist* noted in 2006 that dealing with the issue of dual citizenship was likely to prove problematic:

Unless he handles his review carefully, [Prime Minister] Harper risks alienating actual and potential immigrants. Those already in Canada are concentrated in big cities, where his Conservatives fared poorly in January's general election. Mr Harper wants their votes to turn his minority government into a majority one. Potential immigrants are being wooed to ease growing labour shortages, particularly in the west. That is one reason why Canada admits around 240,000 immigrants a year, most of whom eventually become citizens. Would the highly skilled come if it meant severing their connections to home?²⁷

The issue remained in the news for a while. After the 2008 federal election, then Liberal leader Stéphane Dion said he would renounce the French citizenship he held through his mother after his loyalty was questioned by Prime

²⁶ Neil Bissoondath, "A Question of Belonging," *The Globe and Mail*, January 28, 1993. His book *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada* appeared in 1994; a revised edition was published by Penguin in 2002.

²⁷ "I'm a Lumberjack, and You're not," *The Economist*, August 3, 2006.

Minister Stephen Harper and NDP Member of Parliament Pat Martin.²⁸ When Dion vacated the leadership soon afterwards, his loyalty ceased to be an issue.

An Ipsos-Reid poll taken in June 2007 suggested that almost 40 percent of Canadians opposed dual citizenship. In the 18-34 group the percentage dropped to 25, suggesting that there is growing tolerance of the phenomenon.²⁹ A government review of the issue, undertaken after the 2006 crisis in Lebanon, led to legislation, passed by Parliament in the spring of 2009, that dealt with the rights of Canadian citizens abroad to pass their citizenship on to children. It did nothing about the rights of Canadians living abroad – recently described by one writer as something to be treated as “a national treasure”³⁰ – or about the right to hold another citizenship enjoyed by Canadians living here.

Undoubtedly the government was wise not to act on these matters. The federal Conservative Party decided between 2006 and 2011 that it was politically more promising to court ethnic groups than to question their allegiance to Canada when they retained links to their countries of origin. There were no further suggestions that members of ethnic groups, whether in possession of one citizenship or two, were somehow less Canadian than others. It is possible that some members of the party felt uncomfortable with the relentless pursuit of the so-called “ethnic vote” that was spearheaded by Jason Kenney. Even if they did, however, they must nevertheless feel gratified by its results in the 2011 election, when a number of seats in the Greater Toronto area in which fairly recent immigrants are numerous passed into Conservative hands.

Finally, it is surely a reason to feel gratified that even the relatively high unemployment of the last few years has not prompted the formation of a political vehicle designed to exploit the distress and uncertainty that unemployment has created by blaming it on immigration. There has been some concern about the potential inroads of Islamic radicalism, especially among the young, epitomized by the conspiracy to commit violence for which 18 Toronto area youths were arrested on June 3, 2006. But the response has, on the whole, been measured and sensible.

Here the contrast with the Netherlands is startling. Just last week I read the historian Tony Judt’s last book, a insightful collection of short essays with the title *The Memory Chalet*, and came across this sentence: “In France and the Netherlands, artificially stimulated ‘national debates’ on identity are a flimsy

²⁸ Juliet O’Neill, “Dual Citizenship Review Worries Some MP’s,” *CanWest News Service*, December 22, 2006. <http://www2.canada.com/shareit/soundoff/story.html?id=a36d3a50-4889-4516-acb9-8ddc0db00b1f>.

²⁹ “Nearly 40 per cent of Canadians against dual citizenship: poll,” *CBC News Canada*, June 30, 2007. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2007/06/30/citizenship-poll.html>.

³⁰ Jennifer Welsh, “Our Overlooked Diaspora,” *Literary Review of Canada*, March 2011.

cover for political exploitation of anti-immigrant sentiment – and a blatant ploy to deflect economic anxiety onto minority targets.”³¹ The reference is to an anti-immigrant hostility that has prompted the creation of political parties which appeal to anti-immigrant and especially anti-Muslim sentiment. Immigration from Turkey and Morocco has met with considerable opposition in parts of the Netherlands. Since 2004 it has provided the soil in which Geert Wilders’s PVV (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*: ‘Party for Freedom’) has taken root and flourished. I am not qualified to offer a full assessment of the PVV, but I am appalled that some 16 percent of Netherlanders voted in 2010 for an openly racist political party whose platform and policy seem calculated to complicate rather than facilitate the integration of immigrants in general, and Muslims in particular, into Dutch society.

What should worry us is the increasing marginalization of some groups, the poor, the un- and under-employed, and above all the young and unemployed, whether they live in Canada, the Netherlands, or any other country. In these categories, it seems, immigrants are over-represented. Too often they have become *les exclus*, the excluded, people who feel they do not belong. Their talents may well be wasted, and the young among them may be particularly prone to anti-social behaviour, ranging from hooliganism all the way to terrorist actions. Is it too much to say that being (or becoming) Canadian (or Dutch) means, among other things, being able to do useful and rewarding things? If so, then too many people are on the outside, looking in.

Finally, to return to Mary’s question: yes, my views have changed somewhat. For example, fifteen years ago I did not clearly recognize the change in Canadians’ self image that resulted from the Quiet Revolution in Quebec. And with the passage of additional time it seems clearer to me that immigration and immigrants are generally seen in a more positive light in Canada than they were, say, 50 years ago, to say nothing of 80 or 100 years ago. I find this encouraging, and I hope that other peoples, including Netherlanders, may learn from it.³²

³¹ Tony Judt, *The Memory Chalet* (New York: Penguin, 2010), 201.

³² This is a revised and expanded version of a paper presented to the annual meeting of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Netherlandic Studies, Fredericton, N.B., May 28, 2011.