FOREIGN POLICY AND CANADIAN NATIONALISM

A. R. M. LOWER

OUT of the welter of discussion in respect to the nature of Canada's international position, a certain clarity is at last beginning to emerge: we are rapidly passing through that period of adolescence in which a country, like a youth, has very cloudy ideas as to its own essential nature, and while we have not yet attained any marked degree of self-knowledge, we have at least arrived at certain broad generalizations. Most thoughtful people will probably agree that in respect to conduct of our own political affairs, if not in respect to our cultural life, we have got beyond the stage of colonialism; that is, we have taken our fate into our own hands, and do not look for our decisions to be made for us beyond our own borders. The implications of our geographical position are also gradually becoming clear. A writer in this periodical can take the view that a foreign policy for us is, like a professional career to a young lady of means, an agreeable adventure, not a necessity; in other words, that we are remote from danger, and need have no particular concern as to how things go in the outer world. Our comfortable state of geographical security has existed for some time, but it is just being realized.

We have not got very far beyond these primary facts. We are an insular people, and do not know very much of the great world. We have only recently established our own diplomatic service, and its rudimentary state is sufficient evidence of our paucity of interest in all but a few very obvious regions. We have belonged to the League of Nations since its beginning, but we are not very sure why we belong. Being a people steeped in the morality of good behaviour, we have been inclined to think of the League as a giant "up-lift" society, and have supported it because it has been a good cause. Remote from the realities which gave it birth, during the entire period of our membership we have developed no positive policy in respect to it or indeed in respect to our place in the world, save the rather nebulous assumption that as a matter of course we are on the side of right.

Our relationships with the outside world, save in such aspects as the above, have continued in the realm of tradition: we grew up in the Empire, we have taken the Empire as a matter of course, and our present thinking is still largely confined within that frame-

work. So near to a child is he still, that the youth, Canada, has hardly yet worn out his first pair of long pants.

This pleasant period of life will pass, is passing. Presently we shall have to face reality. But what is reality?

That the country has an option as to whether it shall have a foreign policy or not, implies, it seems to me, some misconception of reality. Two peaceful neighbours need have no written code of behaviour *vis-a-vis* each other, but they must have some sort of relationship, if it is only one in which each agrees to ignore the other. Such mutual exclusiveness will be suddenly ended if, for example, the dog belonging to one of them walks across the lawn belonging to the other. Relationships of some sort with the rest of the world we must have, and the mode of conducting these relationships constitutes our foreign policy.

So far, Canadians who think about these things have hardly got beyond discussing great general ideas. This discussion, however, has elucidated the basic principles of our association with other countries. Canadian opinion seems to be falling into three schools of thought. One of these believes that tradition is good enough, that we can drift along as we have been drifting and leave our foreign relations to the mother country. A variant of this school of opinion would associate us more closely with England and the Empire, and seek to work out a rounded Imperial Foreign Policy, the expression of a cohesive Empire, a British *bloc*.

The second school of thought clings to the League of Nations as the hope of the future. It is apprehensive of war in the near future, sees clearly enough that war would be the end of the Empire as it exists to-day, and possibly the end of western civilization. It believes that Canada cannot keep out of the coming war, and that the international organization of mankind, together with its correlative, the abrogation of national sovereignty, is the only way to prevent war. Hence it is ready to cast in its lot with the generality of humanity as represented by Geneva, giving up to some sort of international body control of such things as materials likely to be used as munitions of war, vacant lands, immigration and so on. It would, if carried to its logical end, make Canada into a kind of province of a world-wide state.

The third view may be described as nationalist. Those who hold it believe that nationalism for Canada means something very different from the fervent lunacies of the Europeans; they believe that for Canada it marks simply the emergence of a new social group, a new community come to self-knowledge and self-consciousness. They cannot see that it carries any suggestion of

hostility to others, any more than the attainment of his majority does for the individual. Looking over the Dominion for some strong social cement, this group perceives racial differences, linguistic differences, religious differences, cultural differences so wide as to produce cultural—and even social—anarchy. No new community can be reared on a basis of language, culture, religion or race, heretofore the bed rock of societies everywhere. What social dynamic is there, then, powerful enough to weld our heterogeneous masses together? There seems to be no other than nationalism, that is, a common fate and a common concern for it, a common citizenship, a common love for the common land. If this country is to be welded together, if it is ever to be more than a string of provinces, more than a collection of English, French and "Bohunks," ever to be a homogeneous community, then the only solvent strong enough to resolve these things must be a national spirit.

The nationalists go further: a true nation cannot be content with a partial life, having control over one aspect of its affairs and not over another. Canada is in some respects in this latter position. It has not yet taken into its own hands power to amend its own constitution, or to decide once and for all its law-suits. In particular, on this all important question of war and peace, it may be committed by decisions made elsewhere. It may be committed because it is a member of the League of Nations and of the British Empire. As a member of the League, it could be projected into at least passive beligerency, conceivably (if it were true to its engagements) against even its own mother-country. Few Canadians will worry about this latter contingency, and but few more will worry about the danger of our having to take part in League wars. League wars will probably be waged, if waged, at a safe distance from Canadian shores; and as Canadian enthusiasm is not likely to mount very high over a piece of mechanism, which is what the League is at present, there will be little likelihood of Canadians doing anything very active in a war to enforce the law. An occasional police expedition might occur, but that would be neither here nor there.

The commitment represented by membership in the Empire is much more serious. There is scarcely a stirring of humanity anywhere which does not impinge upon the Empire in some way or another. The Empire as a whole is in every possible relationship with every possible state. Opportunities for friction are endless. It is often said that the Empire is a power for peace; but we ought to be frank enough to face the unpleasant fact that it is so because, by fair means or foul, it has acquired such a huge proportion of

the world's wealth that there is little left for it to desire. The Empire has only recently begun to stand for peace, and it might have a relapse.

There is one partner in the Empire which of all others is likely to get into trouble, Great Britain. She is too close to Europe to keep out of Europe's quarrels, and she has world-wide interests which she has not shown much hesitation about protecting. The interests of the white Dominions do not extend far beyond their own territory; at least their interests of that type which gets a country into trouble, territorial interests; but those of Britain are everywhere. An Italian nationalistic movement makes trouble in Malta; a native tribe goes on the war path in Burmah: in both cases, widely separated, Britain is involved. This huge vulnerable rag-bag of possessions is no longer the matter for simple pride that it once was. It has been very profitable, but it is now becoming dangerous, both to its possessor and to the peace of the world.

Canadians of British descent now, thanks to the immigration policy of the last generation, unhappily a bare majority of Canadians, are attached rather to the mother country than to the Empire, and with the commendable loyalty of children to their parent, many of them are ready to accept unreservedly all the chances of the family connection. They take the attitude of the dog in the story, who when his master was sold out of his old home was asked by him if he would go on with him to another and unknown one. "Oh, yes, I'll go," said the dog. The French Canadian on the other hand is more like the cat of the same man. "Will there be a nice fire there and food?" asked the cat before consenting to go. That is, French Canadian attachment to the Empire is not, and cannot be expected to be, a disinterested attachment. It is a sincere attachment, but it is so because the French Canadian thinks he can see value for him in the Empire.

There is a third group, growing large nowadays, which has the attachment neither of self-interest nor of sentiment, the so-called "New Canadians". To many a Slav on the western prairie, King George must be as obscure a figure as the Shah of Persia. To such a one the British North America Act holds out no special privilege. He is uprooted, traditionless, local. If he is ever to enter our communal life—and he is entering it—it is scarcely conceivable that he will come into the old Imperial tradition. He will be a Canadian.

Now can these three groups be confined within the simple old Imperial faith? What would happen to this incipient Canadian nation if another war such as the last should occur? Is it not

reasonable to assume that the stresses and strains which were so painfully evident over the conscription issue, and whose evil heritage is still with us, would be reproduced on a larger scale? In 1914, this country was just like an unthinking schoolboy; it heard the call of the blood, and off its young men rushed, most of them knowing little and caring less about the real issues at stake. There was a great deal of talk about Prussianism and fighting for democracy and for stricken Belgium, but anyone who looks back to his own war experience knows very well that he did not enlist on matters of high principle so much as on an emotional impulse. The point is that it is very unlikely that the country will ever be in such an unanimous and chivalric state of mind on any future occasion. After all, we must have learned something from the Great War. The majority of those of us who fought—a not inconsiderable body—sum up their experiences in two words, "Never again". Most of the rest of us know that another crusade of the same sort would at least bankrupt the country, and those who think about the situation very acutely are aware that the racial factors just outlined would complete the damage. There would not be an unanimous response; there would be racial friction; those of British descent would be the first to go, they would be decimated as they were before, those of them who came back would find their places in many cases taken by the non-Anglo-Saxon, and the result of the whole affair would be racial division, internal dissension and in the western provinces at least the eclipse of the people of British descent. A Communist said to the writer not long ago that he had not much hope of revolution as long as we were at peace; but with another upset of the magnitude of the last it was incredible to him that revolution would not occur. He would, of course, at once set to work to capitalize on all the types of dissension just referred to.

The chance of making a strong and homogeneous community out of our present heterogeneous elements would thus probably be thrown away if we were induced to go into another war waged in a distant theatre, a war in which our own immediate interests were not at stake. The nationalist here points out that it is practically impossible for our own immediate interests to be at stake in a war not on this North American continent, for the simple reason that we have no immediate interests outside this continent. We have our overseas trade, but we would not be sufficiently foolish to fight a war because some nation or other refused to trade with us. Apart from trade, from our sentimental connection with the people of Great Britain, and from the persons of a few citizens

living abroad, we have nothing beyond the seas that would involve us in a quarrel with anyone. We are a peaceful nation, wanting no one else's territory (the great cause of war), and having no reason for not living on good terms with everyone. Why then should we ever again take a chance on dealing a suicidal blow to ourselves by taking part in some quarrel in which we had no concern?

Again, there is no possibility of any foreigner in the wickedness of his heart doing any harm to us. On both coasts we have thousands of miles of water, the best defence against invasion that can be conceived of, and even with the possibilities of the aeroplane reckoned in, a sufficient defence against any aggression from overseas except a mere raid. With the United States, we enjoy on this North American continent a private world of our own. We are not part of Europe, and European turmoil need not reach out and embrace us unless we deliberately go out to embrace it. No foeman will appear for us to drive back from our soil (though if he did, there is no reason to think that any one of the different elements would hang back when the matter was the defence of their own land); any war in which we engage will be one we enter of ourselves, not because our hand has been forced by local circumstances. For as long a period as can be reasonably foreseen, this country can have peace if it wants it.

The nationalist thus can see no good reasons for associating this country with other countries which are likely to get it into trouble, but many good reasons for attempting to keep his country out of trouble which does not concern it. He sees that in so far as the physical factors of geography and circumstances go, it is absurdly easy to keep this country out of such trouble, and he sees no sufficient reason for not taking advantage of the favorable position with which nature has endowed us. He is, however, not blind to the fact that irrationalism is stronger than rationalism, and that matters of peace and war have to do primarily with the emotions. He recognizes quite frankly that the sentimental attachment of the people of British descent to the motherland is so strong as very likely to sweep this country in the future as in the past into a war which does not concern it. He believes such a thing would probably destroy this country as we know it. Recognizing that whether we like it or not, we are living in Canada and not elsewhere, and that we and our descendants are likely to go on living in this particular geographical area, he believes that the only thing to do is for the citizens of what after all seems to be a going concern of some permanence, the Dominion of Canada, to give to that concern, which happens to be their own country,

their undivided loyalty. Regretfully he admits that this may mean, if another cataclysm should occur, that they will have to withdraw that part of their loyalty which has hitherto been concentrated across the sea and bring it home, leaving there only the affectionate sentiments of a child who has moved out of the parental house into his own, some distance away.

The nationalist hopes the day of sharp decision may never need to come. It is possible that peace may be maintained for a long while. Still, he has not much faith in a Europe which fights the same battles over again century after century, and never seems able to solve its own problems. He is willing to give what incidental aid he can to help such a continent to drag itself out of the mire, but it is apparent to him that Canada is too far away, too unconcerned with the issues, to do much more than give good will. In other words, the Canadian nationalist values the concept implied in the League of Nations as an instrument for keeping the world's powder magazine—Europe—from exploding, but he has not too much faith in its ability to do so, or in the likelihood of its success in looking after the affairs of other continents. In particular, he is not anxious to have the same sets of people, those in control of the League, who seem so unable to resolve their own affairs, given any commission for resolving his.

The nationalist school of Canadian foreign policy thus takes an independent and to many people an unpopular attitude. It bases itself squarely on the necessity of creating a strong and reasonably homogeneous social group within the territory at present known as the Dominion of Canada, in other words of completing the process begun in 1867. It believes that the process can be completed only if there is an assurance of a long peaceful period for different elements to settle down together. It looks on a war in which this country is only indirectly interested, that is, any war not an actual invasion of Canadian territory, as one of the most powerful deterrents to this process of fusion, and one likely to end the present experiment. It refuses to believe that any of the people living within this territory can have a duty superior to the duty owed to this community, whether it be to the land of their ancestors or to their race. It believes that room can be found in Canada for much variety of race, creed and tongue, but that these things must be kept in their place, that the future can have no room for a Canadian who, let us say, considers himself primarily a Frenchman or, similarly, one who considers himself a British subject before a Canadian citizen.

Holding these views about the necessity of completing the social process, how can the nationalist in foreign policy do anything else than attempt to keep his skirts clear of the entanglements of the outer world? That is his foreign policy—quietly minding his own business, conscious that he has and need have no quarrel with anyone, giving this tender young plant, the Canadian nation, a chance to grow. That is the sort of foreign policy, albeit a negative and a sober foreign policy, that this country needs. It is a foreign policy which in defining our relationships with the outside world expects our citizens to conduct themselves, not as people of British descent or internationalists or French Canadians or free-traders or protectionists or provincials, but as Canadians.