

Democracy and Quebec

Big guy slugs little guy? "Unfair!" is the universal cry. Yet, in a simple democracy, when the majority squishes the minority, we somehow deem it fair.

Fine. But that gives zero protection to the 49% left behind. So various sorts of constitutional democracy such as we find in Canada, the U.S.A., Germany, and elsewhere, were designed to provide equal legal protection of rights and property for all the people. But such guarantees obviously mean nothing without the primal constitutional integrity of the federation itself. Who else would protect minorities such as the 3.4 million Canadian citizens nearly abandoned to Quebec had the Yes vote won?

Hopefully, we have learned that if our primal national commitments are forgotten, or simply undefended by the people and their leaders, then in an ironic flip, the majority becomes exposed to a reverse tyranny - of the minority! Little guy slugs big guy. And a nasty little guy, to boot, willing to lie and cheat.

Democracy falls victim to this process of self-immolation whenever its fetishistic affection for simple democracy permits majorities in a part, to be used against the constitutional democracy of the whole people, giving rise - as the Cree and Inuit have demonstrated with forceful timing - to a never-ending sequence of democratically-justified divisions and territorial claims.

What our leaders must therefore enunciate, is the reality Abraham Lincoln taught America at the end of sword and musket: that there is a fundamental conflict between simple democratic theory, and the theory of democratic federation. Once states are constituted by or agree to join a federation, they effectively surrender their sovereignty to the larger whole; a sovereignty that can only be transferred back to them by agreement of the whole (or taken back unilaterally, by revolution). Democratic methods, when used by a part as a political weapon to dismember the democratic whole, must be declared illegitimate

In the run-up to Quebec's sculduggerous, Maybe Referendum (maybe separation, maybe sovereignty-association, maybe partnership, maybe Canadian dollars, maybe passports, maybe M.P.s, and so on), millions of Canadians gave passionate voice to their rising feelings of anger at the betrayal of our federation.

Stompin' Tom Connors put it best in the Toronto Star, when he said it was a cryin' shame "that a handful of Canadians is allowed to decide the fate of Canada." I submit that no single Canadian leader or politician has put the case more forcefully than Tom. It was indeed a handful (barely 10% of the eligible voters of Canada). And this minority (a quarter of whom actually believed they could separate from Canada and still send us Members of Parliament!) was truly

being allowed to hold a referendum (on a shamelessly deceitful question) by cowardly, spineless politicians and courts, and a feckless media frightened to stand up for the integrity of this great nation.

But the name of the game has changed drastically. Millions of sleepwalking Canadians got a hair-raising referendum jolt they will not soon forget. As a result, we have a new class of radicals in Canada. They are called citizens. Citizens refreshingly surprised and moved by their own patriotism. So my guess is that it's game over for simple democratic separatism.

Any separation of any parts of Canada in the future will have to be constitutional, arranged by the people as a whole. All we need is a little more confidence in our founding principles - and Stompin' Tom for Prime Minister.

Meanwhile, Canada remains an irony inside a conundrum. For two generations, the rest of Canada has swallowed the multicultural myth and cheerfully forgotten its history and traditions in the name of pan-liberal diversity and pluralism. As a result, as Sheila Finestone, Minister of Multiculturalism, has proudly reminded us: "Canada has no culture."

But Quebec, while always accepting the multicult publicly, fought it privately every step of the way, struggling fanatically to preserve every scrap of French identity, singing songs of blood and soil, even unto punishing merchants for daring to print English letters larger than French ones on commercial signs.

So, in a delicious irony, the "ethnics" Parizeau thinks sunk his leaky ship (though it was really his own Francophones who failed him), these very same ethnics who have in fact partaken in the dilution of the English culture of the Rest of Canada, have ended up saving Canada - simply because it was too weak to save itself!

Now this is a welcome, but quite insufficient broth to nourish us. If Canada feels any will to survive as a civic state (as opposes to a religious, cultural, or ethnic state), it had better start expressing this will.

We need a declaration from the Prime Minister and all Premiers, on the first civic law of all: that Canada is a duly constituted federation with a duty to protect all the people. Any change in our democratic rights, or Canada's duties, can only be with the express sanction of all the people. Any province wishing to separate must seek secession only under the laws of Canada, based on a provincial special majority of at least two-thirds, on a clear and unambiguous question, followed by approval of terms by the same two-thirds of all the people of Canada.

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