

Happy Birthday, Canada

As we observe the 148th anniversary of Confederation, there are a few facts civic-minded Canadians should remember.

However humdrum it may seem at times, this system has served us well and there have been fewer than 100 deaths in that time from political disputes, an astonishingly peaceable history. No countries with a population the size of Canada's have more durable political institutions except the United Kingdom and the United States. In my lifetime, and although I was born in the last year of the Second World War I am not ancient, France has had five different systems including foreign military occupation and a government in exile that regained the country with the allied armies. Germany has had four systems, moving vertiginously upwards in quality of government from the Third Reich.

Most people remember the Soviet Union and many remember pre-Communist China, colonial India, the Palestine Mandate, the Iron Curtain satellites and Franco's Spain, Salazar's Portugal, Tito's Yugoslavia, Peron's Argentina, the Shah of Iran, Sukarno's Indonesia and the era when most of the world's present countries were part of European empires. These recollections take us less than half-way backwards into the history of Confederation, which began when the leaders of the British and American governments were the Earl of Derby and President Andrew Johnson, Napoleon III was the French emperor, Germany and Italy had not been united as countries and Japan was a pre-Meiji hermit kingdom.

Obviously, only our more eccentric or historically preoccupied countrymen would shuffle through these remembrances on July 1, but the point is that we have the only trans-continental, officially bicultural, parliamentary confederation in the history of the world, and it works, though neither it nor anything else works perfectly. The fact that it was created at

all was very fortuitous. From the end of the War of 1812 for 50 years to the end of the U.S. Civil War, while the United States wrestled with the slavery problem that was only finally resolved in a horrible war in which 750,000 people died in a population smaller than Canada's is today, Canada had gradually to wrinkle its autonomy and self-government from the British without so rankling them that they ceased to protect Canada from the Americans. Without that umbrella of protection, the United States would have swallowed Canada whole; we could not have cobbled together an effective defence against Grant and Sherman's immense and battle-hardened Grand Army of the Republic in 1865, as we did in 1775 and 1776 and in 1812 to 1815. The British, who had not always appreciated their possession of Canada, had come to recognize it as an imperial asset, and as the Civil War ended, were asserting strong pressure on the Canadians to compose their provincial and Anglo-French differences and cohere in some sort of entity as the only way to avoid absorption into the emerging American Great Power.

John A. Macdonald, George- (his French Canadian parents named him after King George III) Etienne Cartier, George Brown and others recognized that a country could only be made of Canada if there was a double majority among both English- and French-speaking Canadians on major issues. It was initially a union of four provinces, three with large French or English minorities, (only Nova Scotia was almost uniformly English speaking). It was an equal union of two peoples, not an unequal union of only four provinces, and it has been the cross-threading between the need for general support from both cultures with requirements for the support of qualified majorities or even of all provinces that has caused much of the friction in this country since. If there were to be only an English party and a French party, with the English party periodically imposing its majority on important issues, the country would break up. Wilfrid Laurier and Mackenzie King narrowly avoided unbearable strains in the country during the

conscription debates in both World Wars. (This is why their Liberal party governed for 51 of the 63 years between the elections of 1921 and 1984.) The collapsed Quebec birthrate and the assimilation of most immigrants to the English-speaking majority in Canada and North America have increased the imbalance between the English- and French-speaking populations of Canada, but have not deprived French Canadians of their right to be treated as a founding people.

With regret I respond, briefly, to the urgings of many readers who have asked me to return to the vexed subject of the treatment of the native peoples. In general, that treatment has been shabby, though increasingly well-intentioned and well-funded. There is much to apologize for and I believe in the value of confession, repentance and trying to make amends. But conditions are aggravated and not ameliorated by exaggeration and by putting on the airs, on behalf of Canada, of a criminal nationality that has been guilty of crimes against humanity.

I cannot allow to pass without comment the accusation against me by the former head of the Canadian Jewish Congress, Bernie Farber, of a "dastardly minimizing of Canada's genocidal history." While he cites his own tragic family history in the attempted extermination of European Jewry by the Nazis and their collaborators, I do not believe anyone ever has or could question my credentials as a philosemite, and Farber's acute awareness of what a real genocide is makes more odious and irresponsible his assimilation of murdering six-million Jews (and six-million non-Jews) in death camps with the tawdry, often shameful and inexcusable, treatment of the native people of Canada by the French and British colonists and frequently by Canada as an autonomous country. The distinction between satanic crime and reprehensible misgovernment must not be blurred, and the failure to make that distinction assassinates historic truth, trivializes the Nazi Holocaust and mass murders of non-Jews, mortally abuses the language, all Western

languages, and wilfully assaults the moral basis from which Canada must address and do justice to the profound problem of the native people. The massacre inventors are just as odious as the Holocaust deniers.

I have been defamed by more substantial figures than Bernie Farber (and there are few people I would rather share that distinction with than Jeffrey Simpson, as in this case). But in his mindless zeal, Farber dishonours the Jews and the Canadians, and does no favours for the native people. All Canadians have a right to be in Canada. North America's original inhabitants (that is, when the Europeans arrived in the 15th century and afterwards) did not own or occupy this continent; their population was too sparse for that and they had no right to object to the arrival of the Europeans, though they certainly have every right to object to much that has happened since.

What is distressing is the ant-like inroads made on the national consciousness by what is an undisguised effort by Farber, and only a thinly disguised attempt by more substantial commentators, to place this country squarely in the same moral position as Nazi Germany, a country that premeditatedly murdered 12-million innocent people, and unleashed war on almost all of Europe and northeast Africa in which more than 25-million citizens of other countries died violently, and which led to the occupation of every square millimetre of Germany by powers it has attacked. Those powers, after reasonable due process, sentenced the surviving German leaders to death or lengthy imprisonment, in reasonable compliance with international law. I am skeptical of the practice of trying former enemies and disapprove of the death penalty, but the post-war trials of Nazi leaders were serious attempts to provide due process for the surviving authors of the greatest crimes in history. The comparison of Goering, Kaltenbrunner, later Eichmann and other Nazi criminals (most of the prominent leaders committed suicide before they could

be tried and executed), with John A. Macdonald, is unspeakable.

I have written here before of Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin's propagation of the fraudulent notion of "cultural genocide" and her false claim that Japanese Canadians were confined to "concentration camps" during the Second World War. Outrageous though the matters referred to were, the imposition of the terminology of the Third Reich from so exalted an official is scandalous, and was of a piece with a systematic moral debunking of this country. In the same speech, last month, she said "slavery was not absent from" Canada. It almost was, and the choice of words was misleading. The largest concentration of slaves was by the native people, as many as a third of the northwest Pacific tribes were slaves. New France had about 4,000 slaves at its end and Upper Canada, when set up, a few hundred. Their numbers dwindled and all were emancipated in 1834 when slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire. In the meantime, Quebec Governor Guy Carleton had refused to give back 3,000 slaves to George Washington at the end of the Revolutionary War, and the Underground Railway admitted approximately 40,000 fugitive American slaves to their freedom in Canada, and many U.S. anti-slavery leaders lived at times in Canada, including John Brown, Josiah Henson (Harriet Beecher Stowe's original Uncle Tom) and Harriet Tubman (who regarded herself as a Canadian). On balance, Canada's record in these matters, though not perfect, was very creditable.

Canada is fundamentally a comparatively liberal state and almost always has been, since it became a chiefly European and especially English country. Let no faults be hidden or unrepented, and there were many, but anyone who implicitly assimilates Canada's leadership as an autonomous jurisdiction to the world's genocidists and champions of slavery traduces and defames this country and all of its occupants, including the native people. No great weight attaches to the frothings

of Bernie Farber, especially on Confederation Day, but the chief justice should fire her speech writer and be more judicious.

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