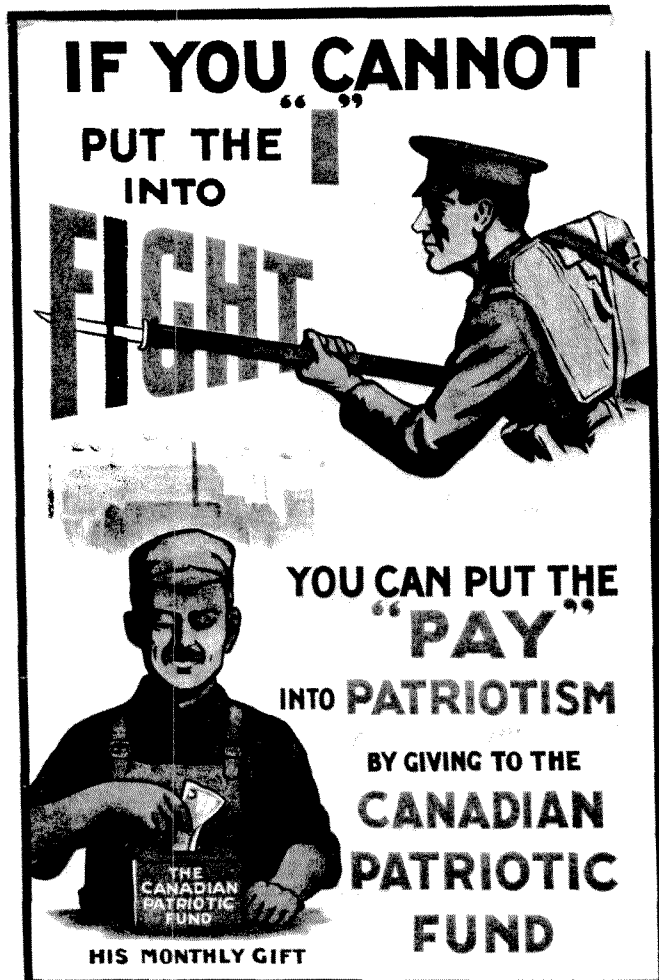


"Patriotism, Eh?"

The Canadian Version

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Poster created circa 1915 by Howell Lith. Co., Ltd., Hamilton, Canada. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, WWI Posters [LC-USZC4-12709].

It's 8:15 A.M. on a typical day at Anyschool in Canada. Adolescents are charging down hallways, slamming locker doors, and tripping over one another and any unwary supervising teacher, trying to make it through the classroom door before the playing of the Canadian national anthem. Most will manage it; some are stranded in mid-flight. A teacher might have to remind them to "stand at attention." Instead, they remain still-ish (just like their swifter friends in the classroom), looking unhappy, staring vacantly until their purgatory ends after this single demonstration of national respect demanded of students. There is no Pledge of Allegiance, no hand on the heart, not even a working knowledge of the words to the anthem.

Many students, however, could quote verbatim the Molson Canadian beer commercial from April 2000:

I have a Prime Minister, not a President; I speak English and French, not American; and I pronounce it "about," not "a boot." . . . I can proudly sew my country's flag on my backpack. I believe in peacekeeping, not policing; diversity, not assimilation; and that the beaver is a truly proud and noble animal. . . . My name is Joe! And I am Canadian! Thank you.¹

Here we have it: patriotism, Canadian style, apparently composed of vague anti-American pride in our presumed

peacefulness, our diversity, and the lowly beaver. And courtesy, too, represents a proud Canadian value: The "oath" ends by thanking the listeners. This bland self-identification with qualities perceived to be less abrasive or aggressive than those defining the American character, voiced more politely than pronouncements of American patriotism—available for mass comparison on television or in film—is what most Canadians would define as Canadian "nationalism," the closest thing we have to "patriotism."

What are the roots of this seemingly pale thing we might call Canadian Patriotism, and how has the formal school curriculum intersected with popular notions of what it is to be a patriotic citizen? One of Canada's best-known philosophers, John Ralston Saul,² argues that Canada's contribution to the world has been to build a new type of quiet nationalism, characterized most fundamentally by the tradition of compromise between our three founding peoples: French, English, and First Nations.³ And it is no coincidence that Saul is the husband of the woman who has just retired from the office of governor general, a quintessentially Canadian political institution. Adding to its heterogeneous mixture, Canada has welcomed a larger percentage of immigrants compared with its population base than has any Western nation over the past century, Saul asserts, including the United States. The concepts and proclivities underpinning this tradition of compromise—self-effacement, careful and endless debate on a shifting agenda of priorities, the notion of "limited identities" to describe the range of competing factors (regional, linguistic, racial, and ethnocultural among others) in every Canadian's sense of self—all of these are incompatible with strident patriotic fervor. In fact, patriotism is actively feared as having the potential to undo this frail consensus.

Through the school curriculum, particularly in the prescriptions for history and social studies, objectives for citizenship training in this country have privileged understanding through debate rather than patriotism. Both curricular and school authorities have consistently taken the position that, while loyalty is good, patriotism is to be approached with caution. In recounting the Canadian government's efforts to whip the nation into unified support for the First World War, the authors of one leading textbook for eighth graders note that, although English Canadian supporters of the draft eventually triumphed, "the price of victory was steep. . . . It was Quebec against the rest of Canada. The bitterness lasted for years to come."⁴

Patriotism and Canada's Three Cultures

Canada is a tricultural and, since 1971, an officially bilingual nation. The often-uneasy relationship between French and English Canadians has been a feature of our national life from the 1840s, when the infamous Durham Report suggested that the greatest kindness to French Canadians would be to gradually eliminate their language and culture. No matter what Lord Durham thought was best for the colony, one can only marvel at the resilience and vigor of French Canadian life, whether in the "home province" of Quebec or in one of the many minority francophone communities across Canada. French Canadians are here to stay, but their interests have been pitted against the English majority views on many occasions. The two rebellions in western Canada (in 1869 and 1885) both had a strong subtext of French Canadian dissatisfaction, as did the major eastern Canadian rebellion in Lower Canada (Quebec) in 1837; the threat of the draft almost split the nation in two during both World Wars, as noted above; and the rise of modern Quebec separatism remains a persistent worry for most Canadians. The "French Canadian fact," as it is delicately termed in many school curricula, has forced Canadians to emphasize the need to protect unity rather than patriotism while respecting customs and traditions that arise from this linguistic community. For a province like Alberta, this takes the form of requiring students to respect the franco-Albertan community, along with Ukrainian Canadians and First Nations groups, and to accept that "some people prefer to live in or belong to a special community so they can keep their customs and traditions."⁵ Few Canadians feel that the luxury of patriotic fervor is possible or wise in the face of French Canadians' needs and aspirations to protect their language and culture.

One essential element of the Canadian style of patriotism derives from our British forebears. From the earliest Canadian-produced history readers dating from the 1860s, Canadian children learned about their political, economic, and moral indebtedness to Mother Britain. Canadians waited until 1982 to produce a formal constitution under the Canada Act, and our ties to Britain have been cemented through a political system closely modeled on the British, a judicial and education system with strong echoes of British values, and large-scale British immigration. Public values rooted in respect for reserve, fair play, and hard work remain closely linked in popular perceptions to our heritage in the British Empire.

In the early twentieth century, Canadian schoolchildren were challenged, as one textbook of 1910 put it, to civilize "a vast solitude of uncultivated plains, unbroken forests, and lonely mountains" by using these same British values.⁶ Today, curricular guidelines phrase objectives in environmental terms: Responsible citizens must "promote diversity and . . . not compromise the natural world for any species in the future."⁷ As the challenge has been framed in school materials, then, the demands of taming Canada's vast geography while acting respectfully toward the environment and remaining mindful of British values of fair play have remained in the forefront of educators' concerns. And yet, even here, one does not find a patriotic impulse to that duty. Issues associated with the immensity of the land, the husbanding of resources, and the protection of border and region have traditionally portrayed Canada as the junior partner, first to Britain, then to the United States—a willing partner, to be sure, but in deference to those with access to more resources, larger populations, and greater appetites. National patriotism seems unnecessary if one already finds inclusion in the family of a respected imperial power, whether British or American.

The influence of the third major component of Canadian culture, Canada's First Nations, in producing a muted sense of patriotism most likely derives from the early and sustained economic partnerships that the English and the French each developed separately with the aboriginal peoples through the fur trade. There is no doubt that occasional flashes of violence erupted in this relationship. Instances such as the Battle of Long Sault in 1660, in which Dollard Des Ormeaux and his sixteen companions were overcome by Iroquois, continue to live in French Canadian annals and in history textbooks read by generations of Canadian children. Aboriginal and Métis peoples' resistance to the fledgling Canadian government's "manifest destiny" over western Canada, in addition to starvation and disease, resulted in the North-West Rebellion in 1885 in what is now Saskatchewan. Nevertheless, examples of violent resistance are relatively rare beyond the eighteenth century, as the fur trade provided the underpinning for western development through the patronage of the Hudson Bay Company for the British and the North-West Company for the Scots and French. The First Nations and Métis peoples were *commercial* allies, providing a practical reason to resolve any disputes peacefully. This tradition was further reinforced by the establishment in the late nineteenth century of the North-West Mounted Police (now the Royal Canadian Mounted Police), a force that

Canadian children are taught continues to work closely in dispute resolution all through Western and Northern Canada.

The evocation of partnership with First Nations peoples is, of course, belied by the appalling poverty and distress of many native communities in Canada. Yet the official curriculum—however that might be subverted in practice—underscores the unity of purpose. The Northwest Territories curriculum, for example, asserts that "whatever one might desire for the future of the territories, it is a fact that we—easterners and westerners; Dene, Métis, Inuit, and non-Natives—live together now, sharing our lives in a single, vast political jurisdiction."⁸

Patriotism and Peacekeeping

The Canadian tradition of peacekeeping probably developed naturally from such initiatives in the 1870s as the creation of the North-West Mounted Police to remove rum-runners from the West and to make the area compatible to settlement. Clearly, it was also reinforced during the Cold War by the establishment of the United Nations, an institution to which Canadians and especially the Canadian education establishment gave strong support. Doubtless, the widespread enthusiasm for the United Nations—characterized by student UN assemblies held from the 1950s across Canada and overt support through curriculum documents—was partly due to the UN Charter's provision for maintaining international peace through the use of collective security forces. This approach was developed as a reasonable way to ensure that the horrors associated with World War II would never again occur. It was a Canadian, Lester Pearson, who successfully organized a UN peacekeeping force during the Suez Crisis, an accomplishment duly recognized by the international community through the Nobel Peace Prize in 1956 and celebrated in virtually every Canadian history textbook since. Whatever the cause, Canadian schools and institutions have seen Canadians as peacekeepers since that time at least and have immortalized this image through texts, popular films, and commemorative statues.

Patriotic Aberrations

This is not to say that Canada has never experimented with patriotic values or excess. It has done so fairly often and, predictably, in xenophobic

ways that have excluded many and privileged the usual few. As elsewhere, Canadian patriotism has been most evident during periods of national crisis when Canadians' safety or that of the nation-state has been thought to be endangered. The Chinese during the building of the transcontinental railway in the 1880s, German and Italian Canadians during World War I, Ukrainian and Japanese Canadians during World War II, French Canadian nationalists during the FLQ terrorism of the late 1960s, and the invocation of the War Measures Act in 1970—all suffered the loss of civil liberties, of the presumption of innocence, or of the right to earn a fair living wage. Clearly, Canadians can make no claims to treat minority interests more fairly than is done elsewhere.

Patriotism, Canadian Style

Counterpoised to the occasional political aim of invoking patriotism has been the official position of the education establishment (which, however, has not been immune to the xenophobic assumptions of any given era): suspicion toward the extremes of propaganda. One persistent dispute in eastern Canada involved cadet training in the schools from the 1890s to the end of World War I. By 1923, the National Council of Education worried that high school history could become a means to promote patriotism. It argued that "history should not be prostituted to the service of propaganda."⁹ The concern was that combining historical and civics education in the same curriculum would increase the propagandistic potential of history and social studies courses to an unacceptable level.

Rather than promoting explicit patriotism, Canadian curricula have typically celebrated our pride in democratic institutions; the 1952 curriculum guidelines for history in Canada's largest province, Ontario, called on students to develop such vague qualities as "tolerance, respect and good will;"¹⁰ the current civics guidelines call on young people to become "informed," "purposeful," and "active" citizens, by, for example, demonstrating "an understanding of the various ways in which decisions are made and conflicts resolved in matters of civic importance."¹¹ One cannot be certain about the meaning of such statements; they are surely a long way from overt patriotism, however.

It is an open question as to how persuasive this educational discourse of "peace and good government" rather than spirited patriotism is to the

general public. However, there is some evidence that it reflects general Canadian norms. During the winter of 2004, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation—which provides a national radio and television service to all parts of Canada—ran one of the "Greatest Canadian" contests, modeled on the British contest that had resulted in Churchill's being proclaimed as the "Greatest Briton." Whom did Canadians choose as their "Greatest," casting 1.2 million votes for the winner? A Churchillian political master, perhaps, like Pierre Elliott Trudeau or Lester Pearson, holding the country together during times of strife? A famous hockey player, or even a hockey commentator? A scientist? All of these, and others as well, were nominated and promoted with an embarrassing level of hype. But no, we chose a mousy, slight man with wispy hair and a sharp, reedy voice, a former Baptist minister, premier of Saskatchewan, leader of Canada's left-wing New Democratic Party. Best known these days as Kiefer Sutherland's grandpa, Tommy Douglas was hailed as the best this country has ever produced because he introduced the first universal medicare program in the West, setting the stage for this unique Canadian national health plan. This is the type of person who most captures the Canadian imagination and symbolizes our pride: the little guy from Saskatchewan who ensured that everyone would have the right to health care. If contests to discover the greatest Canadian reveal something of the national psyche, then perhaps we can also find here the national aspirations of Canadians: a tradition of populism that encompasses environmentalism and peaceful dispute resolution; health care for everyone; public life grounded in an ethic of fairness, honesty, and plain hard work rather than glitz and glitter. Maybe that is the true definition of patriotism, Canadian style.