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The Elephant and the Mouse: Canada & the United States



John F. Myers and Mary H. Myers

For many Americans, Canada is not a very interesting country. We may link Canada with some familiar signposts -- the Mounties, the Eskimos, the Quebec separatist movement, the Trudeaus, the 1985 Toronto Blue Jays. We probably look upon Canada as some vague place to the north of us, cold and snowy, the source of the Montreal Express that makes our winters bitter, but a place that is basically like our own in most other regards, and so not worthy of *much* regard. Sondra Gotlieb, the wife of the present Canadian ambassador to the United States, has said that "for some reason, a glaze passes over people's faces when you say 'Canada.'" Canada and Canadian concerns have rarely had any priority for the American people or the American government.

On the other hand, Canadians are necessarily familiar with things American, due chiefly to the influence of the mass media. Proximity helps account for familiarity: eighty percent of Canada's citizens live within a hundred miles of the U.S. border. Great numbers of Canadians vacation in the United States, especially the vacation spots of Florida, Old Orchard Beach and Cape Cod. The desire for economic betterment has caused thousands of Canadians to emigrate to the United States, especially in the period from the 1850s through the 1920s. Many Canadian workers belong to American unions and many work for American multinational companies. Paralleling the familiarity that the Canadian people have with the United States is the high priority that the Canadian government has traditionally placed upon Canada's relationship with the United States. Former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau used the analogy of an elephant and a mouse in describing the two countries. While the United States does not have to be overly concerned about the mouse, Canada, as Trudeau stressed, must, "no matter how friendly and even-tempered the beast, be affected by every twitch and grunt."

Throughout their history, Canadians have been constantly aware of the Republic to the South. In 1775 the American Revolution spilled over into Canada as the Americans seized Montreal and tried to capture Quebec City. During the War of 1812 Canada received the brunt of American hostility toward Britain, being invaded by the United States at various points along the border, particularly along the New York State frontier. Although successful in repelling the Americans, Canada became very sensitive to her own weakness as contrasted to the growing power of the United States. Other threats of invasion came after the two 1837 rebellions in Canada. Frustrated reformers broke into armed revolt in both Upper and Lower Canada, now Quebec and Ontario. "Freedom fighters" and adventurers from around the world, especially from the United States, wished to help rebel Canadians cast off the yoke of imperial Britain. At about this time, the Maine-New Brunswick border erupted in a mostly verbal clash over the boundary line. Troops and funds were raised. No actual invasion resulted from either of these two incidents. However, certain border areas of Canada still bristle with fortifications of the pre-1860 era, built to protect Canada from the United States.

Another potential military threat to Canada from the United States arose during the Civil War. Because of official British sympathy for the Confederacy, rumors of invasion ran wild along the border in 1864. The only actual invasion, however, was made by Confederate agents who invaded and looted St. Albans, Vermont, crossing into the U.S. from Quebec -- the "St. Albans Raid." When the Confederacy was defeated, the Canadians feared that the victorious Northern armies would march north into Canada. Such a fear proved groundless, because the Northern armies were disbanded as speedily as possible. However, many veterans of Irish origin did

become Fenians, a group dedicated to Irish independence from Britain. The Fenians attacked Canada in dozens of generally unsuccessful raids along the border from Maine to Michigan. The Fenian raids were important in convincing hitherto sceptical Canadians that the only hope of protection from invasion was a strong, united Canada. Nevertheless, after this era, Canadian fear of military invasion from the United States generally ceased. And as the dangers of military incursion waned, economic and cultural encroachment from the United States increased.

Much Canadian-American interaction in the last decades of the nineteenth century was economically motivated. Canada wished for a treaty allowing a free flow of goods, like the Treaty of 1854, which the United States had abrogated in 1866. All Canadian governments were unsuccessful in their efforts to achieve such a treaty. Consequently, Canada became protectionist and raised her own tariff walls. This reaction on the part of Canada led those American businesses which wished to break into the Canadian domestic market to make a run around the tariff walls by establishing branch plants in Canada. This infusion of United States industry into Canada at the beginning of the twentieth century continued until by the 1960s the Canadian people became greatly alarmed by the degree of foreign ownership of Canadian industry. The official Canadian response was to attempt some buy-backs through the Canadian Development Corporation and to screen future foreign development by establishing the Foreign Investment Review Agency (F.I.R.A.). Neither of these bodies has ever been exactly draconian in its actions. Yet the United States industrial interests were mightily offended by whatever weak efforts the Canadians mounted, Congress even threatening economic retaliation. The present Conservative government of Mulroney opposes these earlier policies and is encour-

aging the United States to invest more in Canada.

Cultural matters have been another area of concern to Canadians as they view their relationship with the United States. American movies, radio and television have had great influence on the Canadians. In the 1950s an extensive self-study of Canadian culture was undertaken with the intention of correcting the poverty of Canadian cultural identity. This study, the Massey Report, provided for monies to be funneled into higher education, the arts and music. Nevertheless, Canadians continue to favor Hollywood. Efforts have been made in the past twenty years to establish quotas requiring that a certain percentage of Canadian-produced radio, TV and movies be distributed in Canada.

The personalities of government leaders have been very important in U.S.-Canadian relations. Sometimes the leaders have liked each other; sometimes not. When the first Canadian Prime Minister, Sir John A. MacDonald, made his first official trip to Washington in 1870, the U.S. government did not bother to send a representative to meet him at the train station. This rude reception seemed to set an unofficial precedent for the low esteem in which many U.S. heads of state would hold Canadian leaders.

Teddy Roosevelt typified such treatment during the Alaskan Boundary Dispute, which arose in 1898 after the discovery of gold in the Klondike. Motivated by its desire to control access from the Pacific to the gold-fields, the Canadian government re-examined the Anglo-Russian Treaty of 1825, which specified the boundary between Alaska and Canada. The United States had inherited the Russian rights under the treaty when it purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867 and, although the boundary had never been accurately surveyed, for 73 years Canada had been effectively barred access to the sea. Throughout the controversy Roosevelt never hesitated to insist in public that the United States would get what it

wanted. According to historian Henry Adams, "When Canada raises a bristle, Theodore Roosevelt roars like a Texas steer and romps around the ring screaming for instant war and ordering a million men to arms." After the first effort at compromise failed, Prime Minister Sir Wilfred Laurier told the Canadian Governor General (the head of State representing the British monarch), "I like the Americans. But I would like them more if they were not so intensely selfish and grasping." The Alaska Tribunal decided in favor of the United States on most of the critical issues. After bullying his way to success in the boundary matter, which served to embitter



William Lyon Mackenzie



John George Diefenbaker

Laurier against the United States, Roosevelt became more admiring of Canada, its government and its potential.

Roosevelt's successor, William Howard Taft, was the first U.S. President to rent vacation property in Canada, in Murray Bay, Quebec. Taft was also the first President to accept the long-sought Canadian goal of free trade with the United States. Taft met with the Canadian Governor General, Earl Grey, and the Canadian Finance minister, and left them the following stirring message:

I am profoundly convinced that these two countries, touching each other for more than three thousand miles, have common interests in trade and require special arrangements in legislation and administra-

tion which are not involved in the relations of the United States with nations beyond the seas. We may have not always recognized that in the past, but that must be our viewpoint in the future. Say that for me to the people of Canada, with all the earnestness and sincerity of my heart.

The new Speaker of the House, James Beauchamp Clark, inadvertently almost killed the new reciprocity treaty when he announced in the U. S. House, "I am for it (the treaty) because I hope to see the day when the American flag will float over every square foot of the British North

American possessions clear to the North Pole!" Clark was nicknamed "Champ" in the United States, but was called "Chump" in Canada after his speech. Although a favorable vote followed in the U.S. Congress, the Canadian public was understandably frightened with the implications of such rhetoric.

Taft tried to undo the adverse impact that Clark's speech had on Canadians by stating that "no thought of future political annexation or union was in the minds of the negotiators on either side. Canada is now and will remain a political unit." Later Taft, in a speech to newspaper editors in New York, labelled talk of annexation "bosh," and added that "Canada is a great strong youth, anxious to test his muscles, rejoicing in the race he is ready to run." Although the United States continued to declare that annexation of Canada was not in its mind, Canada was seriously concerned. Sensitive to the theme of the Clark speech, Laurier was placed on the defensive in his own country. In the parliamentary elections of 1911, Robert Borden, leader of the Conservatives, warned Canadians "to cast a soberly considered and serious vote for the preservation of our heritage, for the maintenance of our commercial and political freedom, for the permanence of Canada as an autonomous nation of the British Empire." Fear of the United States was a major factor contri-

buting to the defeat of the seemingly strong Liberals and the hoped-for goal of free trade with the United States.

The new Prime Minister, Robert Borden, worked to reaffirm Canadian good will with the United States in spite of the negative Canadian sentiment signified by the election. Borden served as Prime Minister for much of the second decade of the twentieth century, which included four years of World War I. He had to battle President Woodrow Wilson into allowing Canada to be admitted as a participant in the peace treaty after the war. Borden found Wilson "very tiresome" and "obstinate as a mule." The British had to remind the United States that Canada, with only ten percent of the United States' population, had lost more men in combat than had the United States. In arguing for Canada's well-earned right to be part of the peace treaty process, Borden wrote that "the people of Canada will not tamely submit to a dictator which declares that Liberia or Cuba, Panama or Hejaz, Haiti or Ecuador must have a higher place." Borden did prevail, and Canada became an independent signatory to the peace treaty and also played a part in the formulation of the League of Nations.

One of the most interesting relationships in the years since Confederation was the friendship between Franklin D. Roosevelt and William Lyon Mackenzie King in the ten years, 1935-1945, that they were leaders of their respective countries. Their only common bond was their association with Harvard, which FDR had attended as an undergraduate, and King as a doctoral student. Although not at Harvard at the same time, they still felt an affinity as college buddies. Furthermore, Roosevelt had a warm feeling toward Canada from his many years vacationing on Campobello Island, off the coast of Maine in New Brunswick. King, as his diary attests, felt comfortable with FDR. FDR made more official visits to Canada than any other President, while King became a virtual lodger in the White House. During this period, relations between the United States and Canada matured into respectful sophistication, due in large part to the necessities of World War II. Much of our present-day economic and military interdependence resulted from agreements between FDR and King reached at Ogdensburg, New York, in 1940 and at Hyde Park, New York, in 1941. The meetings were informal and without advisors. The Hyde Park agreement bore no official



Lester Bowles Pearson

Probably the lowest point in U.S.-Canadian relations came during the short time John F. Kennedy was President and John Diefenbaker was Prime Minister.

signatures, only a "Done by Mackenzie and FDR on a grand Sunday in April."

All did not always proceed so cordially, however. Probably the lowest point in U.S.-Canadian relations came during the short time John F. Kennedy was President and John Diefenbaker was Prime Minister. The American leader was bright, young, sophisticated, self-assured, while the Canadian was rural, evangelical and unsure. Diefenbaker was a spellbinding orator, the champion of the little man, the great raconteur, and the outstanding parliamentarian. But suddenly it was Kennedy who was galvanizing the world, and Diefenbaker was jealous.

The two men managed to irritate each other almost constantly. Diefenbaker was

offended by Kennedy in countless ways, usually over trivial issues such as a new painting of the War of 1812 in the White House, which offended the Prime Minister because it reminded him of the war in which the United States had invaded Canada. Kennedy publicly needled Diefenbaker. He criticized his French, deliberately mispronounced his name, and even belittled Diefenbaker's skill as an angler, which was the most hurtful jab of all, Diefenbaker being very proud of his fishing talents. He later referred to Kennedy as "that boastful son of a bitch." On one of his several trips to Ottawa, Kennedy lost a one-page document entitled "What We Want from Ottawa Trip." Diefenbaker found it and kept it, calling it "abrasive."

Diefenbaker refused to involve Canada in the Organization of American States (OAS), which Canada still has not joined. Neither would he join the nuclear camp, except for peaceful applications of nuclear power. The last straw for Diefenbaker was Kennedy's friendship with Lester B. Pearson, the Leader of the Opposition. Diefenbaker felt that the White House was out to get him. In fact, when he was defeated by Pearson's Liberals, the Kennedy White House staff reportedly joked and cheered.

Lester B. Pearson and Kennedy got along famously. Pearson was invited to Hyannisport often, and he swapped baseball stories with the Kennedy crowd. But it was not the same with Lyndon Johnson, whose style was radically different from Kennedy's. A weekend at The Ranch was far more hectic than one spent on Cape Cod. Johnson treated Pearson as one of the family, sharing much with the Prime Minister, including any top-secret telegram which just happened to arrive -- even messages from the battlefield in Vietnam. As Pearson later described it, "It was quite unlike anything that could have happened at any other place in any other meeting between leaders of government." One notable incident in 1965 that for the moment disrupted the otherwise amiable association between the two leaders was sparked by a speech that Pearson gave at Temple University, criticizing the U.S. policy in Vietnam. An enraged Johnson invited the errant Prime Minister to Camp David where he berated him. In a characteristic outburst, the President grabbed the Prime Minister by the collar, twisted, and lifted the smaller man off the ground, shouting "You've pissed on my rug!" Although the incident was kept quiet for some time and Pearson never mentioned it in his memoirs, it

became public knowledge after the deaths of the two leaders.

Pierre Eliot Trudeau, who was Prime Minister of Canada from 1968 to 1984 except for a few months in 1979-80, was unlike any of his predecessors. As historian Lawrence Martin writes,

Trudeau was a Harvard man, an intellectual, an internationalist, an athletic, cultured man with a play-boy aspect. For John Kennedy he would have been splendid ... But it was Trudeau's misfortune to face a streak of incompatibles or near-incompatibles -- LBJ, Nixon, Carter, Reagan.

In spite of his opinion of his counterparts in the United States, Trudeau remained respectful and orthodox. Nevertheless, with his usual political acuity, it was in Washington that Trudeau developed his famous elephant and mouse analogy, alluded to earlier, which aptly described the ever-cautious eye with which Canada regards the United States.

During his long tenure as Prime Minister, Trudeau frequently adopted strong positions concerning the United States. With the creation of the National Energy Policy, restrictions were placed upon those Canadian energy resources which could be sold south of the border. The Federal Investment Review Act was passed, creating a watch-dog agency to examine new foreign economic encroachment and to allow into Canada only those non-Canadian businesses which met certain criteria. Efforts were made by Ottawa to block Canadian advertisements in United States border TV stations. This was the era of the "Third Option," which called for less reliance on the United States and more involvement with other areas of the world. Although Canada was asserting herself to protect her interests, the United States government did not get very upset, considering these to be but minor concerns in the total picture of United States foreign policy.

Of the four presidents with whom Trudeau dealt, he respected Nixon the most and Reagan the least. Despite the fact that Nixon was ideologically at variance with Trudeau, they worked well together. However, in 1971 Nixon shocked Canada by proposing a protectionist economic policy calling for a ten percent surcharge on the imports from all the world's countries -- including Canada. Canada had long received special treatment from the U.S. as a hemispheric partner, and with the implementation of the surcharge was quite dis-

satisfied to become just another U.S. competitor. Nonetheless, as a public figure, Nixon was very popular in Canada. Canadians were impressed with his vast fund of information and his ability to give brilliant speeches without notes.

Reagan was another matter. Trudeau held Reagan in low regard, and even set aside the customary respect with which he treated American leaders. His jibes were the sharpest of any delivered by a Canadian Prime Minister toward a U.S. President. In a meeting before the opening of the 1981 Ottawa economic summit, Trudeau made it clear, both to the media and to President Reagan, that he, Trudeau, was running the meeting, and that the President would have the opportunity to give his views when the next summit was held in Washington. When, at a meeting in Europe of the heads of NATO governments, a reporter asked Reagan a question, Trudeau broke in and shouted, "Don't ask him -- ask Al," meaning Secretary of State Alexander Haig.

President Reagan has found a more kindred soul in Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, whose Conservative government succeeded Trudeau's Liberal government in the elections of 1984. Much was made of their common Irish heritage at the recent "Shamrock Summit" in Quebec. Both men are strong advocates of free trade, and this will continue to be the big issue between the two countries in the weeks to come. The two conservative leaders generally see eye-to-eye on most issues.

Of course there are still irritants, some of long standing, between the U.S. and Canada. Acid rain looms large, with the United States government dragging its feet, long after the damning research has put the blame squarely on the United States. The fishing controversy and off-shore boundary problems still rankle between the two countries. Because of the extension of the off-shore boundary to two hundred miles, the effect of defining each country's fishing zones in the Gulf of Maine became so complex and so controversial that finally, in 1979, both the United States and Canada agreed to place the issue before the World Court at the Hague. In late 1984, the World Court handed down a ruling, dividing the waters of the Gulf of Maine between the two countries. However, the governments of both countries called the ruling unsatisfactory. Both Canadian and U.S. fishing industries expressed disappointment with the decision, and each predicted fewer jobs and reduced profits. There are other problems between Canada

and the U.S., some of which may never be worked out.

As long as two such countries exist side by side, problems are unavoidable. The United States will probably remain the elephant and Canada the mouse (although perhaps Canada would rather be the moose), and perceptions of each other will continue to be at odds. Living as she does in the shadow of a superpower, Canada will always be sensitive about her independence and identity. Prime Minister Mulroney, in a recent speech to the House of Commons in Ottawa, summed up Canadian resolve when he assured the members that although free trade was Canada's goal in upcoming discussions with the United States, "our national sovereignty, our independence and our cultural integrity will never be touched."

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