

BOOK REVIEW

J. L. Granastein, Kenneth McNaught, (editors), (1991). ENGLISH CANADA SPEAKS OUT. Toronto: Doubleday Canada Limited. \$17.50. Reviewed by David Johnston.

In 1965, the interim report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism proclaimed that without knowing it, "Canada is passing through the greatest crisis in its history." Today, we are more aware of its nature and the pain is more deeply felt. It has become apparent that the fault in the nation's psyche runs even deeper and manifests itself in a far more complex pattern than was originally thought. Moreover, Canada's present crisis is taking place in a radically changed world. On the one hand, there are ecological concerns and nationalistic and ethnic claims for self-determination. On the other, we are sleepwalking toward large economic trading blocks and the increasing dominance of powerful corporations.

In this context the book, English Canada Speaks Out is a welcome addition to the debate on the state of the country's soul. It contains a series of provocative essays by thoughtful Canadians on the nature of what English Canada's response should be to Quebec's ultimatum. Although the voices differ there is, by and large, a common chorus of appreciation for Quebec's historical importance to the "idea of Canada." There is, at the same time, a general concurrence that bending too far in satisfying Quebec's nationalist demands would represent a significantly more serious threat to the Canadian psyche than outright succession of Quebec. The profound need to consider a fresh the structure and meaning of Canada is not only because of concern over the

place of Quebec in the country's soul, but also due to other complex issues discussed in four discrete sections of this book.

The nature of the concerns in the current constitutional crisis is elucidated in the first section. This includes an historical survey of all the important events that have led up to the present dilemma, from Lord Durham's Report to Quebec's Law 178 suppressing English language rights to the present Meech Lake fiasco. The rhetoric propagated by Bourassa and Mulroney that Quebec was once again humiliated at Meech Lake is also examined.

One author downplays the need for legalistic tampering with the constitution, arguing that de facto constitutional change can take place more creatively through federal-provincial diplomacy. This view, however, does not take into account the fact that Bourassa has stated that he simply wishes to make de jure what is already, in his mind, de facto. The two track process that Quebec has, in fact, adopted includes the possibility of Quebec assuming the status of a sovereign state one year after a positive response on a referendum, failing the formation of a new constitutionally based partnership with Canada.

But it is not simply a question of accommodating Quebec in a reformed Canada. This is made clear in part of two of the book where the concerns of the regions and the aboriginal peoples are adumbrated. Some provinces feel the need for a strong central government, maintenance of national standards and senate reform, whereas others,

notably BC and Quebec, want increased powers. In addition, the interests of the aboriginal peoples are aligned more closely to the federal government than provincial. The polarizing demands of the different regions and peoples therefore argue for ad hoc asymmetrical arrangements as a pragmatic solution.

This is not all. There is the question of self-government for the native people, which could include the formation of up to three new provinces. Furthermore, should Quebec choose to separate unilaterally, which appears to be illegal according to Canadian law, there would be serious boundary issues that would require resolution. This includes the ownership of a large portion of Northern Quebec that, according to some legal opinion, would probably go to Canada. It also involves a thirty to fifty kilometre corridor joining Ontario to the Maritimes, which is vital for Canada's integrity and the well-being and social, economic and cultural progress of the Eastern provinces.

Part three adds three other dimensions to the dilemma facing Canadian's today, multiculturalism, citizenship and rights. Although there is a need for mutual respect between people of different cultural backgrounds, multiculturalism, according to one author, undermines efforts at forming a genuine national identity. Forging a national identity also requires giving Canadian citizenship real meaning that comes along with additional rights and obligations. Finally, women and other disadvantaged groups have a legitimate right for their voices to be heard during the constitutional debate, and they are voices that add support to the call for the establishment of national standards.

Part four deals with the need for “English Speaking Canada” to be well prepared for future eventualities. There is general agreement that sovereignty - association, which amounts to a customs and monetary union is not in Canada’s best interest. In fact, Mulroney has emphatically driven this point home in response to pretensions made by P. Q. leader Jacques Parizeau in a recent speech in New York. One author makes the intriguing suggestion that official recognition of Quebec’s distinctiveness need to be reciprocated by a formal commitment from the province to building Canada as a whole. Finally, there is also a need to form a constituent assembly of prominent Canadians to frame questions for a national referendum and to embody the will of the Canadian people [outside Quebec] in any negotiations with Quebec.

One voice is missing in this valuable book. It is that of French Canadians living outside of Quebec, whose status need be deeply felt by both Quebecers and English speaking Canadians alike. Nor is there any mention of the possibility that a mechanism needs to be found to allow Quebec to save face. The book also fails to provide an inspiring and integrating national vision for the future.

As Canada faces its most critical moment, we must all contemplate the consequences of not courageously facing our problems and creatively resolving them. De-confederation will not only harm English Canada and Quebec economically, but even more so, culturally, morally and spiritually. The real obstacle to weaving a fabric of national unity is power politics and both individual and national egoistic self-interest.

There is a need to rise above our fractional desires in genuine search for an answer that speaks to the soul of all Canadians. Whether or not we are able to do so will determine if we falter in our darkest hour - or initiate a process that carries us triumphantly into the twenty first century, a great nation and embodiment of noble ideas that adds to the welfare of humankind.