



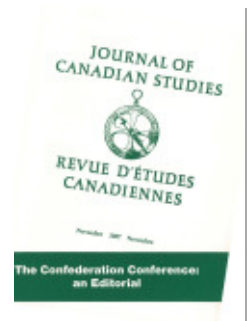
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Commentary:

DE GAULLE, PARIS, AND THE FUTURE OF CANADA

R. D. MATHEWS

The General is hard. He is one of the toughest as well as one of the most astute politicians at work on international problems. Unlike many of his peers, he always has a grand design before him. Unlike most of his peers he knows exactly what he wants. Better than most he knows how to get results. He is neither truly sentimental nor truly irrational, though he uses both sentimentality and irrationality to gain his ends. They are, with him, instruments of diplomacy, just as good relations or deliberately fostered bad relations are instruments of diplomacy, for de Gaulle is a machiavellian statesman. Diplomacy, for him, has national aggrandizement as its end ("La France, c'est Moi!"), and it uses every strategy short of war as its means. The idea that the end of diplomacy is harmony among nations would be for de Gaulle an inexcusable sentimentality.

In the spirit of his kind of diplomacy one uses friendship, enmity, cunning, hypocrisy, good faith and bad faith as they serve the ends of a policy deliberately formulated to effect the aggrandizement of the nation and to satisfy its desires in the world at large.

It is into that framework that de Gaulle's relation to Canada must be seen. Where the facts of Canadian history suit his vision he uses them. Where they do not, he seeks to transform them. His willingness to refurbish the gallic spirit in Canada according to prophetic need rather than historical fact suited his intentions for France, for Canada, and for the balance of world power. His words were greeted with wild acclaim in Quebec, so much so that any politician wishing to hold power in the Province felt himself obliged to honour what amounted to insult and deliberate provocation on Canadian soil by a foreign head of state. The provocation was no doubt directed at English-speaking Canadians,

but the insult fell heavily upon French-speaking Canadians whom de Gaulle assumed to be leaderless, repressed, and without identity unless he was willing to share the identity of France with them.

Quebec applauded him. For it, too, has a vision, a new awareness, which, though it is more sure of its rejections at present than of its affirmations, is a vision of *a new thing* in terms of a re-reading of history. The vision of French-speaking Canadians is truly revolutionary, not evolutionary. For that reason Canada will be lucky to keep from coming unstuck.

If the revolution can be well understood in Quebec and well communicated to the rest of Canada, if, that is to say, it can discover national terms (national economic sovereignty; a special national bilingual excellence; etc.) then Canada can be saved. But the French-speaking Canadians will have to work as hard, as co-operatively, as selflessly as they expect English-speaking Canadians to do. The *revolutionaries*, the French-speaking Canadians, will have to offer all Canada a national formula of revolution. But in the past, as now, for them the insular stand, the separatist role has been easier, for historical reasons and because of the very complex psychology of minority existence.

For that reason de Gaulle's effect was out of all reasonable proportion. De Gaulle legitimized the abandonment of a contractual relation on the part of French-speaking Canadians to the facts of Canadian history. He legitimized for them what might be called prophetic vision or the history of the soul. He invited them to make history (especially past history) whatever they want it to be. In a word, he abetted their revolutionary tendencies. He asked them to jump backwards and forwards over the facts of history to a francophone "eternal present". He helped to give their revolution a basis; a reconstituted past upon which to base a break with the present.

Since the beginning of the "quiet revolution" French-speaking Canadians have been daunted by a history which they know shows them that a large part of their present portion in life is of their own making, even of their own deliberate choosing, both the freedoms they possess and

the barriers they stand behind. In effect de Gaulle invited them to forget the facts of history and to dream the new francophone dream with him.

Deliberately, he ignored Canadian history:

... le fait que le morceau de peuple français qui est installé dans cette province, dans ce Canada, le fait que ce morceau de notre peuple devient maître de son destin implique pour lui, sans aucun doute, mais aussi pour la France, le vieux pays, de grandes responsabilités.¹

He asked them to dream a new francophone dream, and he asked them for revolution. Calling for Quebec to be its own master de Gaulle said:

C'est le génie de notre temps, c'est l'esprit de notre temps que chaque peuple, où qu'il soit et quel qu'il soit doit disposer de lui-même.²

Not only did he call for revolution, but he did so as if French-speaking Canadians are not Canadians at all. And despite the core of insult to French-speaking Canadians in his remarks, they rose tumultuously at his words, for what past history *has been* is for them only an aggravation. What is important for them is what past history *must now become*. Charles de Gaulle told them to make of it what they will, with or without the rest of Canada.

We other Canadians, we Canadians who wish to bind the nation together, we others know that despite the rejections or affirmations of the heart, short of complete breakdown, some compromises with the facts of history, as they affect the Canadian nation, must be made. For whatever we like to think, and whatever we are planning for the future, Canada is powerfully influenced at this moment by facts and forces that internal revolution cannot change and which internal division may, finally, exacerbate.

Like the rest of the world Canada faces a new, naked U.S. imperialism; but Canada unlike the rest of the world, faces it along a 4,000 mile border. Canada lives, too, with a new mini-Britain, too closely aligned with the U.S. even for the happiness of many British government members. Canada lives in a world possessing a

new France: a France which at government level is anti-anglo-saxon and spiritually imperialist. Government level, of course, is Charles de Gaulle, who is as impatient of freely stated criticism in the press as he is scornful of the squandering of energy that takes place when legislative assemblies are allowed to function in representative fashion. Unhappily, Canada is presently served, moreover, by an almost leaderless, unimaginative, and U.S. dominated central government in Ottawa.

De Gaulle professes in part, and French commentators insist, that his goal is to help create a sovereign, independent Canada. (French commentators, unfortunately, write remarkably as de Gaulle teaches.) The sovereignty, of course, must be gained away from U.S. imperialist power. One would expect then, if he meant his protestations, that he would wish to help unite Canada as a basis for a strong, independent stand. Then, one would expect him to want a tough, integrated Europe which could (especially Britain and France) work towards a balance, at least, of external economic interest in Canada. One would have expected him to use the subtlest finesse of which he is capable to support the needs of French-speaking Canadians, while directing the aspirations of all the nationalist elements in the country. He did not, and is not doing any of those things.

Every indication, every contradiction in his policy points in quite another direction. In short, de Gaulle's design may well be to urge forward the destruction of Canada. In fact the seeming contradictions cease to be such when examined in the light of a policy of destruction rather than unification.

For de Gaulle, Canada is a small part of a large strategy based ultimately upon a will to destroy or seriously to enervate U.S. power in the world. He believes (as many of us do) that the U.S. is too powerful. He appears to see Great Britain as a part of Anglo-Saxon hegemony. And he appears to see English-speaking Canadians as the tail that refuses to wag the dog. By embarrassing and even perhaps ultimately breaking British power, he can either Europeanize her in his own way or let her hang as a millstone around

the U.S. neck. For de Gaulle, English-speaking Canadians are a most uncertain quantity. His Canadian visit makes clear he has no faith whatever in the future of English-speaking Canada. If he cannot drive Canadians together in anti-Americanism, then he will drive them apart. Either eventuality, as with his policy for Britain, will be a win for him. A broken Canada may cause Canadian hearts to weep. But it would assure de Gaulle an unstable border to the North of the U.S. and utter disarray among present U.S. holdings North of the border.

In his trip to Canada, de Gaulle judged well the Canadian governors, the French press and the French people. His visit to Canada was a deliberate move to affront English-speaking Canadians, to stir French-speaking Canadians, to embarrass the national government, and to divide Canada. The man who measures the number of steps he will descend from the Elysée Palace to meet foreign dignitaries well calculated the so-called ambiguities he spoke. If any proof is necessary, there is the fact that the Canadian prime minister privately invited de Gaulle to make clear that he meant neither insult nor division, so that it would not be necessary to announce publicly that the Quebec statements were "unacceptable" to Canadians. De Gaulle rejected the invitation, for he knew that if the Canadian prime minister did speak out, the French entourage could leave abruptly, martyrs to Anglo-Saxon pride. If he was allowed to continue to Ottawa, he could have gone to the very capital of the nation, guest of the prime minister, freely invited to divide the nation.

After the first brouhaha at home, serious French articles have been historically incorrect at times, unsound in interpretation often, illogical in argument almost always, and Gaullist in pretension, finally. One feels they are not intended for the French reader, but for the Canadian reader who needs spurring on if he is to follow the Gaullist policy. The French man in the street doesn't figure. He likes all Canadians, it would seem. One is told again and again in Paris to pay no attention to de Gaulle, to the man, that is to say, who rules France alone and by decree. But de Gaulle has judged the French

well. The French man-in-the-street doesn't really care a hang about Canadians as long as they don't force up the cost of the Paris métro. Moreover, de Gaulle has judged well that the present Canadian government has neither the leadership nor the imagination to challenge him in France. And so he can adventure as he pleases in Canada, without fear of a scratch.

The French-speaking Canadians want support for their new deal, whatever it is to be. Daniel Johnson, present premier of Quebec, rode quite comfortably the deplorable Duplessis regime towards power. He will ride the present forces, de Gaulle knows, wherever they lead. For de Gaulle, Daniel Johnson is a useful piece of stage furniture. If there is to be a Joan of Arc for Canada, de Gaulle knows well she may not be in the saddle this time, but rather beside the horse, applying a whip to the hind-quarters of both horse and rider alike.

The illogicalities and errors in Paris comment are embarrassing to a Canadian reader. They are sometimes the result of considerable ignorance, sometimes bias. But, overall, one gets the impression they arise from a need to support de Gaulle at any cost in a position which is logically untenable. There are in the arguments bad history, bad logic, and a need to indoctrinate the reader to believe that suddenly, somehow, France has a right to declare the destiny of Canada. To do so, unfortunately, it becomes necessary — as de Gaulle found it necessary — to state or to imply that English-speaking Canadians are villains, mean oppressors from whose grip, French-speaking Canadians need help to escape. The statement by Claude Julien in *Le Monde* about the fall-out of French-speaking ministers in Ottawa, for instance, reeks of bias. He says

... au cours des quatre dernières années, huit ministres francophones ont été éliminés, la plupart victimes de vendettas politiques inspirées par les conservateurs extrémistes en liaison avec un ancien chef de la police montée.³

Why does he not, one wonders, include Pierre Sevigny of the famous Munsinger case? Were the Conservatives able to force the removal of

innocent men? If so, Claude Julien lists none. He tells the reader that *most* of the men were victims of Conservative vendettas. What were the others victims of? Old age?

In just such a marred fashion, the French press tells us, as background to the de Gaulle journey, that the improvement in France/Quebec relations, begun earlier, met with awful hostility from Ottawa and from English-speaking Canadians. We are told that English-speaking Canadians wanted to stamp on a reasonable desire of France and Quebec to develop relations like those between Ontario and England. What the French press does not hint is that much confusion existed about the nature of relations being set up between Quebec and France, and indications from *both negotiating parties* were that they were considering the formation of agreements of a kind only possible between independent sovereign states. At that time, de Gaulle did nothing to allay concern in Ottawa, to assure Canada that he was only interested in the kind of relations and agreements that were subsequently undertaken.

The trip to Canada was a calculated adventure. The speeches in Quebec were set up to divide and conquer. Insultingly, de Gaulle assumed that French-speaking Canadians are not Canadians. Insultingly, to both French and English-speaking Canadians he pretended a kind and degree of injustice in Canada that is sheer nonsense.

After the first cry of alarm, the tack of the Paris press has shifted de Gaulle-wards. De Gaulle, we are told, has the right to interfere in Canadian affairs, because the U.S. does. *L'Événement*, for instance, says regarding the desire of the Johnson administration, in 1965, to force U.S. subsidiaries in Canada to "buy American":

Le jeune ministre québécois des Finances, Eric Kierans, exigea du gouvernement d'Ottawa qu'il proteste contre cette ingérence dans les affaires canadiennes infiniment plus grave que ne l'ont été le mois dernier les propos de de Gaulle: ce fut un beau scandale: de quoi le Québec se mêle-t-il? Le ministre québécois se vit contraint,

malgré ses sympathies "fédéralistes", à intervenir publiquement auprès de Washington en menaçant de nationaliser les firmes américaines au Québec.⁴

What *L'Événement* does not distinguish is that Eric Kierans was then a Canadian minister objecting to an alien policy affecting the Canadian people. Charles de Gaulle is a foreign head of state who arrived in Canada as a self-appointed director of its destiny.

Le Monde Diplomatique can say without recognizing any differences whatever that:

L'offre de la France d'acheter au Canada de l'uranium avait été fort bien accueillie à Ottawa, car elle servait l'intérêt des deux parties. Mais Washington intervint pour faire avorter la négociation en invoquant le problème du contrôle de l'utilisation de cet uranium. Cette ingérence efficace n'a pas provoqué l'indignation soulevée par un discours prononcé au balcon d'un hôtel de ville...⁵

Those of us who most dislike U.S. influence and interference in Canada cannot see that the unfortunate fact of U.S. interference gives de Gaulle the right to interfere. Nor can we see that U.S. imperialism is in any way modified or overcome by his attitude. The French press, assuming de Gaulle's right to interfere in Canada, then goes on to accept the principle that he has a right to disseminate what ideas he pleases.

Le cri de "Vive le Québec libre!" a provoqué une réaction si vive qu'il n'a pas estimé pouvoir aller jusqu'au bout de son itinéraire. L'hostilité de la presse anglophone depuis de longs mois ne pouvait guère l'encourager à la modération.⁶

By the same token, since the British press has been acidly critical of de Gaulle over Common Market negotiations, he should travel to Britain in support of Scottish and Welsh nationalism. The illogic of French argument about Canada is based on the principle of the eternal citizenry of francophones, "our people in Canada" as de Gaulle would say it. But it also derives, one suspects, from political pragmatism in which

error of fact is of little consequence. *L'Événement* says in a major, fifteen page article on Canada and de Gaulle:

En 1864, le Canada se transforme en fédération du type américain. Enfin le 28 mars 1927 le *British North America Act* consacre l'autonomie du Dominion.⁷

So much for Canadian history!

But when the Quebec trip is compared with the Polish trip which followed immediately after, de Gaulle's intentions become even more clear. Nowhere did the General express concern that Poland, all Poland, is much less free than any part of Canada. Nor did he suggest, nor have his commentators, that because Russia interferes in Poland, much more than the U.S. does in Canada, France also has a right to do so. Those things have needed no mention because de Gaulle did not go to Poland, as he went to Canada, to divide and to provoke. To his commentators, de Gaulle's invasion of Canada and his Polish love-making have seemed perfectly reasonable acts of state. De Gaulle's role in Eastern Europe is to unite, in the West it is to divide. Quebec is pushed gently and not gently from Paris, in the direction of separation. In *Les Lettres Françaises*, René Lacote says recently:

... je venais, dans nos longues journées de Montréal, de voir nettement se dessiner le visage de ce qui pourrait bientôt devenir la République de Québec.⁸

Fernand Dumont, professor at Laval University, speaks of federalist desires to unite all Canada against U.S. encroachments. He writes of a French-speaking Canadian minister in Ottawa who "rappelle volontiers la menace américaine à ses compatriotes tentés par l'indépendance". He

goes on to say:

A quoi ceux-ci sont tentés de rétorquer que le gouvernement fédéral n'y a pas porté remède jusqu'ici. Par ailleurs, bon nombre de Canadiens français n'ont guère envie de servir d'otages contre les Etats-Unis.⁹

The painful irony may well be that a Republic of Quebec is being urged by propaganda, diplomatic friction, and outright attack directed from Paris in order to suit the ambitions of de Gaulle for France and for the power of France in the world. More painful still is the irony that Quebec may indeed be a hostage, but not on behalf of Canadian unity, which at least is an idea with merit. Quebec may be, in fact, quite unconsciously, a hostage for Charles de Gaulle, to use in his international bargaining for France.

The final irony may well be that Gaullist policy will backfire so that whatever happens a weaker Canada and a stronger U.S.A. will result in North America. That last is an eventuality sought neither by de Gaulle nor by most Canadians, whatever their tongue.

NOTES:

1. de Gaulle, Charles, (at Three Rivers), quoted in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, p.5, September, 1967.
2. *Ibidem*.
3. Julien, Claude, "Le Canada Peut-il Survivre?", *Le Monde*, p.5, October 14, 1967.
4. Mallet, Serge, "Ingérences au Canada," *L'Événement*, p.91, September, 1967.
5. Julien, Claude, "Les Perspectives de la Province du Québec . . .," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, p.2, September, 1967.
6. *Ibidem*.
7. Mallet, Serge, "Ingérences au Canada," *L'Événement*, p.82, September, 1967.
8. Lacote, René, "L'Esprit de Québec," *Les Lettres Françaises*, p.5, September 27-October 3, 1967.
9. Dumont, Fernand, "Le Canada et Les Etats-Unis: un inquiétant voisinage," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, p.4, September, 1967.