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On file

Canada Day has always been important to Canadians. For many decades, it was individuals, communities and private organizations, rather than governments, who worked to mark Canada's birthday. The Canadian Unity Council, for example, organized "Canada Week" celebrations across the country from 1969 to 1982. The following article by a CUC Governor looks back over 136 Firsts of July.

Canada Day – the people made it matter

By Raymond Blake, Ph.D.

Tuesday, Canadians across the

land celebrated July 1 with tremendous enthusiasm and warm displays of affection. And it is not just citizens who are excited about our national birthday bash; the Government of Canada encourages participation, but is a Johnny-come-lately to the party.

In fact, individual Canadians are the ones who made the day an event following the birth of their nation on July 1, 1867.

In Nova Scotia, a reluctant partner in the new nation, citizens marked the occasion with picnics, festivals, lectures, bonfires and fireworks. Adolphus Gaetz of Lunenburg wrote in his diary at the end of the day that 'the booming of the cannon early this morning announced the Birth of the New Dominion and the ringing of

Church Bells proclaimed the gladness.' In Toronto, they roasted an immense ox to distribute among the poor of the city. Everywhere, citizens gathered to celebrate the new Dominion.

Spontaneous public support

While the federal government was largely uninterested in Dominion Day, except for the special 60th anniversary in 1927, Canadians everywhere have gathered, almost spontaneously, to celebrate. The government encouraged such acts of nation-building only by making July 1 a public holiday in 1879, although on June 20, 1868, the Governor General, Lord Monck, called upon all Canadians to mark the first anniversary of the union of British North America. Even a cursory glance through the nation's newspapers for each July 1, and in various records in archives and museums across Canada, reveal considerable evidence of enthusiastic Dominion Day celebrations. Many municipal governments and civic-minded organizations played pivotal roles in early celebrations. Aboriginal Canadians also participated. Programs and posters, dating from the 1870s onward, announced the celebrations. Citizens organized sports day, picnics, horse races, parades, lectures, speeches, and other activities to mark the event. Vancouver, for instance, financed the cost of the celebrations through subscriptions

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Food for thought

Young Quebecers at ease with diversity

This is an edited version of a comment piece by Andrew Parkin, which appeared in the June 30 edition of the Montreal daily La Presse.

By Andrew Parkin, Ph.D.

Quebec society is in the throes of a significant transformation. In all parts of Canada, young people are showing themselves to be more comfortable with cultural pluralism than are their elders. It is in Quebec, however, where the difference in attitudes between the generations is most profound, suggesting that change here has occurred at a more rapid pace.

The CRIC-Globe and Mail survey on the New Canada, conducted this spring to analyze how the country is reacting in the face of its growing ethnic diversity, shows that older Quebecers are less comfortable with different ethnic groups than are their counterparts in the rest of Canada. Yet remarkably, this difference in attitude is almost absent among the younger generations.

This pattern is visible when respondents are asked whether they would be comfortable if a close relative married someone who was black, or Jewish, or of Asian origin. In each case, Quebecers over 30 are less comfortable than their counterparts in the rest of the

country. But the difference disappears in the case of those under the age of 30; on this issue attitudes among young Quebecers and young Canadians in other provinces are indistinguishable, with both groups showing very high levels of comfort.

Close friends

Respondents were also asked whether any of their closest friends come from different ethnic, religious or racial backgrounds. Quebecers over the age of 30 are much less likely than the over-30 age group in the rest of Canada to say yes. But young Quebecers and young Canadians outside the province give similar responses. Quite simply, most young people in Canada, including in Quebec, move within social circles that are quite diverse. About seven in ten say they have close friends from racial groups different than their own. In contrast, the social circles of older Quebecers are more homogenous than is the norm for that age group across the country as a whole.

One reason young Quebecers are more likely than older Quebecers to socialize with a diverse group of friends is that the Charter of the French Language, adopted in the late 1970s, changed the school system by streaming the children of immigrants into French-language schools. The social world of the young became less homogenous. Young Quebecers, particularly young francophones, grew up with a mixed group of friends, and their attitudes were shaped accordingly.

A legal regime designed to protect Quebec's linguistic and cultural distinctiveness has done that, but in the process has produced a generation of young Quebecers whose attitudes on a variety of issues are now more similar to those of other Canadians than was previously the case.

This does not mean that all differences between Quebecers and young Canadians are disappearing. For instance, young Quebecers are much more likely to say that language is important to their personal feeling of identity, and they are more likely to say that Canada's official languages policy is something that makes them proud to be Canadian.

What the survey demonstrates, however, is that Quebec has changed in one crucial respect. The greater reluctance to embrace cultural diversity, evident among older generations, is absent among the province's youth. Like other young Canadians, young Quebecers have developed a sense of identity that is based on an acceptance of cultural diversity. It is a remarkable achievement.

Dr. Andrew Parkin is the Co-Director of the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC). More information about the CRIC-Globe and Mail survey on the new Canada is available on the CRIC website at www.cric.ca.

On file (cont'd from p. 1)

from local entrepreneurs and businesses, including those owned and operated by Japanese Canadians.

Canadianization

There was clearly a process of Canadianization at work in the celebrations and in the public commemorations each Dominion Day, one that had practically no assistance from the federal government. For nearly a century, citizens prepared their own Dominion Day celebrations and, perhaps without realizing it, transcended locality and region to promote their Canadian nationality.

Some politicians, however, did think that the federal government should promote Dominion Day. In 1924, Arthur Meighen, the Leader of the Opposition, criticized Prime Minister Mackenzie King for not observing Dominion Day, which Meighen called the 'most outstanding holiday of the year ... the one that means more to our country than perhaps any other.'¹ Fourteen years later, the Conservative Party was still criticizing King for not using Dominion Day 'to educate our youth to a realization of exactly what this confederation means to the young people of this country.'²

The Hill celebrations start

When John Diefenbaker came to power in 1957, the House of Commons delayed its opening until 4:03 PM on July 1 to allow members to join the celebrations on Parliament

Hill. Prime Minister Diefenbaker also told the House that it was important that the Government organize a ceremony on Dominion Day 'to acquaint Canadians as a whole with the history of their country.' Subsequently, the government encouraged annual observance of Canada's birthday, and the Secretary of State assumed responsibility for the event. Even so, the ceremonies were usually low-key, at least, until the Centennial in 1967. The following year marked the addition of multicultural and professional concerts on Parliament Hill and a nationally televised show. From 1968 through to 1975, the celebrations were held in the National Capital Region under the title of 'Festival Canada' and involved numerous cultural, artistic and athletic activities. The celebration was cancelled in 1976 only to be reactivated a year later. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau wanted to use the occasion for Canadians to demonstrate their love for their country, and for federalist Quebecers to express their preference for a united Canada.³ In 1980, the federal government established a National Committee charged with planning Dominion Day celebrations, and provided financial support to volunteer groups in local communities.

Good-bye Dominion Day

In 1982, after some 30 attempts, beginning in 1946, Parliament finally adopted Canada Day to replace Dominion Day as the official designation for the first of July. The Bill was passed late on a Friday afternoon with only 12 members present, and received third and final readings all

within five minutes. There were screams of protest across Canada in opposition to the change, however. Incidentally, in June 1965, Jean Chrétien, then a young Quebec MP, had introduced a private member's bill to substitute 'Canada' for 'Dominion' in the Dominion Day Act, claiming that 'Dominion' no longer reflected the status of Canada. Moreover, he pointed out, the national holiday must have a 'truly national character. It is a day on which our citizenship must be emphasized, as well as our pride in being able to live in so beautiful a country.'⁴

Dr. Blake is Director of the Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy and a CUC Governor.

¹ House of Commons *Debates*, June 30, 1924, pp 3858-9.

² House of Commons *Debates*, July 1 1938, p 4512.

³ House of Commons *Debates*, May 2, 1977. Diefenbaker referred to the press statements during the debate.

⁴ House of Commons *Debates*, June 4, 1965.

Summer break
To our readers:

Opinion Canada will suspend publication for the summer vacation period. Publication will resume on August 14. Have an enjoyable summer.