

# MOSAICS

John Porter's "The Vertical Mosaic", a study of social classes and power groups in Canadian society, was published last summer. This is the second of two articles analyzing the book by Gad Horowitz, assistant professor of economics and political science at McGill. The first article appeared in the January 21 issue of "NOW". The review was originally published in "Canadian Dimension".  
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In *Vertical Mosaic* John Porter suggests that there is a connection between the absence of a national identity in Canada and the absence of a left-right dialogue at the centre of our politics. His insight, though brilliant, is a bit muddled. At times he suggests that what we lack is a "charter myth" like that of the Americans — a national ideology enshrining democratic ideals. The absence of a set of libertarian-egalitarian goals means that there is no utopian ideal against which to measure our reality; the leftist impulse in politics is thus deprived of an essential fuel. What Porter is getting at here is something which I would describe as the strength of toryism in our political culture, stemming from our Loyalist origins. It is not true that we have had no charter myth. We — or at least our dominant British charter-group — had one, but it did not stress democratic goals. In any case, Porter is on the wrong track here, because an egalitarian charter myth is not a prerequisite for left-right polarization. Britain, and most other European democracies, have developed class politics without any basis in revolutionary charter myths. Furthermore, as I have pointed out elsewhere, it is precisely the presence of toryism at the origins of a society which paves the way for the later development of a left right polarization along social-antisocialist lines. This is what happened in Europe, and it may be happening in Quebec.

At other times Porter says that it is the absence of agreement on any goals at all — the absence of "values general to the society" — that blocks the emergence of creative politics. Here he is in part repeating his observations about the effects of the national unity obsession: our only goal is national unity; preoccupation with this goal prevents the formulation of social and economic goals; therefore movement towards such goals through class politics is retarded. But the absence of "values general to the society" also refers to the fact that Canadians, fragmented as they are into particular regions and ethnic groups, have little sense of belonging to an overarching national community, little feeling of "collective participation" in that community, and therefore little inclination to formulate goals for that community, i.e., to make demands upon it. A functioning democracy requires a well-developed sense of national community, a feeling on the part of ordinary people that they are part of that community, that they have a sacred right and duty to participate in its affairs, that it is obliged to respond to their demands, in other words the feeling of a citizen rather than that of a subject.

Canadians do not have this feeling about their country because their strongest identifications are with their regions and ethnic groups rather than with Canada. This is clear enough with regard to English-French relations, but it is also true with regard to English Canada. The French Canadian identifies primarily with French Canada. The English Canadian identifies himself most strongly neither with Canada nor with English Canada but with his ethnic group — British, Ukrainian, etc. — and with his region — Maritimer, Westerner, etc.

Two interrelated factors are responsible for this situation, both of which are alluded to by Porter. The first is the colonial and exclusive mentality of

the British charter group; the second is the presence of the French in the confederal partnership.

The British of Canada, unlike those of the United States did not see themselves as the founding element of an entirely new nation. They saw themselves as Britons in North America, they retained their identifications with England, Scotland and Wales. They therefore made no conscious effort to integrate new ethnic groups into a new Canadian nation. The new groups were left alone, permitted and even encouraged to follow the British example, that is, to retain their identifications with their homelands. Canada was a purely political, not a national or cultural entity. It consisted of a number of ethnic groups, politically-united through allegiance to the British Crown.

The presence of a self-conscious nationalistic French element played a very important part in giving rise to this situation and in sustaining it. If the French were to be left outside the British community, logic and justice required that other ethnic groups be treated similarly. If Quebec were

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to be left alone, logic and justice required that other provinces be left alone. In short, the French presence meant that the "national" community and its government must be weak, its symbols and slogans empty of content. It meant that the national community did not have enough power to integrate even its English speaking elements.

This situation has changed recently in two ways: The British charter group has lost most of its Britishness, so that the sense of a shared connection with Britain and with British traditions which once linked British Columbians, Manitobans, Ontarians, and Nova Scotians has now nearly disappeared. And the French charter group has finally insisted once and for all that it is not an ethnic group like the others and that Quebec is not a province like the others.

The British revolt against the father opened up two possibilities: Americanization, and movement towards a genuine Canadian amalgam. The latter approach is well illustrated by Diefenbaker: One Canada, primary identification with the nation,

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equal status for all ethnic groups, no hyphenation. But the French do not want to be amalgamated. One Canada is left high and dry. The possibility of amalgamating the English speaking regions and ethnic groups into one nation is not taken up, because "logic" and "justice" continue to require that all Canadian particularisms receive roughly equal treatment.

In other, more realistic, words, our national politicians are afraid to challenge the professional ethnics and the provincial empire builders who

perversely demand for their groups a status similar to that of the French. The continuation of our strong emphasis on regional and ethnic differentiation perpetuates fragmentation, prevents the emergence of any clear Canadian or French Canadian identity, and leaves the door wide open for Americanization. We are not facing the dilemma. Instead of giving the French alone a special status, we are disintegrating the country by giving all ethnic groups and provinces special status. Canada may never be a national community because of the French presence. English Canada can be a national community, but only if our image of Canada is transformed from a political union of provinces and tribes into a political union of two national communities, one English and one French. We must have the courage to combine accommodation of the French particularism with resistance to intra-English particularisms.

Porter condemns our beloved "mosaic" primarily because it is vertical. When the British left the "other" ethnic groups alone instead of trying to build them into a new national community, these "others" were frozen in their original economic occupations and social statuses. The absence of a national identity sustains stagnation in our politics and inequality of opportunity in our economic and social life. Assignment to social roles continues to be based on ethnicity. Here is a dilemma which the professional ethnics and all mosaic celebrators refuse to face. Ethnic segregation cannot easily be combined with equal opportunity for the members of different ethnic groups.

Most mosaic celebrators take the line that the very nothingness of Canada is its most praiseworthy characteristic. "How wonderful to live in a country that has no flag." How wonderful to live in a non-nationalistic nation that is not a nation, "a land of many cultures." How wonderful to be left alone, not to be pressed into any moulds. How wonderful to escape the conformitarian pressures of a U.S. style melting pot.

When this way of talking is not fake, it is literally nihilistic. It ignores the dark side of the mosaic, the side exposed by Porter. Furthermore, it combines exaggeration of the cultural uniformity of the United States with exaggeration of the cultural diversity of English Canada. Ethnic segregation does not necessarily preserve genuine cultural diversity. The forces of assimilation can and do operate as powerfully on the segregated immigrant groups of Canada as they do on the less segregated immigrant groups of the United States. In both countries, cultural diversity and assimilation coexist. In both countries, immigrant groups, though they retain partially separate communities and culture for a very long time, adopt the ways or life and thought of the English speaking charter groups. The groups that have been in Canada for a long time are just as assimilated, in this sense, as the groups that have been in the United States for a long time. In Canada, however, assimilation has not levelled the barriers of social segregation —

it has not eroded ethnicity as a criterion for assignment of social status — to the same extent as in the United States. Canada has cultural diversity with segregation, the United States has cultural diversity without segregation. That is an oversimplification, but it is aimed at the truth of the matter.

The other factor which truly differentiates the Canadian mosaic from the American situation is the absence of a Canadian or English Canadian identity. As immigrant groups assimilate in the United