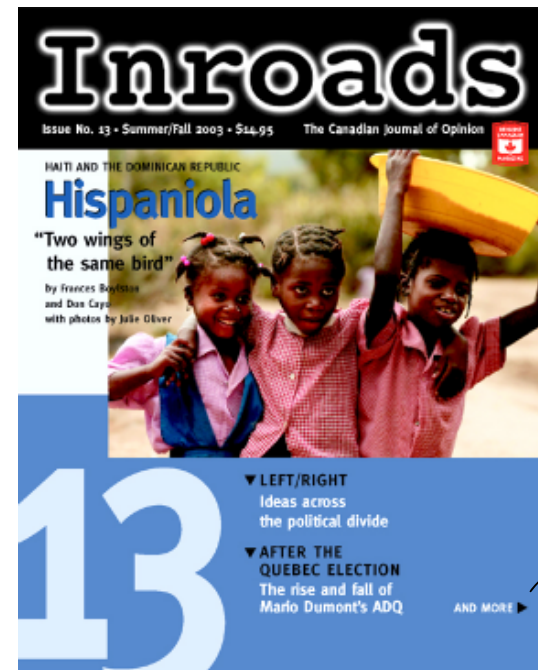


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Hamiltonian Canada, from Macdonald to Trudeau

Stéphane Kelly, *Les fins du Canada: selon Macdonald, Laurier, Mackenzie King et Trudeau.*
Montréal: Boréal, 2001. 288 pp.

by Jean-Philippe Trottier

STÉPHANE KELLY IS A LEADING FIGURE IN A RISING YOUNGER generation of Quebec intellectuals. Kelly's first book, *La petite loterie* (1997), described how the British administration secured

the collaboration of French Canada after 1837. He has also recently edited a book on new trends among Quebec historians. In between, he tackled the Canadian political tradition in *Les fins du Canada*. Instead of examining our history along the usual left/right, liberal/conservative or nationalist/federalist fault lines, Kelly starts from the thesis that the driving force since Canada's inception has been the search for stability.

He focuses on the unusually long reigns of Canada's four foremost prime ministers: John A. Macdonald (20 years in office), Wilfrid Laurier (15), William Lyon Mackenzie King (21) and Pierre Elliott Trudeau (15).

The total time in office of these four prime ministers amounts to more than half the span of Confederation. He contrasts these long reigns with the situation in the United States where a president can be elected for two four-year terms at most.

Reference to the American political tradition is a significant feature of the analysis. Kelly first sets out the two conflicting political ideals that have characterized our neighbour's history since the Revolution, Jeffersonianism and Hamiltonianism. Jeffersonian doctrine proposes a decentralized form of federalism, champions the self-sufficient small landowner, prescribes laissez-faire, and counsels an isolationist

foreign policy. By contrast, Hamiltonian federalism is centralized, its economic philosophy is based on industrialization and a class division of labour, its vision of the state tends toward intervention (with the attendant corruption and clientism), and its foreign policy is characterized by interventionism and imperialism.

In the United States, Jeffersonianism triumphed with the Revolution, and while it waned significantly with the rise of industrial capitalism and America's increased international presence in the two world wars, it remained a factor. In contrast, argues Kelly, Canada unambiguously embraced Hamiltonianism from the very first days of Macdonald. While both Laurier and Mackenzie King (the grandson of well-known republican rebel William Lyon Mackenzie) started out on the Jeffersonian end of the spectrum, they both were forced by circumstances to turn to Hamiltonianism. And Trudeau, he argues at length, embraced Hamiltonianism with no reservations whatsoever.



Most interestingly, Kelly adds four features which run like a common thread and constitute a secondary prerequisite to political longevity in Canada: Scottish ancestry or influence; legal training; the support of the French Canadian com-

pound as a counterweight to Ontario; and tyranny of the centre, or building large coalitions for the sake of stability.

The description of Trudeau is the one that resonates most fully, especially since the author very wisely decided to avoid any mania – pro or con – in regard to the man whose stamp has marked the country so heavily in this past generation. A perfectly bilingual man torn between his French paternal and Scottish maternal lineages, Trudeau was deeply influenced both by Harold Laski's Fabianism and the personalism of Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier. Both doctrines contributed to his view that society's *raison d'être* was to be just, and that individuals were endowed with fundamental rights and essential liberties, but also responsibilities. His genius consisted especially in being the right person

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in the right place at the right time, a transitional epoch when both French and English societies were struggling against their own religious and social traditions.

Yet Trudeau's approach to political issues, Kelly contends, was purely Hamiltonian. He sees Hamiltonianism in Trudeau's well-known stance on bilingualism, a principle defended not by both founding peoples but by the central government, so that it involved a departure from the Pearsonian view that Canada was a bicultural state. He sees it also in Trudeau's catering not to the people or Parliament but to interest groups (such as visible, linguistic or sexual minori-

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ties, women, youth and other vocal supporters of the 1982 Charter of Rights) through the arbitration of the Supreme Court, a bulwark of stability against restive or ever-changing legislatures. These developments attest to an increasing grip by Ottawa, for which not only Quebec nationalism but also western autonomy was anathema.

Two other very strong Hamiltonian traits were the swelling to unprecedented proportions of what Kelly very aptly dubs the Court Party or the managerial class, whose political loyalty would be rewarded with an array of nominations to key positions (judges, ambassadors, heads of crown corporations,

Senate seats, etc.), and Trudeau's international posture, in which Canada appeared as a peace-loving country with enough moral clout to cock snooks at the United States and other powermongering nations on issues like Cuba, Vietnam or China.

Trudeau indeed changed the face of the country, but Kelly argues compellingly that such changes, far from breaking away from tradition and heralding novelty, are consistent with the political orthodoxy of Macdonald and his successors, only under a different guise. Especially because it so lucidly captures the Trudeau phenomenon, *Les fins du Canada* is a worthwhile addition by an independent-minded sociologist to the wealth of literature published on the subject, and it is a pity for English speakers that it has remained untranslated until now.

Kelly has a rare talent: his work is gripping and reads like a novel, yet it is very well documented. His conclusion also hints – perhaps too lightly – at an element meriting more attention. Besides social justice and economic growth, the author calls for adding a third objective, political liberties. Such a remedy, contends Kelly, may offer the beginning of a solution in the identity crisis that Canada is experiencing as it struggles to escape the grip of its powerful American neighbour, whose threat lies not so much in some form of Americanization but precisely in its Hamiltonian proclivities, eerily similar to ours, as evidenced today by its imperialistic stances, economic concentration and increasing governmental centralization. ■