Experiments in Economics and Identity

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Yesterday my son added apple cider vinegar to the family grocery list—soaked in a bandana it affords protection against tear gas. He and other young activists, gathering in Ottawa and elsewhere to demonstrate against the June 2002 summit of industrialized world leaders in Kananaskis, Alberta, have grown up assuming that political expression entails a risk of violent response from authority. They also, intuitively at least, see no distinction between economic and social issues: liberalized trade goes to the heart of domestic policy, including the capacity of individuals and communities to determine their futures. In Canada, one legacy of this capacity is a history of diverse efforts—in a sense, experiments—by communities and regions to achieve economic security. This issue of the *Journal of Canadian Studies* begins with three articles that examine several such efforts in Atlantic Canada.

For many centuries, as Russel Barsh explains, the Mikmaq people of the maritime region harvested ocean resources (mammals, fish, shellfish). They were governed by the ethic of Netukulimk: roughly, to take only what you need. This ethic, and the allocation of hunting territories, likely ensured, at least in the absence of European competition, that resources would not be depleted. Today, however, commercial fisheries have damaged many stocks, and there is conflict between the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Mikmaq. Barsh argues that it is time to consider a new regime for conserving the Atlantic fisheries, drawing on Mikmaq experience, and devolving some management authority to communities and ports.

In the 1930s the Antigonish Movement in Nova Scotia began as a practical expression of the inseparability of community solidarity and economic security. Movement leaders, like Moses Coady, saw community co-operatives as the basis...
for a "middle way" between capitalism and socialism. But Scott MacAulay argues that, in practice, the movement leaned far closer to capitalism. Coady and others defined economic democracy fairly narrowly: in terms of people as consumers, rather than as workers. While giving people more power over their lives, co-operatives would, it was hoped, forestall the radicalism of communism, and its inherent risk to private property and the capitalist system. Essentially supportive of capitalism, the movement failed to provide an alternative to it.

Stephen Tomblin provides a contemporary perspective on the relations between economics and politics. Across Canada, governments have been urged to respond to the imperatives of globalization and other economic changes by reducing their role in the economy. Newfoundland has responded in varied ways: while Clyde Wells, premier after 1989, embraced an agenda of smaller government and a larger role for market forces, his successor, Brian Tobin, asserted a continuing role for government in fostering economic security. The contrast, according to Tomblin, illustrates how economic arguments, however pervasive, will not necessarily drive political change, particularly within a province wary of discarding traditions of economic intervention by government.

In the next article Rod Haddow gives us a broader perspective, by exploring the complex relations between government, business, labour and other interests. These relations have often followed one of two patterns: corporatist, in which business and labour are balanced through close working relations with government; or associational, in which relations between these interests are smaller in scale and more flexible in design. Both patterns have been less evident in Canada than in Western Europe, but recent trends have encouraged experimentation with associational relations, particularly in Quebec. Such experiments have been especially evident in community economic development, as well as in health care, through regional and community health boards. Such experiments, Haddow argues, can help show the way to a more democratic Canada.
Our three final papers turn from economic relations to another dimension of the Canadian experience: the defining of the idea of Canada itself. A familiar story is that an independent, confident Canada was created in 1917 at Vimy Ridge, when the Canadian Corps, attacking for the first time together, won a crucial victory. Less well known is the University of Vimy Ridge (UVR), or the Khaki University, of which UVR was a component. As Tim Cook explains, the Khaki University provided instruction during and after World War I to thousands of soldiers, on topics ranging from carpentry, to commercial subjects, to agriculture. The program served several ends: to meet the educational needs of soldiers, keep them busy and out of trouble during a lengthy demobilization, and help reintegrate them into Canadian society. Eventually, it evolved into an instrument of government policy, finding a place within the military power structure, and encouraging pride in Canadian wartime accomplishments, and in the young nation itself.

But many Canadians grew up defining their country as much by the quiet forests and wind-tossed lakes portrayed by the Group of Seven, as by glory on a gruesome battlefield. It is well known that these artists provided only a partial view of the landscape, drained of indigenous presence and emphasizing Ontario. However, Lynda Jessup explores another dimension of their work: its contribution to an effort to package the western Canadian wilderness as a tourist site for the growing middle class in Ontario cities. In the early decades of the twentieth century, scenes of Mount Robson and Lake O'Hara played an essential role in transforming the land from fearsome wilderness to pleasant scenery: a particular idea of Canada ostensibly national in scope, but in reality bounded by the imaginations of urban Ontarians.

In the 1930s Thomas McQuesten had his own vision of Canada, and as Ontario Minister of Highways and Public Works he was in a position to do something about it. Through a network of parks, forts, and monuments strung along the American border and linked by modern highways, McQuesten presented a different, more "civilized" view of Canada than the one provided by the Group of Seven. But as Joan Coutu shows, his view was even more selective
than was that of the painters. In his instructions to the architects and sculptors McQuesten emphasized the British heritage of southern Ontario, historical battles with the United States, and the civilizing of a once wild landscape. Other dimensions of Canada, including indigenous peoples and the French, were rendered invisible. Although it receives less attention today than does the Group of Seven, McQuesten's view of Canada was, in its own time, more widely held.

Together, these articles provide a variety of perspectives on economics and identity, collectively testifying to the diversity of ways in which a complex nation works, consumes, and defines itself.