

Report of the Annual Meeting Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada

Report of the Annual Meeting

Presidential Address

D. G. Creighton

Volume 36, Number 1, 1957

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/300399ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/300399ar>

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Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0317-0594 (print)

1712-9095 (digital)

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Cite this document

Creighton, D. G. (1957). Presidential Address. *Report of the Annual Meeting / Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada*, 36(1), 1–12.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/300399ar>

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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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Canadian Historical Association presidents, like all Gaul, are divided into three parts. Faced with the annual necessity of composing and delivering a presidential address, they almost invariably follow one of three possible courses. On the one hand, a small but hardy number compose philosophic discourses on the nature and meaning of history; and, on the other, a much larger and more cautious group prepare good solid papers on the subjects of their current research. Obviously the first of these two courses represents the extreme of presidential daring, and the second the maximum of presidential prudence. The third course leads through middle ground. Presidents who modestly follow the third course are accustomed to choose, not the vast and terrifying problem of history as a whole, but the more manageable yet still impressive subject of what is called in North America their "field". And they then compose a critical report or evaluation of the state of historical studies within this chosen area. There is, as will be instantly appreciated, a good deal to be said for this third course. It combines a high degree of safety with a fair amount of latitude. It is the wise way, the good way, the middle way. It is what, from all Canadian experience, will be instantly known and recognized as the Liberal way. And it is the way which, both gratefully and admiringly, I propose to take tonight. What follows is a brief retrospective review of historical writing about Canada, its chief problems and its main tendencies, during the past quarter-century.

This, surely, is an appropriate moment for such a survey. It is true, of course, that historians are always discovering appropriate moments, always making convenient punctuation marks in the writings of time. Ending epochs, beginning new periods, and delimiting ages of transition are questionable professional habits in which historians are only too apt to over-indulge. And yet there are some very substantial reasons for feeling that, at the present moment, we stand in a particularly favourable position for looking back into the past, and forward into the future, of historical writing about Canada. During the last few years, Canadian historical studies may be said to have come to an end of a fairly well defined stage in their development. It has been a curious, paradoxical period, the stage which has just drawn to its conclusion. During the nearly thirty years which elapsed from the Imperial Conference of 1926 to the accession of the second Queen Elizabeth, Canadian historians did some of their best creative work, and yet, at times, hardly knew, or seemed to care very much, whether they could call their souls their own. They became, all too easily, the too susceptible victims of others' intimidation and their own credulity. On the one hand, history was subjected to a fair amount of pressure from related academic disciplines, and from journalists and politicians. And, on the other, the historians themselves showed an inveterate disposition to lose their own spiritual

independence through the uncritical acceptance of currently fashionable theories of historical change. The intellectual atmosphere of these decades was not particularly favourable for historical studies in general; the currently popular theories of historical change were seriously misleading when applied to Canadian history in particular. And it was not really until the first decade after the war of 1939-45 that these circumstances began markedly to alter and these prepossessions lose their stultifying grip. In the past few years Canadian history has recovered its sense of autonomy, its conviction of the worth of its subject matter, and the value of its own independent approach. It has also — and this is still more important — shaken itself free from the rigid doctrinaire obsessions which dominated Canadian thought in the inter-war years.

In this description of Canadian history's attainment of a new-found maturity, there lies, of course, an obvious paradox. For history is the oldest, the most solidly established of all Canadian studies. It is the most articulate of the humanities, the most productive of the social sciences. As the annual reports of university presidents reveal very clearly, the economists, political scientists, lawyers, literary critics, and art critics of Canadian universities share a marked preference for the historical method. Canadian scholars, in any and every academic discipline, are far more likely to be historians than they are to be theorists or philosophers. Outwardly this might have seemed highly flattering as well as extremely valuable to the professional historians; but, in actual fact, they found it to be almost as much a curse as a blessing. History has dominated the humanities and the social sciences; but its domination was one which the professional historians found, to their cost, that they did not exercise themselves. Everybody — or nearly everybody — was his own historian. Everybody was intimately convinced that he wrote superb history and was prepared shyly to admit the fact at the slightest provocation. Everybody was perfectly ready at all times to instruct the professional historian in the infinitely superior methods by which he could improve his own miserable performance of his task.

This amiable business of hectoring, instructing and supervising historians goes back a very long time indeed. It may be said to have had its beginning in the unhappy tribulations of one of the earliest and best-known of Canadian professional historians. A great teacher, a wise scholar, a writer of learned and gracefully written books, this historian enjoyed, and still enjoys, a very considerable reputation; and it may occasion a start of surprise for some to realize that he spent a good part of his early professional career in fighting manfully for the autonomy of his subject. Yet so, incredibly enough, it was. A colleague of his, the head of a fairly closely related department in the university, claimed, and tried energetically to exercise, some mythical superintendence over the Department of History. And when, inevitably, it proved impossible to make this absurd and impertinent claim good, the would-be superintendent went around the university, chattering with rage behind his bushy beard. The historian, who was a Christian and a gentleman, was distressed and

perplexed by his colleague's exhibition of angry presumption. He no doubt put it down to some private aberration of that person's character. But succeeding generations of historians have discovered that these delusions of grandeur, these infatuated claims of empire, seem to be a regularly recurring phenomenon among the disciplines with which history is most closely associated.

Either some other subject appears to be going to take over history holus-bolus, or else the professors of some other subject are proclaiming, with self-righteous confidence, that history *ought* to be taken over holus-bolus. In the 1920's, when most Canadian nationalists were passing through what might be described as a species of frenzy over the question of Dominion autonomy, it looked for a while as if lawyers and neo-legalists were going to make Canadian history a branch of constitutional law. In the 1930's, when the influence of Harold Innis was at its height and everybody was writing and talking about staple production, it began to seem possible that history would degenerate into a sub-department of Political Economy. Finally, just at the opening of the 1940's, came what can only be regarded as the challenge of that great new discipline, Canadian sociology. It was a resounding, a stentorian challenge. It could in fact be only described with justice as a Defiance. And it irresistibly recalls that other famous Defiance, the Pogram Defiance, as recorded by Charles Dickens in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Martin Chuzzlewit and his servant, Mark Tapley, you will remember, encountered Elijah Pogram during their unhappy travels in the United States. Elijah Pogram was a Member of Congress, "one of the master minds of our country, sir" and he was the author of the Pogram Defiance.

"What is the Pogram Defiance?" asked Martin, thinking, perhaps, it was the sign of a public-house.

"An o-ration, sir," returned his friend.

"Oh! to be sure," cried Martin, "What am I thinking of! It defied—?"

"It defied the world, sir," replied the other gravely. "Defied the world in general to com-pete with our country upon any hook . . ."

Now this was almost exactly what sociology proceeded to do. It defied Canadian history in general to com-pete with Canadian sociology upon any hook. Leading sociologists, in tones of mingled condescension and reprimand, deplored what they referred to as the "limitations of conventional historical method". The real trouble with conventional history, they confidently announced, was that it had in fact no method at all. All that professional historians possessed was a primitive sense of chronology; and all that they could do was to hang their material, like so many hats, coats, and scarves, upon little rows of chronological pegs. They had no ideas; they had no analytical theories; they lacked — and this was the crowning charge of the whole awful indictment — they lacked "conceptual tools". Is it any wonder that the historians grew red with shame and mortification? They were acutely, painfully conscious of the dreadful deficiency which had been imputed to them. They hung their heads miserably. And then by degrees they plucked up sufficient

courage to begin to wonder about the "conceptual tools" of other disciplines. What, they asked themselves, were the much vaunted methods of the sociologists? It certainly did not take them very long, or require very much effort, to find out. The "conceptual tools" of sociology turned out to be a rather small collection of simple implements which looked a little as though they had been turned up by a party of archaeologists investigating a Neolithic campsite.

It was not only other academic disciplines such as law, geography, economics, and sociology which had tried to make off with history. Similar attempts were made by politics and journalism; and it must be conceded that politics and journalism proved to be fairly practised hands at the business of abduction. They were, for one thing, quite closely united and very powerful. For the past half-century, Canadian politics — with the exception of a few brief lapses into Tory bondage — have been Liberal politics; and by a similar and not entirely unrelated process of the survival of the fittest, Canadian journalism began to take on a predominantly Liberal hue. In short order, these Liberal journalists realized that a political party, in order to be respectable, must have a tradition, and that really respectable traditions are created by books, not newspapers. They began to write books. They began to write histories and biographies, essays, and learned articles. Sir John Willison started the pious labour. Dr. John Wesley Dafoe continued it with equal ability and even greater fervour. And it has been carried on to this day by that large company of distinguished men which one can best describe respectfully as Dafoe's journalistic progeny. Today, Dafoe's journalistic progeny are still conspicuous in the Parliamentary Press Gallery: they occupy many of the strategically located seats of the mighty in Canadian journalism. It is a consoling, a fortifying thought that, wherever you are in Canada, you can still and always, through the local daily or a national weekly, hear the "voice of Dafoe" ringing sonorously and authoritatively through the land.

It was in this way that the Liberal Interpretation — or Authorized Version — of Canadian history was begun. Its respectability steadily increased — successive Liberal victories and the personality of Mackenzie King were enough to ensure that. And as it grew in favour with serious-minded Canadian nationalists, others besides Dafoe and his journalists began to have a hand in its elaboration. Historians and political scientists lent their professional talents to the task of enlarging and filling in the Liberal interpretation; and there were not a few like Dr. O. D. Skelton, who wrote the official life of Sir Wilfrid Laurier and subsequently found himself called, by a grateful Canadian people, to the position of Deputy Minister of External Affairs. At first, when these professional scribes of the Authorized Version were called to Ottawa, it was usually to accept a post in the civil service or to become a member of some Royal Commission. But in the meantime the Liberal interpretation grew steadily in authority and dignity; and it finally began to be realized that the task of enlarging and perfecting the Sacred Text was a full-time occupation which required the undivided services of specially designated, specially

dedicated, and particularly pious clerks. A national Liberal shrine, in short, was imperatively necessary. What building could serve more appropriately than Laurier House in Ottawa? National Liberal scribes were required to devote themselves to the service of the Word. Who could be more appropriately chosen than those scholars who had dedicated themselves to the lives of the blessed Liberal saints and martyrs of the past?

It was in this way that the Liberal Interpretation of Canadian history took on something of the awful grandeur of divine revelation. Last Monday, the impregnable rock of this Authorized Version, as Mr. Gladstone would have called it, was suddenly and strangely shaken. But in the past it was Truth; and Truth must be accepted literally, in a becomingly fundamentalist spirit. There was no place in Canada for regrettable evidences of Modernism, or what used to be called the Higher Criticism. If a passage in the Authorized Version was in doubt or in dispute, then occasionally — and rather more frequently of recent years — a member of the Canadian Government, speaking *ex cathedra*, would settle the matter by a final pronouncement. Recently, for example, the Canadian government permitted the people of Canada to become aware of the fact that Sir John Macdonald and the Fathers of Confederation had *not* intended to call Canada the Dominion of Canada or to refer to the central administration as the Dominion government. Here was a most providential addition to our stock of historical knowledge. "Revealed religion," a learned divine once reflected, "furnishes facts to other sciences which those sciences, left to themselves, would never reach." A more beautiful illustration of this truth could scarcely be found than the government's discovery about Canada's title! It is perfectly certain that historical science, left to itself, would never have attained this priceless fact. The truth is that historical science, left to itself, would have quite definitely decided that the Fathers of Confederation *did* intend Canada's title to be the Dominion of Canada. In other words, we were saved from error by the revelations of the Authorized Version; and we have one reason the more for humbly contrasting our own poor, puny human intelligence with the god-like wisdom of the Canadian government.

History — human history, that is, as written by professional historians — has thus led a rather embarrassed existence for some time. It has been corrected, reprimanded, intimidated, overawed, and silenced. The professors of the other social sciences have questioned the value of history's method; the scribes of the Liberal Interpretation have shattered history's poor findings with devastating revelations from the Authorized Version. Geographers, lawyers, political scientists, economists, newspapermen, civil servants, and Liberal statesmen have all tried energetically to abduct Canadian history to a lifetime of servitude in their own particular salt-mines. These repeated and continued tribulations would have been bad enough in all conscience, even if they had stood alone. But, most unfortunately, they were only a part of the ordeal which history was called upon to endure. The pressure from outside was extremely

serious; but perhaps its worst effect was that it helped to foster and strengthen certain basic misapprehensions and delusions among the historians themselves. At any rate, they forgot their own proper business, which was the careful and imaginative study of the facts of Canadian history. Instead they accepted, for historical purposes, the two highly fashionable political theories which dominated the thought of the inter-war and war years.

Each of these two political theories provided their believers with a satisfactory general view of world affairs at the time. They were general political philosophies, adaptable for most occasions and nearly all purposes. But it is highly significant that they were both based fundamentally upon quite definite theories of historical change. Both these theories of historical change were revolutionary theories, in the sense that they had had their origins in revolutionary programmes and had been confirmed by revolutionary experience. Both also were deterministic, materialistic, and anti-intellectual theories — a combination of qualities which effectively ensured them popularity in the inter-war years. And finally — and this may be perhaps the most significant point of comparison — each theory had become the official doctrine, or the widely accepted belief, of one of the two greatest continental states of modern times. They were, in short, very much alike in many ways. Yet there was one essential point of difference. The one theory found the origin of historical change in economic organization; the other discovered it in physical environment. The first was, of course, the Marxian doctrine of the class struggle; the second was that characteristic expression of the American Revolution and American western expansion, the Frontier Theory.

The popularity of the Marxian economic interpretation of history is one of the most interesting features of the 1930's and early 1940's. It supplies an excellent example of how the claims of the Canadian social scientists and the circumstances of Canadian politics combined to induce the historians to accept a doctrine which was alien to their experience and unremunerative for their purposes. Once again, they were the victims of superior propaganda. Everything about them seemed to emphasize the primacy of economic phenomena. On the one hand, were Innis and his disciples, whose reconstruction of Canadian economic history was soon to be given impressive popular expression in the first, historical volume of the *Report of the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations*. On the other hand was the depression, and the economic and social distress which it had caused, and the political protest movements which it had helped to inspire. Of course, most of the professional economists — and especially Innis — refused to accept the simplified Marxian version of historical determinism which the circumstances of the moment made so popular; but these timid academic scruples did not deter those party historians, party economists, and party political scientists who made up that superbly confident body, the League for Social Reconstruction, and who were recognized respectfully at the time as the "brains trust" of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. The members of the "brains trust" knew what was wrong with the

Canadian economy. They knew what was the mainspring of Canadian development. And it was even more necessary for them than for other party theorists to make off with Canadian history in a hurry. They confronted the majestic orthodoxy of the Authorized Liberal Version. Self-respect imperatively required them to obtain a rival interpretation. And what could be more highly satisfactory than the Marxian doctrine of the class struggle?

There were, however, difficulties — grave difficulties, it turned out — in applying the great historical truth of the class struggle to Canadian conditions. On closer inspection — though, indeed, the inspection was never particularly close — it began to appear that Canadian history was a sadly imperfect vehicle for the exemplification of the Marxian verities. Canadian history — to put it bluntly — was so regrettably, so deplorably un-European! In Europe, the members of the C.C.F. brains trust agreed, political parties divided in a respectable, proper Marxian fashion, according to Class; and consequently English and European party battles were always charged with deep significance. English party battles were battles over principles; and principles were those political ideas — and only those political ideas — which had had a respectable parentage in the feudal struggles or seventeenth and eighteenth century revolutions in Europe. Judged by these exacting standards, Canadian history seemed to make a very poor showing. Canadians were imperfectly class conscious, they had had no revolution, and they kept getting politically excited about all the wrong things. Canadian history, in short, was disappointing. The members of the C.C.F. brains trust let it be known that they could not entirely approve of Canadian history. They kept on trying bravely, of course, to inject a little real Marxian meaning into what they regarded as the empty sound and fury of Canadian affairs. They insisted perseveringly that the real work of the Fathers of Confederation had been to establish an economic empire for the *entrepreneurs* of Montreal, that the concentration of wealth and power within this empire was rapidly producing a class structure similar to that of Europe, and that the depression of the 1930's was in fact a crisis of capitalism which would likely end in a destructive class struggle.

Blinding flashes of insight such as these could scarcely fail of their effect. And yet it must be confessed that the little group of serious socialist thinkers of the 1930's and 1940's did not have a very profound impression upon Canadian historiography. The class struggle was attractive as an explanation of historical change; but, on the whole, it was decidedly less attractive than the Frontier thesis. For the Frontier thesis was an environmental interpretation and environmental interpretations of almost anything have an irresistible appeal to North Americans. North Americans are fascinated by geography — they have so much of it. They regard the vast stretches of their continent with all the infinitely complacent satisfaction of a Buddha contemplating the broad expanse of his belly. The size, the self-sufficiency, the power of North America, and North America's significant isolation from the rest of the world, have all helped to create in

the minds of its inhabitants, and particularly among the citizens of the United States, a very emphatic and a very exclusive sense of identity. The continent had, in fact, created its own distinctive world-view, continentalism. Obviously continentalism would have to have a theory of historical change as its basis; and obviously also this theory would have to prove the truth of North America's intellectual and spiritual autonomy and North America's independent cultural creativity. This is precisely what the Frontier thesis, as established by the American historian, Frederick Jackson Turner and his disciples, succeeded in doing. Turner, responding instinctively to this deep-seated North American need, fixed upon the movement of settlement across the continent as the most important fact in its history. The frontier, "the hither edge of free land," was "the greatest formative influence" in the development of America. Out of the frontier had come American individualism, freedom, egalitarianism, adaptability, vigour, and idealism. The frontier had created the institutions, convictions, and habits which were most characteristic of America. Thus the source of creative inspiration and action was found not at the centre, but at the periphery, of western culture; and the older view that the progress of its civilization had been an outward movement from an original source, was exactly reversed.

For obvious reasons, the Frontier thesis received a vociferously cordial reception in the United States. The theory then crossed the border, a somewhat delayed import, into Canada, where the circumstances of the 1930's and early 1940's combined to ensure the rapid growth of its popularity. Once again, as in the case of the Marxian doctrine of the class struggle, it was the union of an intellectual movement with a peculiarly appropriate set of political circumstances which made the success of the Frontier thesis. On the one hand were Turner and his American disciples, who, in the respectful eyes of colonially minded Canadians, were invested with the same majestic doctrinal authority which clothed European socialists and British Labour party theorists. On the other hand were the members of the Canadian government who, particularly in the period after 1935, were making those preliminary cordial approaches to the United States which formed the prelude to the astounding concessions of the summer of 1940. In that August of 1940, the Canadian government took two supremely important North American actions. It benevolently accepted, in the first place, a ninety-nine year American military leasehold in the island which the Fathers of Confederation had always hoped would be a province of Canada, and which, at the moment, was Canada's chief strategic outpost. In the second place, the Canadian government, acting apparently on the assumption that mere geographic propinquity meant absolute and eternal identity of interest, agreed to establish, with the United States, a Permanent Joint Board on Defence for North America. Canada, like a dutiful child that has learned to like what its parents think good for it, had actually accepted American continentalism. It had even been sold the idea of North American community fellowship, which may be said to be the Rotarian version of Manifest Destiny. North America was that psychologist's ideal — a

great, big, happy family, in which all the members were perfectly adjusted. It was a gigantic international Elks convention where all the delegates went around hand-shaking and back-slapping and exuding cordiality at every pore.

In these inspiring circumstances, Canadian historians found it easy to convince themselves of the ineffable wisdom of the Frontier thesis. In North America, we were, thank God, just folks; and here was a simple, straightforward, homespun, honest-to-gosh theory, which glorified the backwoods and the frontier and extolled the independent creative power of rugged simplicity.

Here surely was God's truth for God's continent. And yet — it was very sad — when one actually got down to the business of applying this continental revelation to the facts of Canadian history, painful difficulties were immediately encountered. Once again, as in the case of the Marxian doctrine of the class struggle, Canadian history seemed to be a curiously imperfect vehicle for the exemplification of historical truth. In Canada the frontier had not advanced in that free, unspoilt, untutored fashion in which it ought to have done, according to Turner. Its onward creative progress had been evidently modified by all sorts of extraneous and unnatural things such as railways, efficient police, governmental supervision, both provincial and federal. The western disturbances of 1869-70 and 1885 turned out to be decidedly unsatisfactory illustrations of frontier resistance; and the Upper Canadian rebellion of 1837 was simply deplorable, for the rebels had come, not from the frontier, but from the older settled parts of the province, while the real frontiersmen, who evidently lacked the benefit of Dr. Turner's direction in their true historical role, were unaccountably discovered marching in to Toronto to defend the cause of law and order. These, certainly, were disheartening difficulties. Yet the believers in the Frontier thesis, like the supporters of the Marxian doctrine of the class struggle, nobly persevered. They kept insisting that Canadian democracy was "forest-born", that all sound, progressive, democratic forces in the Canadian community were the beneficent products of the backwoods and the prairie, and that all dynamic, free-born, forward-looking elements in Canadian politics had had their origin on the frontier.

Yet this did not by any means exhaust the uses to which the Frontier thesis and the doctrine of the class struggle were put by Canadian historians and political scientists. The popularity of the two theories was only partly shown in the interpretation of domestic Canadian history; it was equally well revealed in writings on Canadian external relations. Once again, the intellectual supply offered by the two theories happened exactly to coincide with the intellectual demands of Canadian politics in their first great attack upon the problems of foreign policy. The 1920's and 1930's were the decades, above all others, in which Canadian national policy, and its supporters and interpreters, required a simple-minded, anti-imperialist doctrine which could be used as a club against Western Europe in general and West-European and British imperialism in particular. Mackenzie King was revolutionizing the Commonwealth through the implem-

entation of Dominion autonomy; Dr. O. D. Skelton and the newly established Department of External Affairs were systematically reducing our commitments and limiting our connections with Europe and the League of Nations; and Canada, for what was really the first time in its history, was luxuriating to the full in that sense of physical and spiritual isolation from the rest of the world, that moral superiority to the unfortunate remainder of mankind, which is one of the chief characteristics of North American continentalism.

In these circumstances, the Frontier thesis and the doctrine of the class struggle came pat to the purpose of Canadian historians and historical publicists. Both Marxism and North American continentalism were obviously, in their different ideological ways, profoundly hostile to Western Europe; and both, moreover, were professedly anti-imperialist systems. In retrospect, and from the vantage-point — if, indeed, it can be called a vantage-point — of our present position, we can bitterly appreciate the horrible irony of these fraudulent anti-imperialist claims. We can realize now — what, if we had been passable historians, we ought to have realized long before — that both Marxism and North American continentalism are essentially revolutionary systems; that revolutionary systems rest on the assumption of the discovery of political truth valid for all countries and all ages; and that revolutionary states, either in the short or the long run, are propagandist, missionary, and imperialistic. Finally, it ought to have been obvious, particularly to Canadians, that the planting of these traditional revolutionary impulses in two nations of such enormous continental extent, threatened even graver dangers for the future. Canadians ought to have been aware of the implications of the mystical North American obsession with geography, with space, with the irresistible onward march of the frontier across vast expanses. They could possibly have foreseen the ultimate consequences of the union of the idea of manifest destiny of God's chosen people with the idea of territorial expansion on a continental scale. They might even have anticipated that, once the period of glutted continental isolation was finished, the mastodon-like battle between the continents would begin.

Yet, in fact, the Canadian intellectuals of the 1920's and 1930's remained complacently oblivious to all or most of this. In their imitative colonial fashion, they took over the Marxist and American conception of European and British imperialism; and without scarcely even bothering to make a perfunctory adjustment or two, they clapped it on to the story of the achievement of Canadian autonomy inside the British Empire-Commonwealth. It was, of course, an extraordinarily bad fit. The trouble which the Canadians had had in wearing these mass-produced, machine-made garments from the Marxian and American ideological factories was enormously increased when they tried to change from home attire to going-abroad costumes. The simple truth was that the revolutionary tradition was completely incompatible with Canada's historic position in the external world. Canada had never broken with Europe; Canada had never identified herself solely with the Western Hemisphere. British North

America had, in fact, consciously stood aloof from the familiar, commonplace western revolutionary movement, which had been originated by the United States, and faithfully copied by every duodecimo South American republic. British North America had sought to achieve a distinct and separate political existence in the Western Hemisphere; she had tried to preserve her identity against the levelling, standardizing impact of American continentalism; and, to a very large extent, the measure of her success could be attributed to the maintenance of her vital connection with Europe. It was British military and diplomatic support which ensured the survival of Canada in a continent which otherwise would have become the prey of Manifest Destiny. For Canada, the imperial connection was not a parent-and-child relationship which ended in an appalling row, but an adult partnership which was prolonged more at the instance of the junior than of the senior partner.

How wrong we were! How imitative, how gullible, how truly colonially-minded! Only now has it become possible for us to realize the enormous extent of our deception. The war and the twelve years which have elapsed since its conclusion have ended our dreams and given us instead a continuous existence of terrible reality; and, in all this grim period, there has been no disillusionment greater than the world-wide disillusionment in the twin revolutionary doctrines of Marxism and North American continentalism. The supposedly anti-imperialist ideas, by which Canadians complacently believed they could offset the weight of British domination, have become themselves the basis of new imperial systems, as powerful as any since the beginnings of western civilization and potentially far more dangerous; and the abortive revolution in Hungary and the mass riots in Formosa have revealed how hated or disliked these new imperialisms have become even in the states which they are said to maintain and among peoples whom they are supposed to benefit. Everywhere the disenchantment has been shattering; but it is safe to say that no people were less prepared than the Canadians to stand the shock of the revelations of the last ten years. It was not simply, as George Ferguson said in an illuminating paper given a year ago at the annual meeting of the Political Science Association, that we were fighting modern battles with the broken-down ideas of the day before yesterday. Of course we were doing that. We were trying to stand up to the Russians and the trigger-happy strategists down in the Pentagon Building with notions which would have been relatively up-to-date at the time of the colonial secretaryship of Joseph Chamberlain. Yet it was not the rusty antiquity of this mental armour that was its chief defect. Its chief defect was that it was irrelevant to our circumstances, alien to our tradition, and useless for our fundamental purposes.

For all this the Canadian historians, like the other intellectuals and pseudo-intellectuals of the inter-war generation, must bear their share of the blame. They played their part in letting the Canadian people down. They did their little bit in producing that state of silenced, frightened bewilderment in which it seems impossible to do anything but accept what Mr. Pearson calls, with happy originality,

the American leadership of the free world. The Canadian historians, if they had stuck firmly to their real job, might have given their countrymen some valuable positive direction in the difficult business of being Canadian in a time of global conflict. But, instead, they let themselves be lectured and intimidated by people who claimed to know what history was all about. They looked on tamely — they even applauded — while other people, social scientists, publicists, journalists, outriders for this or that political party, made off with Canadian history; and, worst of all, they let themselves be persuaded, by the sales-talks of two smart international advertising agencies, into purchasing a couple of suits of imported intellectual reach-me-downs which were as ill-fitting as they were fashionable. They did all this, and for years we have been suffering the consequences. Our tribulations are not over. All we can say, is that the delusions which partly created them are gone, and that the authors of the delusions are no longer unquestioned oracles. A definite epoch in the history of Canadian history has come to an end. A new generation of professional historians has arisen, is arising; and although the character of their work has not yet definitely declared itself, it can be predicted with some confidence that they will have less deference for imported theories of historical change and more respect for the manifold facts of Canadian experience.