



# The Enlightenment



A Mini-Journal of the Humanist Association of London and Area  
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## O CANADA!

*By Goldwin Emerson*

I feel fortunate to be a Canadian citizen. Many more immigrants apply to come to Canada than we currently accept although we annually admit more than 200,000 people. According to world-wide statistics on new births, the chances of a new born baby being Canadian are less than one in approximately 205 births. So statistically, to be born a Canadian citizen is a little like winning a lottery. For a new-born baby it is a matter of good fortune.

In Canada we enjoy a reasonably excellent health care system: this despite the fact that there are occasionally rather long waiting times for some medical procedures. We do, however, have competent medical practitioners and nurses who are capable of offering us excellent health care.

We live in a democracy with free speech, freedom of religious choice, or secular choice, and generally speaking, separation of church and state as well as freedom of political choice. We presently have "first past the post" elections although other options are being explored such as "proportional representation" which is now practiced in many European countries. Generally speaking, Canadians have relatively short election campaigns compared to our neighbours to the south. For many Canadians this is a welcome approach.

We are fortunate to have many natural resources. Canada is a very large country, second in size only to Russia. We have the largest inland fresh water reserves and more inland lakes than other countries. With our large quantity of fresh water in the Great Lakes, Canada has approximately one fifth of the total fresh water supply world-wide. I hope that environmentalists and scientists are able to keep our Great Lakes water fresh and free from the blue-green algae blooms which form from excesses of phosphorous in some areas of the Great Lakes during our warm summer months.

Compared to our nearest neighbour we are relatively unprejudiced in our acceptance of the colour of one's skin whereas in USA blacks and whites are often fearful and wary of each other. Easy access to gun ownership in the United States along with racial unrest exacerbates the danger of citizens being shot. While we are perhaps less racially prejudiced in Canada we need to be aware that historically, our native citizens, particularly indigenous women and girls have too often been abused or murdered.

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## President's Remarks

This coming October 18, HALA will be hosting another public event at the Wolf Performance Hall in downtown London. For a number of years now, we have been putting on these events (which are co-sponsored by the London Public Library), bringing in guest speakers on a range of Humanism-related topics. These events are an opportunity to increase public awareness about Humanism and to reach a broader audience from the London community. This year, our speaker will be Raheel Raza, a well-known Pakistani-Canadian author and public speaker. While remaining a practising (albeit very liberal) Muslim, she is very critical of Islamic extremism and is courageously seeking to bring about reform in Islam. Through her writings, documentary videos, and speeches, she has increased public awareness of negative aspects of Islam, including the subjugation and abuse of women, honour killings, suppression of human rights, and anti-western extremism. The title of her talk is "How Muslims are Embracing the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."

In deciding to invite this speaker, the HALA board members are fully aware that there is a great deal of controversy today over how non-Muslims should respond to those aspects of Islam which conflict with our western democratic values. On one side, there are those who speak out forcefully against the perceived evils of Islam, push for a ban on burkas in public places, and seek to restrict Muslim immigration and screen them for non-Canadian values. On the other side are those who argue that the vast majority of Muslims are peaceful and non-violent, that extremist groups like ISIS are not representative of Islam, and that we should show tolerance and respect for their culture in our multicultural society. These folks fear that public criticism of Islam will lead to "Islamophobia" in the form of prejudice, discrimination, and even a backlash of anti-Muslim violence, as we saw recently in Quebec City and London, England. However, these views are criticized by those holding the opposing position, as excessive forms of "political correctness" which are naïvely oblivious to the potential dangers of Islam for our western civilization. And so the debate rages on.

We also recognize that Humanists, including many of our own members, are divided on these issues, and there was much debate among the board members about the wisdom of inviting someone to speak on such a contentious topic. We decided, however, that we shouldn't shy away from controversy, and instead we should look for a reasonable middle ground between these two polarized positions, acknowledging the arguments of both sides. Muslims are a growing segment of our population, and there are worrisome aspects of Islam that we as a society need to deal with. While seeking to avoid inflaming anti-Muslim bigotry, we need to find a way to engage in rational discussion about the culture and religion of Islam and our response to it. We have also communicated to Raheel Raza our concerns about the potential for polarization, and she has assured us that she will give a balanced presentation, focusing on her own experiences as a liberal Muslim woman seeking to bring reform to Islam. We are therefore very hopeful that this event will help to bring people together and foster rational discussion, consistent with our Humanist principles.

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We are lucky to have relatively clean energy sources such as natural gas and hydro power as well as nuclear energy. Yet, we live in a sparsely populated country where the weather is colder than in most developed countries and transportation and energy costs relative to our population tend to be more costly.

In Canada we have had a good history of acting as peacemakers in many parts of the world since World War II. Nonetheless, membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as well as respect for the efforts of the United Nations sometimes has put Canada under uncomfortable military obligations. The tactics of modern war are now technologically demanding and costly. It will be difficult for Canada to be equipped with the kind of ships and planes needed in modern warfare and in effective modern peace-keeping.

Canada has magnificent scenery from coast to coast. Fortunately, like many readers of this column, I have had the opportunity to admire Canada's natural beauty from the exciting experience of visiting Peggy's Cove on the eastern shores to the peaceful tranquility of Cathedral Groves, Vancouver Island, British Columbia on our western coast. When one visits the Prairie Provinces, Yukon, or our Northern Territories, we have an opportunity to appreciate the vastness of Canada and the beauty of our natural flora and fauna.

Canadians are known for their kindness and courtesy to each other. When we visit other parts of the world, Canadians are warmly welcomed and treated with respect. I am proud to wear a maple leaf lapel pin or a Canadian flag because it often leads to friendly acceptance and interesting conversations when travelling abroad.

Our athletes have done well in the recent Olympics in Rio. On July 1, 2017 Canadians celebrated our one hundred fiftieth birthday. It is my hope that fellow Canadians will share this event with the pride and happiness this occasion deserves. We are fortunate to be Canadians.

**Editor's note.** Yes! Two articles on Canadian patriotism in successive issues of the *Enlightenment*. We feel this is fully justified during Canada's 150 year celebrations. Two more related articles are printed below.

## **We can say "sesquicentennial." But can we say "values"?**

*An Editorial in the Spring 2017 Humanist Perspectives\* by Editor Madeline Weld*

2017 is a milestone anniversary for both Canada and Humanist Perspectives. Canada turns 150 years old on July 1<sup>st</sup>. Humanist Perspectives (once known as Humanist in Canada), was created in the year of Canada's centennial, and turns 50 with this, its 200<sup>th</sup> issue. Such anniversaries invite reflection upon who we are and where we are going.

For Canada, the debate during the past few years has sometimes been intense. Following Stephen Harper's defeat by Justin Trudeau in the October, 2015, election, the Conservative Party of Canada has been undergoing a drawn-out leadership race, whose outcome we will know in May. One candidate, Kellie Leitch, stirred up a great deal of controversy, even riling most of her fellow leadership candidates as well as interim Conservative leader Rona Ambrose, for proposing to screen all immigrants and refugees for "anti-Canadian values." Apparently even proposing such an idea was anti-Canadian. Is that because Canada has no values, or because we have no right to expect that immigrants who will live among us and continue to shape our country should share them? Despite the opprobrium, Kellie Leitch seems to have been on to something. A Forum Research Inc. poll conducted days

after Leitch's controversial remarks and released in September, 2016, no doubt dismayed Torstar, publisher of the very liberal Toronto Star, which commissioned the poll: 67% of those polled thought potential immigrants who hold anti-Canadian values should not be allowed to come to Canada.

Our new Prime Minister, however, seems to be a little less clear on the subject of values. Following his election win, he declared Canada to be the first post-national country and said that there "is no core identity, no mainstream in Canada." That would imply no common values. Yet despite our supposed lack of core identity and mainstream, he claimed that "There are shared values – openness, respect, compassion, willingness to work hard, to be there for each other, to search for equality and justice." Wonderful! So we can have it both ways – no mainstream or core identity but shared values? But what if someone's idea of equality and justice is very different from my own? A person who supports Islamic sharia law, for example, will have a very different interpretation of "equality and justice" than I do. Trudeau may have noticed that not everyone in what might be called "post-national" Europe is happy with the situation, as the Brexit result – with the UK opting to leave the European Union – revealed. The current turmoil in Europe shows that values do matter – and that conflicts result when newcomers refuse to integrate into the mainstream (yes, there is one, Mr. Trudeau!).

That others understand that there is a mainstream vulnerable to be changed is clear from the Muslim Brotherhood's Explanatory Memorandum, which explains that organization's objective: "The Ikhwan [Muslim Brotherhood] must understand that their work in America is a kind of grand Jihad in eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within and 'sabotaging' its miserable house by their hands and the hands of the believers so that it is eliminated and God's religion is made victorious over all other religions."

While terrorism is a useful tool for the grand Jihad, the primary method to reset our values is through the infiltration of our institutions and wearing down resistance to Muslim demands. As Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, put it (and he might have been speaking of almost any Western country): "We will win because Americans don't realize... we do not need to defeat you militarily; we only need to fight long enough for you to defeat yourself by quitting. ... Eventually, America will expose her neck for us to slaughter." All Western countries, deracinating their young from their own culture in atonement for the sins of racism and colonialism, de-emphasizing their own values (there's that word again) while embracing an exuberant multiculturalism regardless of the societal upheavals it brings about, are now exposing their necks to slaughter. This will continue, unless we reconnect with our identity and our values.

And what about our humanist values? Sophie Dulesh's article in this issue provides a condensed history of the evolution of rationalist thought. She notes that enlightenments arose among ancient cultures but that there was backpedaling or a recoil from those values. Sophie suggests that it seems to be happening within our civilization right now. I agree. Take, for example, free speech, a cornerstone of the enlightenment. It is under threat these days, with speakers who are deemed offensive being shouted down, sometimes with threats or violence. Or they are "deplatformed" through pressure on venues to cancel events. And the censorship is not coming from the "Right," but from that hotbed of "liberalism," university campuses.

Tellingly, it is more often the "Right" than the "Left" that raises its voice against the stealth infringements of our freedoms. One such attempt is Motion M-103 (Systemic Racism and Religious Discrimination), tabled by Liberal MP Iqra Khalid and passed by the House of Commons on March 23, thanks to the Liberal majority. Motion M-103 calls upon the government to "recognize the need to quell the increasing public climate of

hate and fear,” “condemn Islamophobia and all forms of systemic racism...,” and calls for the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to collect data and report to the House within 240 calendar days. Motion M-103 is based on faulty premises, does not define “Islamophobia” and looks very much like an attempt to implement the United Nations’ Resolution 16/18 put forward by the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation, allegedly to combat intolerance and incitement to violence based on religion, but in reality an attempt to silence criticism of Islam. (The OIC maintains a deafening silence on the overt discrimination against non-Muslims in Muslim countries, and atrocities committed against them.) As with much subversive activity, both Resolution 16/18 and Motion M-103 use the vehicle of human rights to clamp down on the right to free speech.

Progress is not inevitable. There is no guarantee that we will pass on the freedoms that we have inherited. The devastation wrought by National Socialism seems to have rendered our society incapable of recognizing a totalitarian threat with a different face from a different culture. Almost all Western countries have shown a willingness to accommodate and appease, in the name of multiculturalism and inclusiveness, newcomers whose values conflict with our own. Our freedoms are far more endangered by our inattention to the stealthy subversion of our institutions than by terror attacks or military threats. Yes, at 150, Canada has much to celebrate, but we must recognize that we face serious challenges.

In this year, 2017, Humanist Perspectives celebrates half a century of humanism helping to shape our society’s evolution, from abortion rights to the right to die, to eliminating prayer from city council meetings, women’s rights, gay rights, atheists’ rights and more. Humanists will have their work cut out for them in what are likely to be turbulent times ahead. If we want to continue to be able to say what we want to say for the next 50 years, there is one right we must never support: the right to be protected from offensive speech.

**Editor’s note.** The above editorial, printed with permission of Madeline Weld, editor of *Humanist Perspectives*, may seem somewhat harsh, but we cannot afford to minimize the very real threats of radical Islamic terrorists. We cannot pussyfoot around, but must call it like it is in order to prevent erosion of our cherished Canadian values. Our current federal government, I believe, is correct when it comes to matters such as tolerance toward the LBGQTQ community and approval of a woman’s right to choose, but have perhaps been too reluctant to criticize the radical factions of Islam in fear of offending moderate Muslims. Recent proposed legislation to increase security and intelligence gathering is a step in the right direction, but we must not minimize the threat of ISIS inspired individuals that are willing to inflict jihad in Canada. Two Canadian soldiers have already been killed and a youth from Strathroy attempted to set off a bomb in London’s Citi-centre. So, even we in London are not immune! And we must not forget that there was an attempt, which fortunately failed, to establish Sharia law in Ontario, and there was a recent case of honour killing in a Montreal Muslim family. Yes, killing in the name of Islam is present in Canada. On the other hand we must also recognize that six Muslims were killed and another 19 injured in a Quebec City mosque in January, allegedly by a young Canadian who had been radicalized by anti-Muslim rhetoric. We therefore need to find a way of dealing with the threat of Muslim extremism while also reaching out to more moderate Muslims and avoiding stirring up anti-Muslim bigotry and violence (DAH).

\*Humanist Perspectives is a quarterly magazine published by Canadian Humanist Publications and I suggest every Canadian humanist should seriously consider being a subscriber. It is only \$25.00 per year. To subscribe, send a cheque for \$25.00 to Canadian Humanist Publications, PO Box 3769 Stn. C, Ottawa ON K1Y 4J8 giving your name and full address.

## Much Has Changed Since Our Centennial

Yes indeed! Much has changed since our first one hundred years was celebrated in 1967. At that time, I was fortunate to be living in the exciting cosmopolitan city of Montreal, home of Expo '67. On many weekends, I attended this extravaganza with my family, visiting the many pavilions from countries all over the world, as well as being awed by the magnificent site constructed on islands in the St. Lawrence River.

We had much to celebrate. Since its beginning, Canada became home to immigrants, mainly from Europe, beginning with English, Scottish and French. Adding to this mixture over the years were people from Ireland, Scandinavia, Italy, Ukraine, Russia, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Greece, and others. All of these people brought their enriching culture and adopted Canadian customs and values. The fact that they were mainly Caucasian and Christian made assimilation relatively easy, and Canada became a mosaic of cultures rather than the melting pot ascribed to the United States. On the west coast, Oriental peoples from Japan and China became part of the mosaic. And the people in the black minority were not segregated as was formerly the case in the U.S.

Another reason to celebrate was Canada's thriving prosperous economy. After WW II, Canadian citizens became upwardly mobile as living standards improved and real wages kept increasing as a growing middle-class evolved. This period is sometimes referred to as the "golden years."

But all was not sweetness and light. Unfortunately, indigenous people, the original settlers of Canada, did not share equally in the prosperity, and the religious run residential schools are a black mark on our history, as is the forced internment of Japanese Canadians during WW II. And from time to time there were rumblings of antisemitism as well as rumbles of separatism in Quebec.

Now fast forward fifty years to 2017, and much has changed. It can be argued, I believe, that in general Canadians are not as well off as they were in 1967. Real wages have not increased since the 1980s and the middle-class is shrinking. A significant number of university graduates cannot find suitable employment and workers are losing jobs to robots. While developments in the cyber world have been nothing less than spectacular, with computers, the internet, the iPhone and social media, this seems to have exacerbated problems rather than solving them. How do we find employment for the work force in this new digital era? Obviously, much retraining will have to be done.

On a positive note, the Quebec separatist movement appears to be set aside, at least for the time being, and Jews are well integrated into society. Our country is becoming more secular as religiosity decreases. On a negative note, the indigenous problem has if anything gotten worse. Housing is deplorable on some reserves and potable water is sometimes lacking. And suicides among indigenous youth are increasing. Solutions seem evasive.

Finally, our immigrants are no longer coming mainly from Europe. Most are now coming from Islamic countries, many being refugees, and they are bringing an unfamiliar culture with them. Some aspects are undesirable such as Sharia law and the culture of honour. How do we deal with this? Perhaps Raheel Raza will have some answers in her talk at the Wolf Performance Hall on October 18. Her presentation is entitled "How Muslims are Embracing the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."

Yes, Canada has changed in fifty years. Is it better or worse? It is up to each Canadian to decide! (DAH).