

Rejoinder to "A Note on 'Hartz-Horowitz at Twenty': The Case of French Canada"

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A rejoinder to a rejoinder must be brief, even if the issues it discusses are complex. Nelson Wiseman's rejoinder to my article on Hartz and Horowitz¹ raises no important questions about my presentation of Hartzian theory, so I shall concentrate on his objections to my interpretation of French-Canadian history.

Hartzian theory provides an explanation for the presence or absence of socialism in "fragment societies." The failure of socialism to develop in the United States is explained by the absence of feudalism from the American fragment. The failure of socialism to develop in French Canada before the Quiet Revolution is explained, not by the absence of feudalism (French Canada is said to be a feudal fragment), but by the absence of liberalism, the other necessary ingredient in the Hartzian dialectic. Wiseman claims that there was "a sudden influx of liberal ideas in the mid-twentieth century," and shortly afterwards, as a result, "the seeds of socialism sprouted." The Hartzian schema is "particularly illuminating," he concludes, when applied to French Canada.

Did French Canada open to the outside world and did liberalism appear there only with the Quiet Revolution? Admittedly, many things changed in Quebec in the 1960s and, admittedly, both "opening" and "liberalism" are hard to define. The terms mean different things in different contexts. Nonetheless, I would argue that French Canada was more clearly opening to "the outside world" at the end of 1759 than at the end of 1959. And even if, for the sake of the argument, we assume that French Canada was simply "feudal" before 1759, it had clearly

1 Nelson Wiseman, "A Note on 'Hartz-Horowitz at Twenty': The Case of French Canada," this JOURNAL 21 (1988), 795-806; H. D. Forbes, "Hartz-Horowitz at Twenty: Nationalism, Toryism and Socialism in Canada and the United States," this JOURNAL 20 (1987), 287-315.

acquired important elements of liberalism by the 1830s, as French-Canadian politicians had become very skilled in the rhetoric and devices of British liberal constitutionalism. Was this a mere adaptation to circumstances? Liberal camouflage for “feudal” purposes, as Lord Durham argued? Perhaps, though Durham is not usually regarded as a reliable guide to the thinking of the Patriotes, and Garneau would be surprised to see himself cited as a champion of feudal values. A generation later, in the heyday of the *rouges*, French-Canadian liberalism was clearly more passionate and doctrinaire. Merely a red streak on a blue canvas? Perhaps, though elsewhere a streak seems to be enough to get the Hartzian dialectic going. By 1896, when Laurier won a great victory at the head of the Liberal party against the bitter opposition of Quebec’s most vocal feudalists, the Catholic clergy, liberalism seems to have gained very considerable popular support. Puerile confusion between big “L” and small “l” liberalism? Perhaps. In the decades before and after the First World War, the most thoughtful, eloquent and influential advocate of French-Canadian nationalism, Henri Bourassa, was “a loyal son of the Church and a temperamental conservative,” but also a liberal. In short, I think there was enough liberalism in French-Canadian political culture by the 1930s to combine with its for-the-sake-of-the-argument feudalism to make Quebec (from a Hartzian perspective) an especially rich territory for socialism—richer, at any rate, than Saskatchewan.²

Did socialism develop in Quebec in the 1960s and 1970s? Again, yes and no. The NDP made no headway there during those years, but various small socialist parties appeared. They won tiny fractions of the vote. They can be dismissed as easily as the small socialist parties that have been part of the American political scene for the past century, and Wiseman does not pay them much attention. He rests his case on the socialism of the Parti québécois. There is really no refuting his brief description of that party, but it certainly leaves a lot out.³ To paraphrase Hartz, there were socialists in the Parti québécois, but when we abstract the nationalist elements from it, it shrinks in force.

The failure of the Hartzian schema to throw much light on the fortunes of socialism in Quebec is a happy (or embarrassing) accident, not its most serious shortcoming. More serious is its distortion of French-Canadian political thought. Hartz treats French Canada as a fragment—specifically, a *feudal* fragment. By a “fragment” Hartz

2 This difficulty can be evaded by saying that Quebec was a “rural society” until 1960, but it was not—as Wiseman concedes when he says that “some of the material conditions necessary for the rise of socialist ideology were being created even before the Quiet Revolution.” For some statistics, see Kenneth McRoberts, *Quebec: Social Change and Political Crisis* (3rd ed.; Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), 72-73.

3 For a detailed description and a contrary conclusion, see McRoberts, *Quebec*, chaps. 7-10.

means, not just a society that is an offshoot or colony of another society, but one whose political thinking is confined within the narrow bounds of a single basic outlook, orientation to politics or ideological disposition—feudalism, liberalism or socialism. Thus the United States is said to be a *liberal* fragment: until about 1945, Americans cannot think feudal or socialist thoughts, except to reject them. The pattern Hartz abstracted from American history, ignoring a few details (for example, the Pilgrim Fathers and Henry George), has since been applied to French Canada, changing only the ideological rut. The French Canadians are said to be stuck in feudalism (until the outside world crashes in on them after 1945).

This seems to me to be a singularly unconvincing, indeed tendentious, description of French-Canadian political thought. To be sure, any simplification will ignore some details, but the “details” ignored here are what most historians consider the main events; for example, the growth of liberal nationalism in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the winning of responsible government and the establishment of federal institutions between 1840 and 1867, and then the century-long conflict between liberalism and ultramontaniam which was most intense around 1870, but which was not resolved until a generation ago.

Of course French Canada was not simply a *liberal* fragment. Only Hartzians are required to jump from the frying pan into the fire: others are permitted to recognize complexities and to use more than one word to sum up the political thinking of a society “caught in political institutions hostile to its bent of mind.” My main point was that French Canada is an obvious example of a fragment (an offshoot) that was not a fragment (a society open to only one basic ideology). But if I were allowed to use only one word to describe what is most noteworthy or distinctive about French Canada’s political tradition, the word I would choose is *Catholic*, not *feudal*. I think most historians would support my choice. That is what I was trying to say, though perhaps too briefly, in the section of my article that dealt with French Canada.⁴

What exactly is involved in the “semantic issue” Wiseman discusses? Why use the “nebulous” and “generic” term *feudal* to describe French Canada, when *Catholic* is clearer and more specific? What “purposes of analytic convenience and generalization” are served by using “broad terms broadly” in the manner of Hartz? The payoff, Wiseman suggests, is a neat social science generalization: “the

4 Others say it at much greater length and more convincingly in my anthology, *Canadian Political Thought* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1985). See also Ramsay Cook (ed.), *French-Canadian Nationalism* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1969); Jean-Louis Roy (ed.), *Les Programmes électoraux du Québec*, 2 vols. (Montreal: Leméac, 1971); and Daniel Latouche and Diane Poliquin-Bourassa (eds.), *Le Manuel de la parole: Manifestes québécois*, 3 vols. (Sillery: Boréal Express, 1977-1979).

emergence of socialism in all societies... is a synthetic dualistic reaction... to both feudalism... and liberalism." But from a strictly social scientific perspective, this is a pretty flimsy generalization, as Wiseman well knows.⁵ It is not at all clear how "the study of the comparative history of new societies" would be hindered by substituting the triad "Catholic-liberal-socialist" (which, incidentally, I do *not* recommend) for the Marxist triad that Hartz preferred. Hartz's preference is more understandable from a practical political perspective. His generalization is a form of the standard socialist promise to synthesize the best of the old, cosier corporate-organic-collectivist order with the best of the new, freer liberal-individualist order. It avoids the unhelpful suggestion that Catholics must abandon their religion in order to rise dialectically to higher levels of consciousness and the equally diverting claim that Marxist socialism preserves, dialectically, the truth of Catholicism. At the same time it expresses, discreetly, the common opinion that Catholicism, like seigneurial tenure, is a relic of the Dark Ages.

"Pre-liberal" is not a very good solution to the semantic problem. "Tory" is even worse. "Pre-liberal" is more nebulous and generic than "feudal," but it is positively misleading nonetheless. A specifically *post*-Enlightenment form of Catholicism defined, until relatively recently, the distinctiveness of French Canadians. "Tory" is a non-starter as a description of French-Canadian political culture.

Wiseman makes considerable use of rhetorical questions. Let me conclude by trying to answer some of them. "Who is the French-Canadian equivalent of Egerton Ryerson?" Etienne Parent. "Who is there to challenge Lionel Groulx?" Henri Bourassa, Jean-Charles Harvey, Gustave Lanctot, Georges-Henri Lévesque, Arthur Maheux, Gérard Pelletier and Pierre Elliott Trudeau, to name a few. "Can Papineau's never-too-lively liberalism be compared to Mackenzie's?" Yes. "Where is the French-Canadian equivalent of the 'Progressives' who appeared in the Congress and the House of Commons?" Henri Bourassa and the Nationalists. "Why were the corporatist and feudal notions of Salazar's Portugal... the model that Quebec's clergy cited for dealing with the modern world?" For the sake of the argument, because of the Papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), which condemned socialism and recommended corporatism as a solution for the ills of the modern world. "Who and what were the French-Canadian counterparts of J. S. Woodsworth, Salem Bland and the social gospel in English Canada?" The leaders of the *Semaines sociales* and the *École sociale populaire*

5 Wiseman has explored some of its difficulties in Nelson Wiseman, "The Pattern of Prairie Politics," *Queen's Quarterly* 88 (1981), 298-315. He found no relation, as he says, between the emergence of prairie socialism and toryism or a feudal outlook.

(about as well known to French Canadians as Salem Bland is to English Canadians). “Would the Padlock Law have been tolerated in . . . the United States?” Yes. And the odd thing is, that’s where Hartzian analysis seems to have begun, with the problem of explaining the intolerance of a liberal society. It’s an interesting problem.