

National Fate and Empire: George Grant and Canadian Foreign Policy

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Department of Political Science

University of Toronto

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# Canada

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**National Fate and Empire:  
George Grant and Canadian Foreign Policy**

Doctor of Philosophy, 2010

Scott Staring

Department of Political Science

University of Toronto

**Abstract**

This study examines the foreign policy views of the Canadian thinker, George Grant. It focuses on the years between Mackenzie King's re-election in 1935 and the Liberal party's return to power under Lester Pearson in 1963. During this period, Grant argued, Canada was transformed from a British dependent to a satellite of the United States, a process that he believed had been accelerated by the continentalist economic and security policies of successive Liberal governments.

As a young man during World War II, Grant admired the United States of F. D. Roosevelt. But as he began to contemplate the threat that a postwar *Pax Americana* posed to the societies of the Old World, and, ultimately, to Canada, his misgivings grew. His attempts to understand the emerging order led him to a critical study of modern liberalism, which he believed provided the chief philosophical justification for America's expansion. Unlike Marxists who saw liberalism as simply an ideology of

individual greed, Grant claimed that it succeeded largely by appealing to our hopes for social progress. These hopes found their loftiest expression in the belief that liberalism's internationalization would produce the conditions for the overcoming of war within and between nations. Grant feared that this ideal could only be achieved through the annihilation of all real cultural diversity—the realization of what he called the universal and homogeneous state. One of his unique claims was that the Liberal policy of rapprochement with the United States after 1935 signaled the growing dominance of this ideal within Canada. This dominance was fed during the Cold War by “realists” like Pearson who decried the utopianism of communism, while failing to reckon with the utopian aspirations of his own society. Fearful of Marxist one-worldism, Pearson committed himself to a single-minded defence of a liberal order that tended to produce even greater homogeneity around the world. Grant's own practical aim in writing about foreign policy, I argue, was neither to defend liberalism against its “utopian” critics, nor to reject it for an alternative like Marxism, but to highlight the utopian aspirations of liberal society, and thereby subject it to the moderating influence of doubt.

To Hang-Sun Kim and Douglas Muir.

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good fortune of working for. Thanks as well to Bev Everest, who has engaged me in many interesting conversations about Grant over the years. She also transcribed the proceedings of a seminar course by Grant, which she had the foresight—not to mention the courage, given his attitude toward intrusive technologies—to tape.

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## Introduction

In recent years, George Grant's name has been on the lips of some well-known students of Canadian foreign policy. Michael Byers' *Intent for a Nation*, most notably, presents itself as an extended response to Grant's classic 1965 work, *Lament for a Nation*. Byers begins his book by taking up *Lament's* thesis that following World II, Canadian sovereignty fell victim to the forces of continental capitalism emanating from the United States. But he wastes little time before weighing in with his own opinion: "Fortunately," he writes, "George Grant was wrong."<sup>1</sup>

The thrust of Byers' case against Grant can be gleaned from the subtitle of his book, "a relentlessly optimistic manifesto for Canada's role in the world." For Byers this optimism describes more than just an attitude toward foreign policy; it constitutes a distinct practical orientation, one that has guided Canada's most effective foreign policy makers in the past. To be relentlessly optimistic does not mean to remain cheerfully disposed toward all that befalls us in our dealings with the world. It indicates a

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Byers, *Intent for a Nation—What is Canada For?: A Relentlessly Optimistic Manifesto for Canada's Role in the World* (Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 2007), 16. In an article titled "George Grant Got it Wrong," Reginald Whitaker takes aim at Grant's legacy in the realm of foreign policy where he asserts that there is an "alarmist, if not defeatist tone" surrounding "much current thinking on Canadian-American relations ("George Grant Got It Wrong: Coping with Uncle Sam in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *Inroads: A Journal of Opinion* (Winter/Spring 2004). Accessed online on 10/08/2008 at [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_7074/is\\_14/ai\\_n28244947/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_7074/is_14/ai_n28244947/). In his recent book on the Grant family, Michael Ignatieff declares that his uncle George "was wrong. Wrong. Wrong again," in assessing Canada's prospects for survival. *True Patriot Love: Four Generations in Search of Canada* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2009), 150. Likewise, Andrew Potter's Introduction to the 40th Anniversary Edition of *Lament for a Nation* (Montreal: McGill Queen's Press, 2005), concludes by pronouncing that "in the end, it would appear that Grant was simply wrong" (lxiii). Andrew Cohen offers a similar assessment in his recent biography, *Lester B. Pearson* (Extraordinary Canadian series), with an Introduction by John Ralston Saul, (Toronto: Penguin, 2008), 179. See also Kent Roach's remarks in *September 11: Consequences for Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 14.

commitment to searching out the opportunities that exist in every situation. It means avoiding intellectual dithering over the proper course of action. “All we have to do,” he writes, “is to imagine something different—better laws, a better country, even a better world—and then translate our ideas into action.”<sup>2</sup> What Grant failed to understand, according to Byers, is that there is no iron fate that binds us to the United States. Canada’s future looks bright, so long as we recognize that it is in our hands to actively shape that future.

*Intent for a Nation* offers a perspective on Canadian foreign policy that could hardly be more different from Grant’s. But it is not a perspective that was unknown to him. In one of his most sensitive writings on North America, Grant described a society guided by that same sort of “driving practical optimism”<sup>3</sup> that Byers seeks to reinvigorate in his passionately argued book. He drew a vivid picture of a confident, pragmatic people determined to take “fate into [their] own hands” and make a better world for themselves.<sup>4</sup> In a phrase that could have been taken right from Byers’ manifesto, Grant referred to our belief in our own ability to “creatively will to shape the world to our values.”<sup>5</sup> In all of this, there was a clear note of admiration, a recognition that the “practical optimism” he described was in large measure responsible for North America’s greatness as a civilization. Yet Grant also criticized this same attitude as the source of our society’s greatest excesses—excesses that were perhaps nowhere more evident than in the realm of foreign policy. This study offers a further exploration of those criticisms.

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<sup>2</sup> Byers, 241.

<sup>3</sup> George Grant, *Technology and Empire: Perspectives on North America* (Toronto: Anansi, 1969), 25.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

## Grant's Critique of Modernity

Despite its title, Byers' book does not actually aim to *provide* a new "intent" for our nation. Instead its goal is to awaken us to the fact that we are free to "find that thrust of intention ourselves."<sup>6</sup> The notion that we are capable of defining own projects in this world—that we in fact only realize our true potential in doing so—is one that Grant believed defined the self-understanding of that "modern" civilization that had spread out from Western Europe to the rest of the world since the age of discovery.<sup>7</sup> As he sometimes put it, modernity is guided by the belief that "man's essence is his freedom." A great deal of Grant's career was spent reflecting on the implications of this belief, which he ultimately saw as entailing a somewhat paradoxical consequence: the very belief that we are free to shape the world as we want was part and parcel of a certain broader way of seeing the world, a "way of thought about the whole," that we did not freely choose.<sup>8</sup> This view of the whole, Grant claimed, reflected the overwhelming dominance of two particular forces within our society today: modern liberalism and technology. At its heart, liberalism for Grant was the affirmation that "man's essence is his freedom," while technology, as the scientific conquest of nature, was the principal way that this freedom was manifested. Nowhere, Grant contended, had these two phenomena been more fully realized than in the United States, producing what he described as the most "progressive" civilization in the world. Canada, he believed, had become increasingly a part of this civilization, as it grew evermore dependent upon Washington after 1945, both economically and militarily. He also believed that Canada

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<sup>6</sup> Byers, 16.

<sup>7</sup> George Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1997, The Carleton Library Series No. 50. Originally published by McClelland and Stewart, 1965), 25, 67, fn. 15.

<sup>8</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 33.

had become implicated in the outward spread of this society, embracing a foreign policy that was increasingly defined by the drive to extend the reach of liberalism and technology throughout the world. This was most clearly represented for Grant in the “internationalism” of Lester Pearson, Canada’s leading diplomat in the years after the war when, in Byers’ words, Canadian foreign policy reached its “dizzying heights.”<sup>9</sup>

One objective of this study is to understand Grant’s criticisms of Canadian foreign policy in the first decades after the war. It also, indirectly, proposes a response to Byers’ charge that Grant ignored the role that the right sort of “individuals” with the right sort of intentions can play in creating a distinctly Canadian foreign policy.<sup>10</sup> Grant thought that in order to understand our foreign policy history, it was necessary to look beyond the intentions of the individuals involved, to the particular civilization that had formed those intentions.<sup>11</sup> This meant reflecting in a serious way on the origins and nature of modern liberalism and technology, with a view to understanding how these forces have shaped our history and our particular vocation in the world today.

## **Liberalism**

Grant traced the influence of liberalism in Canada back to the continent’s early European settlement, and more particularly to the arrival of the first English-speaking colonists. Modern liberalism, Grant claimed, was born out of a philosophical revolution that found its most influential representation in the writings of early modern English

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>11</sup> In *Lament for a Nation* Grant asserted that his analysis of the continentalist policies of Canada’s Liberal governments after the war was “not concerned with the nature of intention, but with that of decision” (58). “The use of the word ‘decisions,’” however, “does not entail any concept of free will” (56, fn. 12).

thinkers like Hobbes, and especially, Locke.<sup>12</sup> Freedom or liberty as described by these figures was built on a theoretical rejection of the Aristotelian teleological conception of nature woven into the political and theological traditions that came out of the Middle Ages. The Puritan society of the New World, Grant maintained, offered particularly fertile soil for these new liberal ideas to flourish. According to Grant, Protestantism shared a certain affinity with the new “moral sciences” articulated by Hobbes and Locke, insofar as Protestant theologians also rejected (on strictly theological, rather than philosophical grounds) the medieval teleological conception of nature.<sup>13</sup> The Puritans that populated the New World, Grant argued, “found something acceptable in the new ideas so that often they were the instruments for these ideas in the world, often without knowing the results for their faith.”

In describing the influence of liberal thought on the English-speaking populations of the New World, however, Grant noted a slight divergence in the case of Canada. Because Anglicanism had never broken with the past as cleanly as the Puritan sects had, the pre-modern conception of nature still maintained a certain residual influence within the Church of England. This influence lingered in Canada, too, where it was preserved in the religion and political traditions of Tory Loyalists who fled north after the American Revolution. Grant described this “conservatism” as “less a clear view of existence than an appeal to an ill-defined past.”<sup>14</sup> It gave rise to what Grant

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<sup>12</sup> Grant argued that no other thinkers had had a greater influence in establishing the dominance of liberal thought and practice in the world. “Among those who wrote political philosophy since,” in the English-speaking world, “there has been little but the working out in detail of variations” on themes opened up by these two thinkers. Grant, *English-Speaking Justice* (Toronto: Anansi, 1998), 48-49. Continental Europe produced thinkers like “Descartes and Rousseau, Kant and Nietzsche,” who thought more “comprehensively about modernity.” Yet none of these non English-speaking thinkers has exercised the same influence around the world (*Ibid.*, 2).

<sup>13</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 22.

<sup>14</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 82.

described as “an inchoate desire to build, in these cold and forbidding regions, a society with a greater sense of order and restraint than freedom-loving republicanism would allow.” Grant thought that this lack of theoretical clarity could even be seen in the writings of some of the chief philosophers within the British liberal tradition. At the height of its power in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for instance, the Empire’s most representative political thinker was J.S. Mill, a figure Grant described as a “decent and sensitive” reformer.<sup>15</sup> What lent Mill’s liberalism this decency, according to Grant, was the fact that it was sufficiently bound to earlier moral traditions to give it something of an immunity to the philosophical attack on Lockean liberalism initiated by Rousseau, and carried even further in the works of later German thinkers like Kant and Hegel.<sup>16</sup> Mill still appealed to an older British sense of order and restraint that resisted the more extreme formulations of the doctrine of liberty articulated by Locke’s critics.<sup>17</sup> America’s Puritan settlers, on the other hand, had taken up Locke in a revolt against the older traditions of Britain. They were not sheltered (at least not to the same extent) by the same sort of unquestioning attachment to past belief and practice; for this same reason,

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<sup>15</sup> George Grant, “Acceptance and Rebellion,” in *Collected Works* 2:271. For full citations of each of the volumes in Grant’s *Collected Works*, see the Bibliographical Notes.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 246-247; “Review of John Stewart Mill: The *Collected Works* vols. 18 and 19, (1977),” in *The George Grant Reader*, 130; *English-Speaking Justice*, 49-51.

<sup>17</sup> Remnants of a teleological conception of freedom are clearly visible in Mill’s account of Utilitarianism for example, where the principle that actions are right insofar as they promote the greatest happiness, understood as pleasure, is modified by the claim that “some *kinds* of pleasures are more desirable and more valuable than others.” “Utilitarianism,” in *John Stuart Mill: On Liberty and Other Essays*, edited with an Introduction and Notes by John Gray (New York: Oxford University Press, Oxford World’s Classics edition, 1998; first published as a World’s Classics paperback, 1991), 138. Just what these more desirable ends are is something that is left to be decided by the most “competent judges” (141) who have broader experience with the “higher” pleasures. In theory, this experience is available to all; in practice it is open to those members with comfortable standing in a “civilized country” (145), and the “capacity for the nobler feelings” can even be lost, particularly among the young “if the occupations to which their position in life has devoted them, and the society into which it has thrown them, are not favourable to keeping that higher capacity in exercise” (141). Generally speaking, Mill finds it sensible to assume that actions adhering to the traditional “ethical standards” of society will conduce to the greatest happiness, and may be used as a practical guide in decision making (155-156).

Grant claimed, they were also more susceptible to the theoretical radicalization of the Lockean idea of liberty.

At its origins, then, Canada was a more conservative society than the United States. One way that this conservatism expressed itself was in what Grant described as an “inherited determination not to be Americans.” This same resolve provided English-speaking Canadians with an incentive to “come to a *modus vivendi* with the more defined desires of the French.”<sup>18</sup> He claimed that French Canada constituted an even “more formidable” obstacle to the spread of American influence in Canada. “During the nineteenth century,” the French “accepted almost unanimously the leadership of their particular Catholicism—a religion with an ancient doctrine of virtue” that stood in even more marked opposition to the liberal notion of freedom. Grant did not deny that very real differences existed between the French and British.<sup>19</sup> Both were guided by a “belief that society required a high degree of law, and respect for a public conception of virtue,” and “both would grant the state much wider rights to control the individual than was recognized in the libertarian ideas of the American constitution.” But beyond this he admitted that the British and French actually shared “little common ground in their sense of social order.” What really bound them was the conviction that their respective societies “could only be preserved outside the United States of America.” Thus, “the French were willing to co-operate with the English because they had no alternative but to go along with the endurable arrangements proposed by the ruling power.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 82.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 87; “Conversation: Canadian Politics,” in *George Grant in Process: Essays and Conversations*, edited by Larry Schmidt (Toronto: Anansi, 1978), 14.

<sup>20</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 81.



But the English and French could not survive entirely on their own. For most of its existence the country had depended upon the military and economic support of Britain to sustain an independent existence. This arrangement was dealt a sudden and grievous blow in 1914. To begin with, the war precipitated Britain's decline as a world power that could no longer offer its support to Canada on the old terms.<sup>21</sup> But the war also affected Canada's relationship with England in a less immediately practical way. "English-speaking Canadians from all areas and all economic classes went off to that war hopefully and honestly believing that they were thereby guaranteeing freedom and justice in the world. Loyalty to Britain and loyalty to liberal capitalist democracy was identified with loyalty to freedom and justice."<sup>22</sup> But this faith in the British Empire as the standard bearer of freedom and justice could not survive the war unscathed. "In the nineteenth century," Grant remarked in a later interview, "one could believe that European civilization was going to solve it all."<sup>23</sup> In England, this confidence was typified by the philosophy of Mill, which assumed that liberalism could bring progress (if very gradually) to the far-flung regions of the world, and that this progress would look very much like the British upper-middle classes.<sup>24</sup> World War I, Grant claimed,

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 49; "'The Canadian Character and Identity': Interview with Gad Horowitz," in *Collected Works* 3, 436.

<sup>22</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 69.

<sup>23</sup> Grant, "An Interview with George Grant," conducted by Larry Schmidt, *Grail* 1:1 (March 1985), 44.

<sup>24</sup> Or as Grant once put it, the belief that, "if you had equality of opportunity, you were like John Stuart Mill, you would all become, you know, sort of dignified educated men of letters." "'A Canadian Identity': Interview with Gad Horowitz," in *Collected Works* 3, 445-446. Consider, for example the following passage in Mill's "Considerations on Representative Government" in *John Stuart Mill: On Liberty and Other Essays*: "Experience proves that it is possible for one nationality to merge and be absorbed in another: and when it was originally an inferior and more backward portion of the human race, the absorption is greatly to its advantage. Nobody can suppose that it is not more beneficial to a Breton, or a Basque of French Navarre, to be brought into the current of the ideas and feelings of a highly civilized and cultivated people—to be a member of the French nationality, admitted on equal terms to all the privileges of French citizenship, sharing the advantages of French protection, and the dignity and prestige of French power—than to sulk on his own rocks, the half-savage relic of past times, revolving in his own little mental orbit, without participation or interest in the general movement of the world. The

shattered the Anglo-centric pretensions of nineteenth-century liberalism and signaled “the beginning of an absolutely new era.”<sup>25</sup> “The English and the Germans started massacring each other,” and in so doing, “spelled out the implicit violence of the West.”<sup>26</sup> Although many English-speaking Canadians continued to express their loyalty to the Empire, these sentiments were nevertheless strained by the sacrifices they had been asked to make.<sup>27</sup> “The war of 1914 was for Western society the demolition of its origins and roots. The demolition of Europe as an effective moral force was very difficult and terrible for Canada. We were cut off from our deeper roots by what happened in 1914.”<sup>28</sup> For English-speaking Canadians this translated into disillusionment with the Empire and the gradual “disappearance of the sense of being British.”<sup>29</sup>

Disillusionment with the Empire, however, did not mean disillusionment with the broader hopes of “progressive liberalism” for Grant.<sup>30</sup> On the contrary, these hopes were increasingly unchained from the older British traditions and institutions—

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same remark applies to the Welshman or the Scottish Highlander, as members of the British nation.” (431) A little later, Mill describes Britain as “the Power which, of all in existence, best understands liberty—and whatever may have been its errors in the past, has attained to more of conscience and moral principle in its dealings with foreigners, than any other great nation seems either to conceive as possible, or recognize as desirable” (451). See also Mill’s essay “Civilization, 1836” in which he lays out the civilizing duties incumbent upon Great Britain, where the “elements” of progress exist “in a more eminent degree, and in a state of more rapid progression, than at any other place or time,” *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XVIII: Essays on Politics and Society, Part I*, edited by John M. Robson, with an Introduction by Alexander Brady (Toronto: University of Toronto, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977). Published online by Liberty Fund at <http://oll.libertyfund.org/title/223/16538> (accessed on 11/06/2007).

<sup>25</sup> Grant, “An Interview with George Grant,” 44.

<sup>26</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 70.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Monica V. Halil, “Lament for a Nation Revisited: An Interview with George Grant,” *International Insights* 4:1 (Spring 1988): 7.

<sup>29</sup> Grant, “The Canadian Character and Identity,” 437.

<sup>30</sup> The First World War, Grant remarked in interview, made it even harder for the generation who fought in it “to leave the progressive liberalism of the nineteenth century behind.” David Cayley, *George Grant in Conversation* (Toronto: Anansi, 1995), 46.

particularly the Protestant Church—that had once provided nineteenth-century liberalism with its character of greater restraint.<sup>31</sup>

It was at this critical juncture in Canada's history that William Lyon Mackenzie King began his Methuselah career as prime minister, which lasted most of the period between 1921 and 1948. Grant saw King as a politician who was still committed to the principles of nineteenth-century liberalism found in thinkers like Mill.<sup>32</sup> He also saw him, however, as someone who was tragically unaware of the very different form that liberalism had taken in the United States. Although Grant believed that liberalism had been the mainspring of both British and American imperialism since the nineteenth century, he maintained that the United States had wrought much greater cultural destruction on the world. British liberalism, it is true, was a more aristocratic phenomenon; yet Grant seemed to believe that it was partly for this reason that it was more likely to allow local culture and traditions to survive. Taking its own bourgeois society as the model, English imperialism sought to bring improvement to its subject peoples, not just at the material level, but at the moral level too. But this task of moral uplift was not seen as something that could be achieved overnight.<sup>33</sup> Hence, the British were less inclined to interfere too much with the beliefs and practices of local populations subject to their rule.<sup>34</sup> The Americans, on the other hand, embraced a more sweeping, confident doctrine of liberalism, one that saw fewer obstacles standing in the

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<sup>31</sup> In particular, liberalism in Canada became increasingly detached from the peculiar forms of Protestantism that had grown up there (Ibid., 46-47).

<sup>32</sup> Grant, "John Stuart Mill," 129.

<sup>33</sup> Grant, who as a young man just after World War II had staunchly supported the continuance of the British Empire, wrote, "It is all very well to want perfect freedom for all in the world. But merely wanting it will not make it come. It will not spring, like Minerva, fully formed from the head of Jove...at the present stage of human development, varying forms of empire must remain as steps toward that world of perfection" "The Empire: Yes or No?" in *Collected Works*, 1:105.

<sup>34</sup> Gad Horowitz provides a summary of this view in conversation with Grant, "A Canadian Identity," in *Collected Works* 3:447.

way of the achievement of freedom and equality for all. For this same reason, American liberalism was less accommodating of local differences or traditions. “Liberalism,” Grant wrote, “is the ideological means whereby indigenous cultures are homogenized”;<sup>35</sup> these means found their most potent exercise in American foreign policy.

That King was blind to the more predatory character of American liberalism, Grant believed, could be seen in his attitude toward Canada’s economic relations with the United States. After his return to power in 1935, King sought to open Canada up to the vast American marketplace. The prime minister did not seem to recognize, according to Grant, that capitalism was the chief vehicle through which the United States insinuated its power behind foreign borders. One form this took in Canada was direct investment, which removed control of economic affairs from local hands, and uprooted settled patterns of life by spurring the transition from agriculture and raw material production to secondary industry. It also took the form of more open trade, which again often undermined local production, and exposed Canadians to the temptations of consumerism, and to the influences of American cultural production in particular. Where the forces of cultural resistance were relatively weak, as in Canada, this expansion took place peacefully. In countries where there were more significant barriers to the adoption of liberalism and capitalism, Grant argued, American incursions were often more destructive.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 91.

<sup>36</sup> “Communist imperialism is more brutally immediate but American capitalism has shown itself more subtly able to dissolve indigenous societies. This can make it harder to resist than the blatant thrusts of the Russians or the Chinese” (*Lament for a Nation*, 76). But Grant also argued that because Washington had “chosen to draw the line against” communism, it was being “forced” to be more “ferocious” in its dealings with some cultures, most notably Vietnam, where “it is clear that...the American empire has

King, then, did not fully grasp the fact that in seeking a rapprochement with the United States he was in fact aligning Canada with, in Grant's words, "a world empire, the largest to date."<sup>37</sup> The case was different, however, with Lester Pearson, who became prime minister in 1963, after serving as Canada's best-known secretary of state from 1948-1957. Pearson, according to Grant, recognized that Canada was tying itself economically and militarily to an expanding giant. There is even some justification to the claim that the real target of Grant's *Lament* was "Pearson and his ilk."<sup>38</sup> But although Grant believed that Pearson had played a key role in the country's capitulation to the United States, he did not suppose that the prime minister had done so willfully. Grant had met Pearson during the war when the latter was serving as first secretary for Canada at the High Commission in London, and even at this early date what most troubled Grant about the young diplomat was his pragmatic attitude toward American power.<sup>39</sup> Pearson, Grant claimed, readily accepted the idea that in order to be effective in the world, one first had to accept the undeniable reality of American preeminence. Only then could one hope to "influence the American leaders to play their world role with skill and moderation."<sup>40</sup> According to Grant, Pearson recognized that in supporting

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been demolishing a people, rather than allowing them to live outside the American orbit" (*Technology and Empire*, 63).

<sup>37</sup> Grant, "Protest and Technology," in *Collected Works* 3, 395.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Fulford, "Ignatieff Gives a Shake to the Family Tree," *National Post* (April 21, 2009). Online at <http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/fullcomment/archive/2009/04/21/robert-fulford-ignatieff-gives-a-shake-to-the-family-tree.aspx> (accessed 5/05/2009).

<sup>39</sup> Grant had felt personally invested in 1940 election race between F. D. Roosevelt and Wendell Willkie, seeing the former as a social reformer and the latter as an advocate of "complete business freedom from economic interference." Willkie who had attacked Roosevelt's implementation of the New Deal and charged the President with leaving the country in a state of military unpreparedness, was endorsed by the internationalist wing of the Republic Party because of his vocal support for American aid to Britain in the war effort. Grant was incensed that Pearson, "a fairly liberal person" could say "that he doesn't care" about Willkie's politics, "as long as the U.S. foreign policy is right, to hell with their internal policy" ("Letter to Maude Grant, August 31, 1940," in *George Grant: Selected Letters*, edited with an Introduction by William Christian [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996]: 63).

<sup>40</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 55.

NATO and NORAD, what he was really supporting was America's military leadership of the Western alliance.<sup>41</sup> Even when Pearson worked through the UN to establish the first peacekeeping force during the Suez Crisis in 1956, he knew that his efforts were in the service of America's international interests. Grant mocked the way that Pearson's support of the American alliance was often cast in the language of "internationalism" in the popular press.<sup>42</sup> It is not that Pearson was unsympathetic to the internationalist goals of peaceful economic and political cooperation between nations, but he had few illusions about the possibility of realizing such a goal under the prevailing geopolitical conditions. This ambivalence is nicely captured in the following description of one of Pearson's policy memoranda: "In the here and then, Pearson adhered to ultimate ends while advocating policies that did not... Transcendental ideals were held out as legitimate objects of aspiration, but on every concrete issue, Pearson pressed for a lower line of vision."<sup>43</sup> Grant, in a more cynical moment, put it this way: Pearson could "speak the rhetoric of internationalism...but he knew it for what it was."<sup>44</sup> Thus, the "high comedy" of seeing the newly elected prime minister in 1963 being celebrated as "the true Canadian internationalist, at a time when he was negotiating with the United States for the spread of nuclear arms to Canada."<sup>45</sup>

Denis Stairs has remarked that underlying Pearson's pragmatic approach to foreign policy was an understanding "that power is a fairly fundamental currency of

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 44, 48.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 103. Grant did not use the term internationalism to refer to any particular school or doctrine of foreign policy (for instance, the "liberal internationalist" doctrine often associated with Woodrow Wilson), but instead employed it to describe a more general view of international relations which took as its aim the overcoming of nationalisms and the realization of a peaceful and prosperous world order (see, for instance *Lament for a Nation*, 95-96).

<sup>43</sup> Peter Gellman, "Lester B. Pearson, Collective Security, and the World Order Tradition of Canadian Foreign Policy" *International Journal* 64:1 (Winter 1988-1989): 98-99.

<sup>44</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 48.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 103.

international politics.”<sup>46</sup> For this reason he viewed foreign policy as a “practical art”: “His test...in the conduct of foreign policy was not whether it’s right in principle but whether it’s effective.” This “practical” view, that one has to be flexible about the means one embraces in order to be “effective” internationally, demonstrated what Grant saw as a fundamentally technological perspective. The irony behind Pearson’s career was his assumption that by adopting a “technological,” or means-ends approach to foreign policy, he could moderate the extreme tendencies of the most technological society in the world.

### **Technology**

Grant saw modern technology as an outgrowth of the modern natural sciences, which like the new moral sciences of Hobbes and Locke, had arisen out of the revolt against “mediaeval Aristotelianism.”<sup>47</sup> Grant traced this scientific revolt back to Sir Francis Bacon, whose *Novum Organon* (1620) helped to establish the modern experimental method.<sup>48</sup> Beneath the discovery of a new science which would issue in what Bacon described as the conquest of nature, was the no less momentous discovery of what one commentator described as “a needy self that must make its own provision to the point of making its own world.”<sup>49</sup> This way of conceiving of the human relationship to nature, Grant remarked, seemed to turn the self into an “Archimedean

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<sup>46</sup> Quoted by Antony Anderson in “Pearson and the Myth of Neutrality: How Canada’s Crucial Role in the Suez Crisis Had Little to Do with Peacemaking,” *Toronto Star* (November 5, 2006). Online at <http://www.nationaldream.ca/TheStar.com%20-%20Pearson%20and%20the%20myth%20of%20neutrality.pdf> (accessed November 2007).

<sup>47</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 20.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*; “Review of *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon*, by F.H. Anderson,” in *Collected Works* 1:147-148.

<sup>49</sup> Robert K. Faulkner, *Francis Bacon and the Project of Progress* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993), 88.

freedom outside nature.”<sup>50</sup> In essence, he argued, this was the same conception of the self found in modern liberal doctrine; hence liberalism and technology, Grant asserted, derived from the same “primal apprehension of being.” To understand the relationship between these two phenomena one had to question “exactly how the affirmation that man’s essence is his freedom lies at the heart of technology, and how technology as something new leads human beings to define their essence as freedom.”<sup>51</sup>

A paradoxical feature of our modern understanding of freedom as Grant presented it was that it was a self-creating freedom. In order to conquer an external nature, humans had to be capable of self-conquest. This was vividly illustrated by the stern Calvinism of North America’s early pioneers:<sup>52</sup> “The punishment they inflicted on non-human nature, they had first inflicted on themselves.”<sup>53</sup> From its inception, then, technological society was characterized by “the mastery of both human and non-human

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<sup>50</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 33.

<sup>51</sup> Grant, “Conversation: Philosophy,” in *George Grant in Process: Essays and Conversations*, edited by Larry Schmidt (Toronto: Anansi, 1978), 144. “From the very beginnings of modern thought,” Grant wrote, “the new natural science and the new moral science developed together in mutual interdependence so that the fundamental assumptions of each were formulated in the light of the other. Modern thought is that unified fate for us.” *Technology and Empire*, 32. Faulkner has argued that Bacon understood very clearly that what the new sciences were re-describing not just nature, but how our species stood in relationship to nature, and that this entailed a radical new conception of the human being as an “individual”—a conception that Faulkner claims Bacon traced out in a manner that was more consistent, and “in many ways more revealing than what is often supposed the *locus classicus* of individualism of Thomas Hobbes.” (*Op. cit.*, 87).

<sup>52</sup> Grant notes that, in breaking with the old Aristotelian world of Catholicism, the Reformation found a natural ally in the new science of Bacon. “Both modern science and Protestantism were breaking with that old world, and therefore they saw themselves as one.” Cayley, *George Grant in Conversation*, 150.

<sup>53</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 24. Although this self-discipline was imposed in the name of God, Grant stresses that it was a “transcendent (and therefore elusive)” God. “From the solitude and uncertainty of that position came the responsibility which could find no rest. That unappeasable responsibility gave an extraordinary sense of the self as radical freedom so paradoxically experienced within the predestinarian theological context” (*Ibid.*, 24). Max Weber, from whom Grant borrows a good deal in his reflections on Calvinism, describes a similar “sense of the self” awakening, albeit in sociological terms that avoid the language of paradox. “Active self-control,” Weber writes, constituted...Puritanism’s defining practical ideal of life.” This self-control was carried out to prove one’s devotion to God, yet it had the effect of “socializ[ing] the believer to become a ‘personality.’” Hence, Weber writes that, “in contrast to a number of popular ideas, the Puritan goal was to be able to lead an alert, conscious, and self-aware life.” Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (with Other Writings on the Rise of the West)* translated and introduced by Stephen Kalberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, fourth edition), 116.



nature.”<sup>54</sup> But as this society became more secular, self-mastery was no longer carried out in the name of a divine goal; rather the self was increasingly conceived as the source of its own goals or ‘values’ (hence, the perplexing notion of a “subjectivity which creates itself.”<sup>55</sup>) Grant claimed that nowhere had this belief that human nature was conquerable, or “completely malleable,” taken firmer hold than in the United States.<sup>56</sup> There it manifested itself as a “colossal inwardness” that led Grant to reject the stereotype of American society as “materialistic.”<sup>57</sup> It also informed his analysis of American capitalism, which he believed was fueled by more than simple greed (although it was fueled by that, too). Capitalism provided the perfect complement to a concept of liberty which could be formulated as the belief that “the human good is what we choose for our good.”<sup>58</sup> The capitalist marketplace offered an endless proliferation of consumer goods to satisfy individual tastes; and as traditional standards were increasingly eclipsed in the modern age, Grant believed that “taste” alone would be left to guide individual decision-making. “Freedom,” as our society conceived of it, found the conditions of its realization partly in the fact that “in a high consumption economy a

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<sup>54</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 33; *Technology and Justice*, 9; *Lament for a Nation*, 70, 73; *Time as History*, edited with an Introduction by William Christian (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995; originally published by as part of the CBC Massey Lecture Series in 1969), 16. Grant sometimes suggested this conquest was initially directed at external nature and only later turned to the mastery of human nature as well. In these cases, Grant seemed to be speaking more specifically about certain sciences, professions and techniques (for example, sociology and psychology) that were eventually developed to supplement and advance that initial process of self-mastery that allowed Western civilization to apply itself to the technological conquest of nature with such determination in the first place.

<sup>55</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 142. In “using the language of freedom we talk of people as ‘selves’ rather than ‘souls’... As Leo Strauss has said... ‘The soul may be responsible for its being good or bad but it is not responsible for its being a soul; of the self on the other hand it is not certain whether it is not a self by virtue of its own effort’” (“Value and Technology,” *Collected Works* 3:234).

<sup>56</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 76.

<sup>57</sup> Unpublished class transcript, Augustine’s *City of God*, McMaster University, (transcribed by Beverly Everest). Harold Bloom provides a fascinating account of this inwardness; see Chapter 1 of his *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).

<sup>58</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 70.

multitude of new choices and experiences is open to people.”<sup>59</sup> This expansion in the realm of consumption also opened up new roles for individuals in the realm of production. Many of these jobs were of a specialized or technical nature, demanding people “skilled at one small part of the whole enterprise but not necessarily knowledgeable about the whole.”<sup>60</sup> Absent knowledge of the whole, however, each task tended to appear just as meaningful or choice-worthy as the next. The question of how one makes a living, much like the question of what one consumes, was reduced more and more to a matter of individual taste. Indeed, in a mature capitalist economy the very distinction between production and consumption began to blur. As Grant put it, “*Playboy* illustrates the fact that the young executive is not expected to be Horatio Alger.”<sup>61</sup>

In a society devoted to a liberal understanding of freedom then, the expansion of technology and capitalism would be equated with the self-realization of its individual members. But Grant feared that this very belief also encouraged a troubling blindness in the way that liberal societies interacted with non-liberal societies. Communities that did not understand freedom as the conquest of nature, and therefore tended to resist the incursion of technology and capitalism, were themselves treated as so much untamed nature to be conquered. Grant therefore thought that it was inevitable that technological societies would be “extremely violent in their dealings with other men and other

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<sup>59</sup> Grant, “An Ethic of Community,” *Collected Works* 3:25. In his study of the role of consumerism in our modern conception of individuality, Colin Campbell, remarks that “it would be just as true to say that the self is built through consumption as that consumption expresses the self.” Campbell, “Romanticism and the Consumer Ethic,” *Sociological Analysis* 44 (1983): 288.

<sup>60</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 24.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

beings.”<sup>62</sup> “Liberal doctrine,” he argued, “does not prepare us for this violence because of its identification of technology with evolution, and this identification of evolution with movement of the race to higher and higher morality.” Grant thought that this had been graphically illustrated by the Vietnam War. Even in a media age that made it almost impossible to ignore the fact that North American society was engaged in acts of violence abroad, Grant thought that it was difficult for most North Americans to see that their own comfortable pursuit of freedom and fulfillment sustained the very military-industrial machine that that was asserting itself so violently in other parts of the world. The difficulty was even more pronounced for a country like Canada that was not directly involved in combat in Vietnam, but that since 1945 had become increasingly a satellite of the American empire, economically, militarily, and culturally.<sup>63</sup>

It is not that Grant completely discounted the importance of our determination to stay out of the war; on the contrary, he proclaimed that “one must still be glad that Canadian forces are not fighting there,” and saw this abstention as evidence that some small remnant of sovereignty still existed within the country.<sup>64</sup> But he contended that it would be “foolish to overestimate” our independence of action in the realm of foreign policy.<sup>65</sup> He directed this warning at two different audiences: to begin with, those revolutionary forces associated primarily with the “new left,” who hoped that “some

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<sup>62</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 72. Grant thought Bacon’s description of modern science’s experimental method as “putting nature to the question” was apt, since “Bacon was a lord chancellor and knew from experience what it was to put people to the question” (*George Grant in Conversation*, 135).

<sup>63</sup> Grant, “Protest and Technology,” 395. For this same reason, Grant found that the “lack of care [about the war in Vietnam] seems worse in Canada than in the United States. For even as we seek a greater share in defence production, we say that Vietnam is not really our business; we can turn aside” (“The Value of Protest,” in *Collected Works* 3:429, 427; see also *Lament for a Nation*, 11). More generally, Grant contended that “life as little brother often leads to political naivety and even self-righteousness. We have not produced such a firmly defined opposition as have the United States Not so many of us have been forced to look unflinchingly into the face of Moloch” (*Ibid.*, 12).

<sup>64</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 77-78.

<sup>65</sup> Grant, “Protest and Technology,” 395.

transformation of power in North America is going to overcome the implicit difficulties of the technological apparatus, and that the North American society can in the future radically change its direction.”<sup>66</sup> Grant thought that such hopes were utopian, insofar as they did not fully appreciate how tightly bound we were within our own “technological strait-jacket.”<sup>67</sup> Radical dissent and protest, Grant declared, tended either to “harden the very directions society is already taking”<sup>68</sup> by bringing about “a closing down of certain forms of liberty which have been present in this society up until now”;<sup>69</sup> or on the contrary, tended to be “taken into the system and trivialized,” or “bureaucratized,” that is, made to “serve the interests of the system that they are supposed to be attacking, by showing that free speech is allowed.”<sup>70</sup>

The second group that Grant addressed his warning to was those who placed their faith in Canada’s political leaders to use whatever influence the country had to sway American foreign policy. Since 1963 the country had been in the hands of an administration that believed that a realistic foreign policy begins with the “recognition that we are a satellite and that a kind of sensible voice should be whispered in the ear of Washington occasionally.”<sup>71</sup> But Grant doubted whether, in the end, leaders who so willingly acceded to the country’s satellite status would “have any different opinions from Washington.” In fact, there was something about the very pragmatism of the Pearsonian position that already revealed a deeper kinship with the Americans. Pearson’s view of foreign policy as a “practical art” expressed a sort of means-ends

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 399.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 397.

<sup>68</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 77.

<sup>69</sup> Grant, “‘Technology and Man’: An Interview of George Grant by Gad Horowitz,” in *Collected Works* 3, 600.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 398; *Technology and Empire*, 75; *Lament for a Nation*, 91.

<sup>71</sup> Grant, “A Canadian Identity,” 450; See also *Lament for a Nation*, 55.

thinking that was consistent with what Grant described as the technological attitude toward the world. But Grant also claimed that there was something about this attitude that obscured the nature of modern technology itself. Technology, Grant claimed, was too often thought of as a range of “neutral means”<sup>72</sup> or instruments “lying at the free disposal of the species which created them.”<sup>73</sup> In this conception, there is nothing that fundamentally inhibits our ability to choose from amongst these means and deploy them toward whatever ends we have set for ourselves. Grant described the relationship with the following analogy:

When we represent technology to ourselves through its own common sense we think of ourselves as picking and choosing in a supermarket, rather than within the analogy of the package deal. We have brought a package deal of far more fundamental novelty than simply a set of instruments under our control. It is a destiny which enfolds us in its own conceptions of instrumentality, neutrality and purposiveness.<sup>74</sup>

Technology, for Grant, was not just “a clever way of dealing with the external world.”<sup>75</sup>

To truly grasp its nature, it was necessary to see it as “one part of a way of thought about the whole and what is worth doing in it.” To say that we lived in a technological society, for Grant, meant not simply that we had learned to dominate the world through technology, but that technology in a sense dominated us, changed the very way that we relate to the world.<sup>76</sup> This raised the troubling prospect that those who were most committed to exploiting the instrumental potential of technology were perhaps most blind to how it shaped their understanding of the whole. This offers one way of

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<sup>72</sup> Grant, “The Computer Does Not Impose on Us the Ways it Should Be Used,” in *The George Grant Reader*, 430.

<sup>73</sup> Grant, *Technology and Justice*, 19.

<sup>74</sup> Grant, *Technology and Justice*, 32; “The Computer Does Not Impose on Us,” 432.

<sup>75</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 33.

<sup>76</sup> Paraphrasing Heidegger, Grant claimed that “technique is the metaphysic of the age” (*Lament for a Nation*, 11; “Technology and Man,” 596). Similarly, he labeled technology “the ontology of the age” (“The Computer Does Not Impose on Us,” 431).

explaining how Grant could in almost one in the same breath admit that Pearson thought of himself as a “nationalist,” while also suggesting that “the existence of the Canadian nation was not a priority”<sup>77</sup> under his leadership: Pearson believed that Canada’s best chance of survival lay in a pragmatic foreign policy which accepted the hard fact of America’s preeminence in the West; by accepting the reality of American power, he was left free to try to manipulate that power to serve Canadian ends or interests. Yet in thinking that American power could be used to serve Canadian ends, he was involving the country in a larger “destiny” which was in fact incompatible with Canada’s continued existence.<sup>78</sup>

### **Grant and the Political**

Grant could be unsparing in his criticism of the Liberal party. In *Lament for a Nation*, he sometimes seemed to suggest that they had single-handedly brought about Canada’s demise,<sup>79</sup> and he spared little of his deftly crafted invective in describing the role played by key liberal figures like King, Pearson and the redoubtable continentalist and “Minister of Everything,” C.D. Howe. But despite *Lament’s* sometimes accusing tone (Grant admitted that it was “written too much from anger”<sup>80</sup>), it was not a book primarily concerned with affixing blame to any particular individual or group. “The confused strivings of politicians, businessmen, and civil servants,” he wrote, “cannot alone account for Canada’s collapse. This stems from the very character of the modern

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 58, 59.

<sup>78</sup> Another way to make sense of his seemingly ambiguous comments about Pearson is to note that Grant believed that it was impossible to come to a loving understanding of anything with which one had a fundamentally technological relationship. Hence it was possible to dedicate all of one’s attention and expertise to a particular object or entity without actually loving it. Cayley, 186-187.

<sup>79</sup> Writing, for instance, that the Liberal party pursued “policies that led inexorably to the disappearance of Canada”; that they had a “policy of satellite status to the United States,” etc., (*Lament for a Nation*, 26, 30).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 12.

era.”<sup>81</sup> In seeking the country’s economic and military integration with the United States, Canada’s leaders were driven by more than their own venality and greed. To the extent that the United States was identified with the twin blessings of liberalism and technology, Canada’s ever-closer association with that country seemed to hold out the promise of something “‘higher,’ ‘more developed,’ ‘better,’ ‘freer’ than what has been in the past.”<sup>82</sup> These progressive hopes, according to Grant, found their purest expression in the policies and platform the Liberal party. Yet Grant also noted that the Liberals sometimes framed the case for continental integration with more realistic or hard-nosed arguments which focused on the “necessity” of integration. “The argument from necessity,” he wrote, “is that nationalism<sup>83</sup> must disappear and that we are moving inevitably to a world of continental empires.”<sup>84</sup> Grant believed that there were in fact reasons to take seriously such an argument from necessity. He acknowledged, for instance, that “it may indeed be argued that the safety of the western world against the hostile forces of Asia requires that we be part of a tightly unified empire; the integration of Canada into that empire would be a small price to pay.”<sup>85</sup> What troubled him so much about Liberal rhetoric, however, was that it so often seemed to mingle, and even conflate arguments about the “necessity” of continental integration with arguments about the “goodness” of this process.<sup>86</sup> To say that there was an “inevitable movement,”

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>83</sup> Here Grant seems to be referring to “nationalism” as resistance to the homogenizing influence of liberal modernity (in the case of Canada, resistance to integration with the more liberal society of the United States). He does not deny that Liberals like Pearson understood themselves as Canadian nationalists of a sort. See *Lament for a Nation*, 58-59.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>86</sup> The ambiguity, Grant remarked, was captured in “the whole Liberal campaign of 1963, in which Pearson wrapped his acceptance of continental atomic arms in the language of international obligations and his loyalty to the United Nations.” (Ibid., 103). It might be noted in passing, that from Grant’s

toward a new age of Cold War empires, Grant pointed out, did not “in itself mean that we are moving to a better and more peaceful world order. The era of continental rivalries may be more ferocious than the era of nationalisms.”<sup>87</sup> To insist, then, that this process represented something “good” for humankind relied upon an outside assumption. To understand this assumption in its origins, Grant argued, it was necessary to turn to the study of “progressive political philosophy and its interpretation of history.”<sup>88</sup>

Such a study led back to the new moral science which was initiated by Machiavelli and Hobbes, traced its way through the later “bourgeois” thought of figures like Locke, Smith, and Hume (and in the nineteenth century, Mill and Macaulay), and was later radicalized by successive generations of French and German thinkers, most notably Rousseau, Kant and Hegel.<sup>89</sup> “To many modern men,” Grant wrote, “the [progressive] assumptions of this age appear inevitable, as being the expression of the highest wisdom that the race has distilled.”<sup>90</sup> “Yet,” he continued, “these assumptions were made by particular men in particular settings.” In writing this, Grant was not claiming that these thinkers were merely giving voice to the historically contingent opinions of their particular societies. In fact, he realized that even to question the idea of progress as it had been refined and expanded upon within the modern tradition of political philosophy was to engage in what “may seem the work of a madman.” And as he made clear in the closing pages of *Lament for a Nation*, this was not without reason:

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perspective, current arguments over whether Pearson was a “realist” or an “idealist” in the realm of foreign policy miss the point. For Pearson—as for the society he represented more generally—considerations of the necessary and considerations of the good overlapped with one another.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 104-105.



It can only be with an enormous sense of hesitation that one dares to question modern political philosophy. If its assumptions are false, the age of progress has been a tragic aberration in the history of the species. To assert such a proposition lightly would be the height of irresponsibility. Has it not been in the age of progress that disease and overwork, hunger and poverty, have been drastically reduced? Those who criticize our age must at the same time contemplate pain, infant mortality, crop failures in isolated areas, and the sixteen-hour day.<sup>91</sup>

This more tentative, almost agnostic assessment of modern progressive thought seemed to mark a distinct change of tone in Grant's work, a retreat from his more resolute critique of liberalism and technology. Even the poignant sense of loss that pervaded most of Grant's lament gave way to a more philosophical attitude, what Hugh Donald Forbes describes as a "suspension of judgement."<sup>92</sup> There is a tension or even a contradiction that, it will be argued here, runs through most of Grant's writings. Heeding Hannah Arendt's insight that the best writers often present us with contradictions that "lead into the very center of their work,"<sup>93</sup> it is perhaps best not to assume that the ambiguities in Grant's thought can be easily smoothed away. But while acknowledging this, it is still possible to see how the two variant strands of Grant's critique might play complementary rhetorical roles. Sometimes it takes a forcefully stated counterview to shake the mind free of its more complacent certainties and open it up to the possibility of philosophical questioning. While Grant often reminds his reader that no honest assessment of the achievements of modern liberal society can dismiss the possibility that we are entering into a higher stage of human history, these reminders remain the less forcefully stated part of his critique. His fundamental doubts about the

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>92</sup> Hugh Donald Forbes, *George Grant: A Guide to his Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 74.

<sup>93</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. Second edition (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), 25.

goodness of the liberal project, on the other hand, are often put forward with an artistry and intensity that seldom leaves readers indifferent. Grant clearly does not see it as his central task to affirm a philosophical possibility that, in his opinion, is already the guiding faith of our society.

The fact that Grant's chief goal was to raise doubts about the modern liberal project, however, provokes a serious question about the practical value of studying his thoughts on Canadian foreign policy. "Foreign policy," Elie Kedourie pronounced a decade and a half after World War II, "is a practical pursuit... Foreign policy is action not speculation."<sup>94</sup> Some of Grant's critics have accused him of indulging in speculation at the cost of action—of pursuing a type of "theorizing that leads to impotence."<sup>95</sup> According to Byers, nowhere have the effects of Grant's thought been more enfeebling than in the realm of foreign policy. Grant's ideas, he argues, have had a "pervasive effect on how Canadians think about Canada's place in the world"<sup>96</sup> and have prevented the country from realizing its potential as an engaged middle power over the last few decades. This study is not concerned with challenging the claim that Grant's writing has dampened the nation's enthusiasm for an activist and internationalist foreign policy. But it does take issue with the suggestion that Grant encouraged political indifference toward foreign policy in this country. To have had a moderating effect on the nation's zeal for internationalism must be counted as a

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<sup>94</sup> Elie Kedourie, *The Crossman Confessions and other Essays in Politics, History, and Religion* (London: Mansell, 1984). Originally published in *The Princetonian*, January 4, 1961.

<sup>95</sup> Robin Mathews *George Grant's Betrayal of Canada* (Vancouver: R. Mathews Northlands Publications, 2004), 32. Many other critics have charged Grant with encouraging a philosophical withdrawal from politics. See for example, Janet Azjenstat, *The Once and Future Canadian Democracy: An Essay in Political Thought* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2003), 110-111; George Woodcock, "A Barometer of Public Anxieties: Review of Joan O'Donovan's *George Grant and the Twilight of Justice*," *Globe and Mail* (February 16, 1985), E15.

<sup>96</sup> Quoted in Michael Valpy, "This is Stephen Harper's war," *Globe and Mail* (August 18, 2007), F3.

political act, unless one narrowly identifies politics with the internationalist project itself.

### **Outline of the Project**

If Grant has influenced the nation's international role in the way that Byers suggests, he has done so despite the fact that his work offers no single, systematic presentation of his views on Canadian foreign policy. Nor, for that matter, has there been very much produced in the way of secondary scholarship on this topic. The present work is an attempt to bring together Grant's sundry thoughts on our nation's foreign policy into a more coherent synthesis. Chapter one traces the development of Grant's thought during the formative years of the Second World War. The argument is made that it was during this period that Grant first began to develop his more serious objections to liberalism. This interpretation of Grant's early thought is meant to challenge the perception that his antipathy to American liberalism was grounded in a simple attachment to the British Empire inherited from imperialist forebears. Through a close reading of some of his wartime correspondences it is shown that Grant began the war neither so critical of American liberalism, nor so friendly toward the British Empire as is often assumed. What changed his thinking was the attack on Pearl Harbor and America's subsequent entry into the war. Grant was forced to reckon with the prospect of a postwar international order dominated by what he came to see as an expanding American liberal empire. For a brief period at the end of the war Grant's distress over this prospect moved him to look for an alternative to the emerging *Pax Americana* in an idealized conception of the British Empire. In a booklet entitled "The Empire: Yes or No?," Grant argued that, unlike the Americans and Soviets who both pursued an

aggressive and divisive foreign policy dictated by self-interest, British imperialism was led by an understanding of the broader interests of international society. Grant knew that it was fruitless to imagine that this more universal British model of world order could be fully realized in a world caught in the clash between these ideological rivals; but especially for a country like Canada, which, because of its relative weakness and geographical location, found itself drawn ineluctably into the orbit of one of the superpowers, the British Empire could at least provide a useful “counterweight.”

But Grant’s hopes that Canada might safeguard its sovereignty within a renewed British Empire did not survive long into the postwar period. For one thing, it soon became apparent to him that Britain had been irretrievably damaged by the two world wars. Not only had its economic and military resources been exhausted, but so too had the loyalty of its subject peoples been exhausted by the sacrifices that they had been asked to bear. Nor, importantly, did the British ruling classes provide an edifying model to follow. “In the face of the competition from other European empires,” Grant remarked, “the British ruling classes acted as if their only hope of continuing power was to put their fate into the hands of the American empire.”<sup>97</sup> It gradually became clear to Grant that the young British enthusiast who had written “The Empire: Yes or No?” had underestimated the centrality of liberalism as a force within English imperialism. As this force became increasingly dominant in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was inevitable that Britain would begin to understand itself as having a shared destiny with that most liberal of world powers, the United States.

What was true of the British ruling class was also true of Canada’s ruling class, which since the 1930s centered more and more around the governing Liberal party.

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<sup>97</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 70.

Chapter two examines the role that Grant believed Mackenzie King and his administration had played in hastening Canada's integration with the United States. It argues against the view that Grant, failing to recognize the economic and military necessity that dictated this integration, painted it as a liberal conspiracy against the country. Grant sought neither to portray this rapprochement as a conspiracy, nor to deny that there was some sort of necessity behind the process. His more important claim in *Lament for a Nation* was that the Liberal's continentalist policies were in fact guided by a conception of the good that identified the United States with an Enlightenment ideal of progress. Canada's absorption into a larger North American political community was seen as a step in the direction of what Grant, borrowing from the Hegelian scholar, Alexandre Kojève, described as the universal and homogenous state—a worldwide order in which all war both between nations, and all war within nations (that is class warfare), had finally been overcome. To lend plausibility to Grant's claim, the chapter briefly examines some of the exaggerated hopes that King invested in trade and military agreements brokered with the administration of Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s and 1940s, notably the Reciprocity Act of 1935 and the 1940 Ogdensburg Agreement, which lay the groundwork for a joint continental defence scheme with the United States.

Chapter three examines what Grant saw as the failure of Canadian socialism to provide a meaningful alternative to the liberalism of Mackenzie King and his successors. By the early years of the war, King had moved the country decisively into the American sphere of influence, both economically and militarily. "If there had been an influential group that seriously desired the continuance of the country after 1940," Grant wrote, "it would have needed the animation of some political creed that differed

from the capitalist liberalism of the United States.”<sup>98</sup> According to Grant, socialism did not provide such a creed. This insight was provoked partly by events that shook Canadian political life in 1962-1963—events that would inspire Grant to write his brief “masterpiece of political meditation,” *Lament for a Nation*.<sup>99</sup> Grant had long had sympathy for socialism as a political movement, and even had a role in crafting the platform of what in 1961 would emerge as the New Democratic Party. But in 1963, when the NDP joined Lester Pearson’s Liberal party to defeat the Conservative government of John Diefenbaker in Parliament, it became clear to Grant that socialism was unlikely to provide a bulwark against the intrusion of American liberalism into Canadian political life. At issue in the vote was Diefenbaker’s response to Washington’s insistence that Ottawa make good on its commitment to arm its Bomarc missiles with nuclear warheads. In Grant’s opinion, Diefenbaker and his secretary of state, Howard Green’s resistance to this pressure constituted a last stand for Canadian nationalism. Grant thought that the NDP’s decision to join the Liberals in censuring the Conservatives demonstrated the limits of their nationalism.<sup>100</sup>

But to grasp the ultimate reasons why socialism failed to provide a meaningful alternative to the Liberal party in Canada, Grant thought one had to look beyond the level of political events to the realm of political theory. By the time Grant wrote *Lament for a Nation* in 1965, he had arrived at the conclusion that, philosophically, socialism rested on the same progressive understanding of human nature found in liberalism. At the core of the most influential strains of modern socialism, one found Marx, who, in

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<sup>98</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 61.

<sup>99</sup> Peter C. Emberley offered this description of *Lament for a Nation* in his Foreword to the work (first published in a 1994 edition of *Lament*), 16.

<sup>100</sup> “I found more real nationalism in the bourgeois, in the nationalistic bourgeois, than I did in the NDP, who were so full of ideology,” Grant remarked. Cayley, *George Grant in Conversation*, 97.

Grant's view, shared with liberal thinkers an essentially technological conception of human freedom. Marx, however, tied the realization of human freedom to a determinate historical process, which encouraged his followers to project their hopes onto a future transformation of society. Liberalism encouraged its followers to seek the technological transformation of the world in the here and now. Unlike Marxism, liberalism had no doctrine of teleology constraining or limiting its account of freedom, and therefore offered a much more suitable ideology for the age of progress. Ultimately, he thought that liberalism's triumph in Canada was an expression of this fact.

Chapter four examines the significance that Grant attached to Diefenbaker and Green's stance in the Defence Crisis. It compares the position taken by the prime minister and his secretary of state with that taken by the celebrated diplomats within the Department of External Affairs, notably, Norman Robertson. While Grant admitted that officials like Robertson were genuinely concerned with preserving Canadian independence ("it would be a travesty to deny [it]"<sup>101</sup>), he doubted whether they had honestly faced up to what this would mean in the postwar period. Grant suggested their internationalist faith had shielded them from the dangers that Canada's involvement in institutions like NATO posed to the nation's sovereignty. They were all too willing to believe that Canada had a unique role to play in the world, helping to bring about a peaceful international order. They were less willing to contemplate how this very goal justified the nation's participation in an American-led alliance that might very well come into conflict with the needs of sovereignty. Diefenbaker and Green, on the other hand, were in Grant's view too committed to the country of their concrete, lived

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<sup>101</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 63.

experience to find consolation in the possibility that it might be succeeded by something better, the realization of the internationalist hope.

Grant believed that the internationalism pervading External Affairs after the war was one expression of what he described as the “dominant ethical ‘ideal’” of our time: the desire to bring into being a “universal and homogeneous state.”<sup>102</sup> Chapter five offers a closer theoretical reflection on this ideal through an examination of Grant’s 1964 essay “Tyranny and Wisdom,” which takes up an earlier debate between the German émigré scholar, Leo Strauss, and the Russian-born thinker and French diplomat, Alexander Kojève. The immediate question animating the debate was whether the realization of the universal and homogeneous state would represent humankind’s highest achievement, as Kojève argued, or the worst sort of tyranny, as Strauss asserted. Although Grant presented his essay as little more than a review of the original debate, I argue that his intentions in fact went much further than this—that “Tyranny and Wisdom” provides us with our first glimpse of Grant’s mature stance on the proper relationship between political philosophy and political practice.

Strauss believed that at its very origins, modernity was defined by a revolution in thought which sought to give humankind control over its own fate by mastering chance.<sup>103</sup> This overcoming of chance, or the “conquest of nature,” in Bacon’s phrase, was the object of both modern political philosophy and the modern natural sciences. Strauss believed that only within the assumptions of the modern age—notably, the belief that human beings gained their freedom by overcoming chance—did it appear that the coming-to-be of the universal and homogeneous state would represent a

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<sup>102</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 88-89.

<sup>103</sup> “What is Political Philosophy?” in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays by Leo Strauss*, edited with an Introduction by Hilail Gildin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 41.



liberation for our species. But viewed from outside of modern assumptions, in particular, from the perspective of the Ancient Greeks, the realization of the universal and homogeneous state presented a very different prospect. Strauss purported to find in the writings of certain Greek philosophers, (notably, Plato and Aristotle) the grounds for the claim that the universal and homogeneous state would, if realized, represent a terrible tyranny.

Unfortunately, modern thought, according to Strauss, was built upon a rejection of the classical thinkers, whose wisdom therefore remained a very elusive thing for any modern society. At the same time, he allowed that not all modern societies presented the same obstacles to the pursuit of ancient wisdom. While the modern liberal West was also built upon a rejection of classical thought, it at least provided legal protections for the individual, and thus offered certain guarantees of freedom for those who felt compelled to question their society and to seek the understanding of the classical thinkers. In the context of the Cold War, this reasoning provided the justification for a spirited defence of liberal democracy against the other major ideological alternative, communism, which held little regard for the rule of law.

Grant too had suspicions that the universal and homogeneous state, if realized, would be a tyranny. But in “Tyranny and Wisdom,” he expressed his doubts about this modern ideal more tentatively than Strauss. He even hinted that the evidence that Strauss adduced from the classical Greek thinkers to support his more categorical claims about the tyrannical nature of the universal and homogeneous state was not as clear or convincing as Strauss seemed to suggest; certainly, Grant questioned whether those looking to challenge the assumptions of our own age would succeed in

uncovering this challenge in the ancients. He suggested that these modern assumptions were so dominant, so inescapable, for those living within the liberal West, that it was not at all certain whether our society, despite its legal freedoms, offered any greater possibility of questioning them. He therefore worried that those who took up a vigorous defence of liberal society were ultimately only reinforcing their own monolithic beliefs and practices, and moving us further toward the ideal of the universal and homogeneous state.

## Chapter 1

### The Lessons of the War: The British Empire in George Grant's Early Thought

In his classic work, *Lament for a Nation*, George Grant famously pronounced that Canada had ceased to exist as a nation. It had been swept away, he argued, by the forces of modernity which flooded across the American border after the Second World War. While many readers were shocked by Grant's claim, a few reacted, not with shock, but with skepticism. If Grant lamented the onset of modernity in Canada, they argued, it was primarily because it entailed the eclipse of the dominant European culture from which he sprang. Both sides of Grant's family were tied to a social class whose prestige rested on Canada's traditional connection with the British Empire. What *Lament for a Nation* really illuminated, many critics averred, was its author's inability to accept the startling collapse of that Empire after the war.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Early critics who linked Grant's analysis to the desire to maintain a privileged social class include R.K. Crook, "Modernization and Nostalgia: A Note on the Sociology of Pessimism," *Queen's Quarterly* 73 (1976), 268-84; and Robert Blumstock in "Anglo-Saxon Lament," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 3:2 (May 1966), 98-105. A more sensitive review of *Lament for a Nation*, which nevertheless draws the same connections between Grant's thought and his social background is Ramsay Cook's "Loyalism, Technology and Canada's Fate," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 5:3 (August 1970), 50-60. Cook makes the same point with a good deal less sensitivity in "A Nationalist Intellectual Behind Every Maple Tree: Notes on Current Fashions in Canadian Patriotism," *Saturday Night* (April 1970), 19-22. John C. Kendall who sees Grant as part of a modern "intelligentsia," claims that "there is an atavistic, derivative progression from the Loyalist tracts" to his "controversial tomes." "A Canadian Construction of Reality: Northern Images of the United States," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 4:1 (Spring 1974), 28-29. Carl Berger concludes his classic work *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914*, by describing Grant's writing as a "depressing footnote" to the age of his imperialist grandfathers, George Monro Grant and George Parkin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 265. Berger's view of *Lament for a Nation* is affirmed by Philip Massolin in his *Canadian Intellectuals, the Tory Tradition, and the Challenge of Modernity, 1939-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 240-241. In recent decades, Grant has also been criticized in a similar vein by scholars searching for postcolonial themes in Canada's literature. See for example, Diana Brydon's "The Dream of Tory Origins: Inventing Canadian Beginnings," *Australian-Canadian Studies* 6:2 (1989): 35-46; and Brydon and Helen Tiffin, *Decolonising Fictions* (Sydney: Dungaroo Press, 1993): 95. See also

Some of Grant's readers have looked beyond *Lament for a Nation* to his earlier writings to find more direct documentary evidence of this self-interested attachment to British imperialism. Grant's 1945 polemic, "The Empire: Yes or No?," for example, offers a passionate plea for the maintenance of Canada's traditional ties with Britain in the postwar period.<sup>2</sup> Scholars like Philip Massolin have suggested that this piece lays bare the unfiltered prejudices that Grant inherited from his imperialist grandfathers, George Monro Grant and George Parkin.<sup>3</sup> This chapter aims to provide a very different reading of "The Empire: Yes or No?" I argue that Grant's attitude toward the British Empire was not first and foremost the expression of an unthinking patriotism. In fact, I will make the claim that Grant spent the first years of the war as a harsh critic of Britain and what he saw as its war-mongering ways. His eventual embrace of the Empire, I

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Jill Vickers, *Canada: Theoretical Discourse*, selected proceedings of the conference entitled *Theoretical Discourse in the Canadian Intellectual Community*, edited by Terry Goldie, Carmen Lambert, Rowland Lorimer (Montreal: Association for Canadian Studies, 1994), 351-71; and Vickers, "Feminisms and Nationalisms in English Canada," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 35:2 (Summer 2000): 139.

<sup>2</sup> *The Empire: Yes or No?* was originally published as a pamphlet by Ryerson Press as part of a series entitled *Canada Must Choose: A Series Dealing with Our Immediate Problems*. It is reproduced in full in *The Collected Works of George Grant, Volume 1, 1933-1950*, edited by Arthur Davis and Peter Emberley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 97-126. Another significant, but shorter, work from this period is Grant's "Have We a Canadian Nation," originally published by the Institute of Public Affairs, Dalhousie University, and reprinted in *The Collected Works, Volume 1*, 127-36. *The Collected Works* also features examples of a column, *Food for Thought*, that Grant wrote for magazine of the Canadian Association for Adult Education from 1943-1945.

<sup>3</sup> Massolin, *Canadian Intellectuals*, 235-241. Ramsay Cook offers a more nuanced interpretation of "The Empire: Yes or No?," but in the end still sees it as an early symptom of that "nostalgia for the Victorian past" that, in his view, marred Grant's later *Lament for a Nation*. "Loyalism, Technology and Canada's Fate," 53, 59. Joan O'Donovan, generally a much more generous reader of Grant, nevertheless reaffirms the interpretation of his wartime writings as essentially "patriotic" pieces, expressing the opinions inherited by Grant as the "scion of one of Canada's oldest, most distinguished, and most influential families, connected with wealth, prestige, and political power". *George Grant and the Twilight of Justice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 11-12. Barry Cooper also sees "The Empire: Yes or No?" as avowal of Grant's "loyalism" delivered "in the raw and direct language of a twenty-seven-year-old, just returned from Britain". "Did George Grant's Canada Ever Exist," in *George Grant and the Future of Canada*, edited by Yusuf K. Umar, with a foreword by Barry Cooper (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1992), 159.

contend, was the outcome of a philosophical struggle to understand, and define an alternative to, an emerging American world order.<sup>4</sup>

The key to understanding wartime publications like “The Empire: Yes or No?,” I argue, is through a careful reading of Grant’s private correspondences and journal entries during the same period. As Robert C. Sibley remarks, while Grant’s public writings often expressed a forward-looking faith in British imperialism, “in private [he] was not so hopeful.” Sibley notes that letters written by Grant in 1945 betray a “growing pessimism about the future” that belied his confident projections for the Empire.<sup>5</sup> In actuality, this pessimism had been growing for several years. This chapter traces the development of Grant’s changing ideas about the British Empire during the war years, paying special attention to his personal correspondences. The aim in doing so is to demonstrate that Grant’s attitude toward Britain was more complex, and certainly much more critical and questioning, than has generally been assumed.

### **The Early War Years**

Grant was preparing to set sail for Oxford University when Britain declared war on Germany in the late summer of 1939. Having recently won a Rhodes scholarship, the twenty year-old Grant planned to begin his doctorate in law that fall. He was soon contacted by a Rhodes trustee, however, who did his best to impress upon Grant the dangers of traveling to England to study at such a time. Less than a month later, Grant was aboard an American ship bound for England.

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<sup>4</sup> This interpretation accords with a comment that Grant himself later made about “The Empire: Yes or No?” “I wrote the piece about the empire when I was very young,” he wrote, “and when I was just first revolting from the liberalism in which I was brought up. I have found it very difficult indeed to understand the collapse of the English ruling classes since 1945” (Letter to Stephen Bornstein, in *Selected Letters*, 244).

<sup>5</sup> Robert C. Sibley, *Northern Spirits: John Watson, George Grant, and Charles Taylor, Appropriations of Hegelian Political Thought* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008), 123.

As a young student at Toronto's elite Upper Canada College, where Grant's own father was headmaster while he was attending, Grant had already committed himself to the path of pacifism.<sup>6</sup> But pacifism did not mean political withdrawal for Grant, and as war became imminent, he determined that he "would far rather live in the centre of the crisis," than be left standing on the sidelines.<sup>7</sup> He stayed on in England even after Oxford's operations ground almost to a halt in the first year of the war. In July of 1940, Grant joined a group of pacifist students from Oxford and Cambridge who came together to form a volunteer Universities Ambulance Unit. The venture was, however, a short-lived one. The unit had intended to serve in the field, but this was an eventuality which seemed increasingly unlikely following the fall of France that same summer. Upon disbanding, many of its members, including Grant, repaired to the neighbourhood of Bermondsey in London's east end to serve as Air Raid Patrol officers. Grant himself became an Air Raid Precautions warden, a position which, by all accounts he carried out with admirable bravery. He served in this capacity for a year until, his moral resolve finally broken by family pressures to fight, he made an unsuccessful bid to join the merchant marine.<sup>8</sup>

William Christian, Grant's biographer and the editor of a collection of his letters, has described Grant's service in Bermondsey as "a way of doing his duty to king

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<sup>6</sup> Two of Grant's childhood friends at Upper Canada College who would join him in declaring themselves pacifists, later recalled the difficulty of taking such a stance. UCC pridefully maintained strong British military traditions and a Cadet Corps with a mandatory service requirement that was instituted in 1919, just two years after Grant's father took over the headmastership. See the entries by Michael Shalom Gelber and Kenneth McNaught, in James FitzGerald's *Old Boys: The Powerful Legacy of Upper Canada College* (Toronto: Macfarlane, Walter and Ross, 1994), 38-46.

<sup>7</sup> William Christian, *George Grant: A Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 54.

<sup>8</sup> "I am going to try to get into the navy or the merchant marine next week," Grant wrote his mother, "even though I think it is one of the stupidest, most useless, basest actions I have done. But people expect it; so there one goes." Letter to Maude Grant, 1941, in *Selected Letters*, 80.

and country, without compromising his pacifist principles.”<sup>9</sup> The implication is that Grant in fact stood squarely behind Britain’s cause during the war, even if he refused violence as a means to advancing it. There is reason to suppose, however, that Grant’s relationship to the Empire was actually a good deal more complicated than this. To begin with an observation that Christian himself makes about Grant’s pacifism, it did not entail a “total opposition to the idea of killing.”<sup>10</sup> On the contrary, Grant believed that it was morally justifiable to fight for the right cause. But the evidence of his letters suggests that Grant did not see Britain’s war effort as providing such a cause.

There can be no question that Grant viewed a German victory as the grimmest possible outcome of the fighting. But at the same time he found it impossible to contemplate an outright British victory with equanimity. There were moments when he was overcome by a dark sense that the war was not simply a showdown between rival powers, but a battle that would shape the world’s destiny in some unknowable way.

“The war progresses toward some incalculable destination,” he wrote,

‘That undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns.’ It is like death, the strangest feeling of not knowing (apart from the obvious short[-term] military situation), where England over a long period of time has the advantage, but where in the immediate future Germany seems to have the advantage. Certainly the world, if it be the traveler, can never return to the destination whence it started. The wheels are set in motion down the hill and the car is gaining velocity and going faster and faster. Whether it is going to crash or not depends on whether there is anyone strong enough to put on the very worthless brakes or to control the obsolete steering gear. Oh what a crash. It would be tremendous and

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<sup>9</sup> Christian, *George Grant*, 58. In a 1941 letter to his mother, Grant remarked that it was not “some inane idea about killing that holds one back...to kill for a purpose seems to me utterly justifiable.” Letter to Maude Grant, 1941, in *Selected Letters*, 83.

<sup>10</sup> Christian, *George Grant: A Biography*, 82. For more on Grant’s pacifism, particularly on its Christian roots, see *Ibid.*, 65; as well as Christian’s “Was George Grant a Red Tory,” in *Athens and Jerusalem: George Grant’s Theology, Philosophy, and Politics*, edited by Ian Angus, Ron Dart, and Randy Peg Peters (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2006), 41-43; and Harris Athanasiadis, *George Grant and the Theology of the Cross: The Christian Foundations of His Thought*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 13-19.

sudden like a car. It will be bump, bump, bump, till the car falls to pieces.

Grant reflected on the possible outcomes of the war with an acute sense of anxiety. The prospect of a fascist victory was, of course, terrible to contemplate. “I see only blackness from Germany and Italy co-operating,” he desponded. Yet he also feared the consequences of an Allied victory. “Although pleasant for all of us,” he claimed, “Anglo-American capitalism would wreak havoc on the world.”<sup>11</sup> The very loathsomeness of the fascist ideology had encouraged what Grant saw as an exaggerated sense of righteousness amongst the Allies. The British in particular, with their history of imperialism, were only too anxious to re-make the world in their unblemished image. “The thing that [England] must learn if it is to survive (one might say if Europe is to survive),” he warned, “is that it is not heaven-endowed to run the world.”<sup>12</sup> While Grant’s letters from this period often expressed warmth and admiration toward the English that he encountered in London’s east end, he could also be jarringly critical of the country. There were times when he came close to suggesting that Britain’s role in the war was not all that different from Germany’s. In a journal entry from 1942 he expressed exasperation that the obvious lessons had not been drawn by those who believed in the superiority of the British: “What I can never understand—why it isn’t patently obvious to the people (British German Japanese or American) who preach the Herrenvolk idea, that other nations will soon learn the idea—then when Herrenvolk meets Herrenvolk the result is chaos—what we have now.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, 1941, in *Selected Letters*, 74.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>13</sup> Journal entry, October 24, 1942 in *Collected Works*, 1:20.



Grant saw the imperialist impulse permeating every level of British society. For this same reason, he was skeptical of the socialist belief that imperialism could be overcome by taking power away from that class traditionally in charge of foreign policy. In particular, he scoffed at the British Labour Party's contention that the Empire could be transformed, through a program of social reform, into a sort of "international socialist commonwealth."<sup>14</sup> Since the 1930s, British Labour had pushed a platform that sought to combine economic planning at the national level with what was described as "international planning" at the world level. The two goals of domestic economic reform and international economic reform were seen to be mutually reinforcing and inseparable, and with the onset of the war, Labour drew this link with even greater emphasis.<sup>15</sup> Underlying this plan was an assumption that imperialism was a function of an elite controlled, capitalist economy, and that the way beyond empire lay in dispersing economic power to the working classes. While Grant did not question that imperialism was directed by elite forces, he refused to accept "the myth that the ordinary man—the working class—the masses (what you will) are the blameless stooges of selfish scheming."<sup>16</sup> He thought that it was a characteristic feature of English imperialism that it was "based primarily on exploitation not at home but abroad."<sup>17</sup> "Even these poor people who have not had the real fruit of the products of empire," Grant remarked, "still have received many of the benefits."<sup>18</sup> London as a whole, he claimed, was "pulled together not by the river, not by a thought, not by a road, but [by]

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Toye, "The Labour Party's External Economic Policy in the 1940s," *The Historical Journal* 43:1 (2000): 189.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>16</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, June 24, 1941, in *Selected Letters*, 78.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>18</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, 1941, in *Selected Letters*, 76.

a terrible economic purpose that lies subconscious in most Londoner's minds."<sup>19</sup> His close contact with the working class of Bermondsey during the war convinced him that they were "just as corrupt as the people above them," and he insisted that he could see "no brave new world coming from them." All of this led Grant to see Labour's desire to pull up Britain's lower classes, while simultaneously pushing for reform at the international level, as paradoxical:

It is the Labour movement in a country whose life is based on the incoming dividends into the country from the exploitation of other countries, sometimes by force as in India, sometimes by the threat of force. The Conservatives say, 'We are honestly going to continue that rule by hook or by crook.' Labour can't decide whether it believes in economic imperialism and, if it does not, how is it going to support this country without this influx of money from abroad? What is the solution?<sup>20</sup>

### **The American Hope**

In contrast to the jaded view he took of Labour's policies, Grant greeted efforts at reform in the United States with relative optimism. As an adult, Grant recalled that his "first political memory [was] Roosevelt's inaugural in 1933—being called in from playing in the spring floods and told by my father to listen to the great man on the radio." He remembered "with what hope and excitement one listened to FDR in the next decade."<sup>21</sup> In the run-up to the American elections of 1940, Grant voiced enthusiastic support for Roosevelt and his commitment to sustaining the interventionist schemes initiated under his New Deal.<sup>22</sup> Although Grant's faith in the president soon began to "waver," he still found himself identifying with what he described as the more general

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>21</sup> "From Roosevelt to LBJ," in *Collected Works* 3:466.

<sup>22</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, August 31, 1940, in *Selected Letters*, 63; also see letter to Maude Grant, 1940, 58.

spirit of “hope” within American society.<sup>23</sup> He found this hope manifested in the poetry, philosophy and even the building styles of the country, and affirmed his commitment to “bring[ing] Canada more into line” with the American tradition after the war. He pondered whether Canada might not be destined to form “part of a larger whole” with the United States after the war,<sup>24</sup> or at least whether his own future did not lie south of the border.<sup>25</sup>

This is not to say that Grant had no misgivings about the United States. He in fact thought that he could see traces of the same instinct for rule that was so prevalent amongst the British. “I hope it doesn’t grow,” he remarked, “so that the Americans become too self-righteous.”<sup>26</sup> On balance, however, Grant’s anxieties over British imperialism clearly outweighed his fear of like tendencies in the Americans. The United States somehow embodied the hopes of a more moderate form of capitalist society. He even seemed to welcome the idea that the United States would play a leading role in international politics after the war. His reaction to the news in August of 1941 of Roosevelt and Churchill’s secret conference off the coast of Newfoundland to discuss the postwar order was telling. Roosevelt’s commitment, for a time anyway, seemed to assuage Grant’s fears of Anglo-American expansionism. “I prefer to have England and the USA govern the world than Germany,” Grant wrote, “as long as they do it passably, do not ask too high a price, and do not ask me to govern or help enforce that government when the war is over.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, November 1941, in *Selected Letters*, 88-89.

<sup>24</sup> Letter to R. A. Trotter, September 18, 1940, in *Selected Letters*, 64.

<sup>25</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, November 22, 1939, in *Selected Letters*, 42.

<sup>26</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, 1941, in *Selected Letters*, 77.

<sup>27</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, August 21, 1941, in *Selected Letters*, 81-82.

Grant's mood of optimism did not last long, however. Ironically, what seems to have broken it was America's entry into the war following the fateful Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941. The news of America's announcement reached Grant while he was already in a psychologically fragile state. Only a short while earlier, Grant had finally yielded to the pressure to join in active duty and made the torturous decision to sail with the merchant marine. He was turned away, however, when it was discovered that he had a tubercular lesion on one lung. Panicked and depressed, Grant retreated from London to the countryside, briefly falling out of contact with friends and family. When Grant learned of America's declaration of war, his reaction was dramatic. Writing to his mother, he claimed that, "For three days I really almost was on the point of suicide, certainly nearer than I have ever been or ever hope to be." "It just didn't seem worthwhile," he continued, "to struggle[,] for that spreading of the war almost guaranteed in my mind the triumph of all that I had hoped would not conquer...It may [help] (in fact, it is almost certain) to establish the Anglo-American *pax*, but will that be much nearer to God than the other alternative?" Reacting to what he saw as the naïve optimism of expert opinion in Canada, Grant asked critically, "did practically anyone understand what other parts of the world would feel about the establishment of Anglo-Saxon civilization? We have just presumed that our standards fit others that ours are the best, that other people can find their God through our way of life."<sup>28</sup>

At first blush, Grant's reaction to America's entry into the war seems perplexing. Only a few months earlier, he had believed that the world's best hope lay in an international order in which the United States played a central role. By taking up arms alongside the Allies, America was almost guaranteeing that this future would

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<sup>28</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, January 3, 1942, in *Selected Letters*, 95.

materialize. One might therefore have expected Grant to react to the news with joy rather than despair. What, then, are we to make of his response?

One fact worth noting is that Grant did not believe that America's new status as a belligerent would expedite a satisfactory resolution to the conflict. On the contrary, he felt that it would ensure, in his words, the "spreading of the war." While America's decision to fight made victory for the Allies that much more certain, it also meant that they would be unwilling to accept any outcome short of absolute defeat for the enemy. By pursuing a Carthaginian peace, the victors would also be handing themselves a blank slate on which to impose their vision of a new order. Some such reflection seems to have underpinned Grant's belief that America's arrival on the battlefield ensured "the establishment of Anglo-Saxon civilization." Forty years after the war, Grant argued that it was Churchill's narrow focus on victory at all costs that brought England into its fateful alliance with the United States.

I blame Churchill terribly for bringing the Americans into the Second World War to see that the English won in Europe. What has happened since '45 has been the unequivocal victory of the English-speaking powers in the world with only Russia against them. And I think the civilization that the English-speaking powers made out of their victory has not been such a great civilization. And I say this as someone brought up in the English world.<sup>29</sup>

Grant believed that the first object of British policy should have been to prevent the expansion of the war. Instead, under Churchill's leadership, England fixed its sights on bringing total defeat to Germany. As a young ambulance trainee in 1940, he was appalled when a fellow pacifist ridiculed Neville Chamberlain attempts at appeasing the

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<sup>29</sup> Grant, "An Interview with George Grant," 44. In 1938, a less resolutely pacifist Grant viewed Chamberlain's appeasement much more critically (see Letter to Maude Grant, 1938, in *Selected Letters*, 25). British historian John Charmley casts a similar (and equally critical) light on the importance of Churchill's vision of a "Grand Alliance" in bringing the Americans into the war. *Churchill's Grand Alliance: The Anglo-American Special Relationship, 1940-1957* (New York: Harvest Books, 1996).

Italians. “I could hardly believe it,” he later recalled, “because I assumed that Chamberlain had been trying to maintain peace in Europe while trying to keep the USA and the USSR out of Europe.”<sup>30</sup> Early in the war, Grant accepted it as a principle that the Allies should “never discourage an early peace, if it is possible,” and found himself agreeing with an author who bristled at the hawkish attitude apparently being expressed by some Americans: “The English are suffering; the U.S.A. is not. Therefore the U.S.A. has no right to yap for blood like the crowd at a gladiatorial show.”<sup>31</sup> As Christian notes, Grant was greatly shaken by the Netherlands’ quick collapse, remarking that England was “no longer fighting for liberty, but for her life.”<sup>32</sup> But like many British pacifists,<sup>33</sup> he seems to have held on to some faint hope that a resolution, short of absolute victory for either side, might be achieved. In fact, as late as 1943 Grant entertained the implausible notion that the Allies “would take the same kind of compromise from conservative Germans,” that Churchill had accepted by backing Marshal Bagdolio to secure Mussolini’s ouster.<sup>34</sup> He believed that “anything that will save Europe from another winter of war & prevent the dissolution of everything is worthwhile.”<sup>35</sup> What he feared most was a protracted slaughter that would see continental Europe reduced to a rubble footing for the postwar order.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Extract from letter to Noel Curren-Briggs, written about 1984, in *Selected Letters*, 61-62. See also George Grant, “Louis Ferdinand Céline,” in *The George Grant Reader* edited by William Christian and Sheila Grant (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1998), 377.

<sup>31</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, January 25, 1940, 46; Grant raised the same views in a Letter to Professor R.A. Trotter, January 18, 1940, in *Selected Letters*, 44.

<sup>32</sup> Christian notes that after Germany’s crushing defeat of the Netherlands, Grant remarked that England was “no longer fighting for liberty, but for her life. “Was George Grant a Red Tory?,” 43.

<sup>33</sup> Richard A. Rempel, “The Dilemmas of British Pacifists During World War II,” *Journal of Modern History* 50:4 (December 1978), D1215. {D1213-D1229}

<sup>34</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, 1943, in *Selected Letters*, 108.

<sup>35</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, summer 1943, in *Selected Letters*, 109-10.

<sup>36</sup> Grant would later claim that the Americans and the Russians viewed national socialism as symptomatic of a deep-seated European resistance to the modern progressive ideology shared by both liberalism and

But Grant must have realized that these late-blooming hopes were fragile flowers. Even ignoring the vast improbability of a German compromise, the attack on Pearl Harbor had practically guaranteed in his mind that no early peace would be reached. With America's entry into the war, Grant believed the Allies would seek the total victory needed to impose an Anglo-American *pax* over Europe's order. In the months and years that followed, one could detect a more critical attitude toward the United States taking root in his thinking. Although the shift began subtly and followed an uneven path (at least publicly, as we shall see, Grant remained for a time well-disposed to the prospect of the United States having a share in world leadership), by the end of the war, his objections had grown in measure with America's growing power and influence.

### **Reassessing the Empire**

As Grant's view of the United States became more critical, his opinion of England began to shift in the opposite direction. Grant increasingly seemed to sympathize with the Empire as he witnessed its power being eclipsed on the world stage. An early sign of this change in attitude could be seen in his reassessment of the role of the working class in England. In 1941, before America's entry into the war, Grant had charged that the British worker was just as corrupted by imperialism as any other class. It was, after all, a system "based primarily on exploitation not at home but abroad." Late in 1942, however, Grant leveled the following criticism against a group that he described as "Anglophobe leftists":

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Marxism, and agreed that the only way to overcome this resistance was "to smash Europe." Cayley, *George Grant in Conversation*, 117-18.

One thing that is consistently forgotten...is that English imperialism is not the only side to the life of England, and that English capitalists have performed almost as great an exploitation within their own country as without, that the average English man has had little benefit from the empire other than fighting to maintain it, that the average Englishman (& by that I mean the average income group £3/10 etc.) has had little of the economic benefit of the empire.”<sup>37</sup>

While Grant still saw England’s economic system as a corrupting force, he no longer believed that this corruption reached down into all levels of society. Nor did he continue to view England as beyond reform. Two days after making the above journal entry, he wrote a letter to a former professor from Queen’s, R.A. Trotter, expressing his belief that Britain’s postwar reconstruction would necessitate some measure of “planning.” The English war machine had been mobilized through massive intervention in the economy, and it was not realistic to think that this trend could be suddenly reversed following the war. The task of reconstructing bombed cities alone would ensure that government continued to play a centralizing role. “It seems clear that, after the war,” Grant wrote, “the people of England and Scotland will have to face their problems, particularly their economic ones, with far greater power in the hands of the state, than they have ever granted to it before.”<sup>38</sup> Grant cited the authority of Sir William Beveridge, whose soon-to-be-published Report on social services in Britain would provide the blueprint the country’s postwar welfare reforms.<sup>39</sup> The enthusiasm generated by Beveridge’s study anticipated a shift in the public mood that would see the Labour Party win a landslide victory over Churchill’s Conservatives in 1945. Grant, who earlier in the war had dismissed Labour’s utopianism, now appeared to be moving in the direction of the British voter.

<sup>37</sup> Journal entry, November 1, 1942, in *Collected Works* 1, 101.

<sup>38</sup> Letter to R.A. Trotter, November 3, 1942, in *Selected Letters*, 103.

<sup>39</sup> The Report is available on-line at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/19\\_07\\_05\\_beveridge.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/19_07_05_beveridge.pdf).



At the same time, Grant's perception of the American political landscape also seemed to be changing. As we have seen, at the beginning of the war, Grant thought that he could see the currents of an American reformist spirit in Roosevelt's 1940 bid for re-election. Roosevelt stood for "progressive democracy" over the dream of a "conservative businessman's heaven."<sup>40</sup> In the fall of 1942, however, it looked to Grant as if the future of the United States, and along with it Canada, belonged to the conservative businessman. He speculated that after the war, "we in Canada and the US...will probably want to continue with our economic institutions that gave the individual an almost free hand."<sup>41</sup> But Grant was no longer resigned to the possibility that Canada might tie its fortunes to the Americans after the war. He feared that "those elements in our country, who believe strongly in an uncontrolled economic life, may so distrust the new England economically that it will find expression in antagonism to the continuance of our free relationship with England." "This would seem to me a disastrous attitude," he continued,

for my interest in the maintenance of our connection with England has never been because of its advantages in terms of power, but of the very practical, if intangible advantages of a North American country freely keeping in close cooperation & friendship on another continent. If our relationship will not stand the test of England's changing status, then it does not seem to me to be "founded upon the rock." This may seem very idealistic in a world where power seems to play the vital part.<sup>42</sup>

In a rather vaguely articulated way, Grant believed that postwar economic reform in England would test the solidity of the Empire. It would reveal whether a country like

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<sup>40</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, 1940, in *Selected Letters*, 58.

<sup>41</sup> Letter to R.A. Trotter, November 3, 1942, in *Selected Letters*, 103; Grant may have been responding to the reversal that the Democratic Party was experiencing in that year's House of Representative elections, which he referred to in his journal as a "sad thing." Journal entry, November 4, 1942, *Collected Works* 1, 26.

<sup>42</sup> Letter to R.A. Trotter, November 3, 1942, in *Selected Letters*, 104.

Canada was willing to sustain a relationship with Britain, even though the relationship did not serve Canada's immediate "advantage in terms of power." Evidently power was meant here in a way that comprehended the idea of economic self-interest. Britain's attempt to build a nationally oriented economy, Grant seemed to suggest, would be incompatible with the economic interests of Canada, a nation that he apparently saw as more inflexibly wedded to the tenants of economic liberalism and open trade. If Canada were to maintain a strong bond to England after the war, it would have to be willing to overcome narrow economic self-interest. This theme of economic sacrifice would gradually take on a broader significance for Grant as he began to reflect on the challenges of building a stable international order after the war.

In 1943, a year after America's entry into the war, Grant authored a pamphlet entitled "Canada—An Introduction to a Nation" for the Department of External Affairs.<sup>43</sup> The tone, as one might expect from a government publication of this nature, was for the most part unpolemical. By the end of the pamphlet, however, the voice of its earnest young author seemed to break through. In the final, rather importantly titled section, "General good-will and a desire for peace," Grant made the following claim: "like most smaller nations, [Canada] has everything to gain from a world of order, justice, and stability—a world where she can sell her goods and conduct her life, free from the ever-pressing fear of war. Yet like many other countries she has not always realized that peace cannot be gained without sacrifices." Grant went on to provide a more specific historical context for this comment: "Thus though Canada was always a member of the League of Nations, she was not always ready to bear her responsibility

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<sup>43</sup> See Grant, *Collected Works 1*, 74-90.

as a member of the organization.”<sup>44</sup> Presumably what Grant was referring to was Canada’s unwillingness to follow through on sanctions that its own League representative had proposed against Italy following Mussolini’s 1935 invasion of Ethiopia (Abyssinia). Canada was too busy getting on with its own business during that “low dishonest decade,” as one scholar put it, to face up to the urgent challenges arising beyond its borders.<sup>45</sup> Although Grant did not make the comparison entirely explicit, he drew a nonetheless crucial distinction between Canada’s vacillating response to the Abyssinian Crisis and its very different reaction to the events of September 1939. Although other “American nations” were threatened both strategically and economically by Germany’s aggression, Canada alone showed an unflinching resolve to fight. The reason, according to Grant, was that the nation was responding to something higher than its own interest. What brought Canada into the war, he argued, was “loyalty to the Commonwealth.”<sup>46</sup> This same loyalty and willingness to make sacrifices—so absent from Canada’s commitment to the League of Nations—would be essential to the building of an effective international order after the war.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>45</sup> James Eayrs, “‘A Low Dishonest Decade’: Aspects of Canadian External Policy, 1931-1939” in *The Growth of Canadian Policies in External Affairs*, H.L. Keenleyside et al. (North Carolina: Duke University, 1960).

<sup>46</sup> Grant, “Canada—An Introduction to a Nation,” 89.

<sup>47</sup> It is worth noting how substantially Grant’s criticism of the League differed from the realist critique that would take hold in Britain and the United States after the war. Critics like E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (New York: Perennial [Harper-Collins], 2001, originally published in 1939), 117,118, argued that the League’s failure during the Abyssinian Crisis was rooted in “the illusion of a separation between politics and economics—a belated legacy of the *laissez-faire* nineteenth century,” English-speaking countries in particular were too ready to believe that they could pursue their economic well-being, as if an economic order did not already presuppose relationships of force with other nations. In Hans Morgenthau’s well-known formulation, it was necessary to turn away from the dangerous illusion that society existed merely to protect the individual’s right to pursue his or her economic interests, to a tougher minded notion of the “national interest conceived as power among other powers.” Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Thompson, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: McGraw Hill, sixth edition 1985, originally published in 1948), 165. This was very different from Grant’s claim that countries would only be moved to fight if they recognized something beyond self-interest.

Grant's 1943 pamphlet carried no suggestion of his earlier concern that economic prejudices in Canada and the United States after the war would thwart good relations with England. He acknowledged that Canada would continue to be drawn more and more into the American ambit, both at the economic and cultural level. But he voiced no suspicion that this development would in any way threaten the nation's fundamental relationship with Britain. Indeed, "Canada—An Introduction to a Nation" concluded by proclaiming Canada's role as a "meeting ground that can draw the two great Anglo-Saxon peoples of the world together."<sup>48</sup> It appeared that not only had Grant overcome his earlier fears of a growing estrangement between Britain and North America, he had done it in rather grand fashion, appealing to a notion of unity that found an echo in the sweeping rhetoric of no less a figure than Churchill.<sup>49</sup> There are a number of considerations that might help to explain why Grant now appeared to adopt a more hopeful outlook for postwar relations. Perhaps after witnessing months of successful Anglo-American co-operation on the battlefield, he was finally convinced of

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<sup>48</sup> Grant, "Canada—An Introduction to a Nation," 90.

<sup>49</sup> The idea that Canada could serve as a "meeting ground" between the old world and the new—an idea with a long pedigree in Canada—was revived by Churchill in a speech to the Canadian parliament in December of 1941. "Canada," Churchill pronounced, "occupies a unique position in the British Empire because of its unbreakable ties with Britain and its ever-growing friendship and intimate association with the United States. Canada is a potent magnet, drawing together those in the new world and in the old." ("Some Chicken! Some Neck!" in *Churchill Speaks: Winston S. Churchill in Peace and War, Collected Speeches, 1897-1963*, edited by Robert Rhodes James (New York: Chelsea House, 1980), 786). The notion that Canada would serve as a mediator between Britain and the United States, however, was secondary to the more fundamental ideal of an emerging Anglo-American unity. Churchill made one of his first public appeals to this ideal at a September 1943 speech delivered at Harvard University. "We have learned from hard experiences," that stronger, more efficient, more rigorous world institutions must be created to preserve peace and to forestall the causes of future wars....But I am here to tell you that, whatever form your system of world security may take, however the nations are grouped and ranged, whatever derogations are made from national sovereignty for the sake of the large synthesis, nothing will work soundly or for long without the untied effort of the British and American peoples...If we are together nothing is impossible. If we are divided all will fail. I therefore preach continually the doctrine of the fraternal association of our two peoples, not for any purpose of gaining invidious material advantages for either of them, not for territorial aggrandizement or the vain pomp of earthly domination, but for the sake of service to mankind and for the honour that comes to those who faithfully serve great causes." "Anglo-American Unity," in *Churchill Speaks*, 817.

the potential for a fruitful postwar collaboration. It is also plausible, however, that he remained dubious about this prospect—that is, that Grant’s appeal to the ideal of Anglo-Saxon unity was meant to admonish Canadian readers to honour their traditional loyalties to Britain, even as the country was pulled inexorably in the direction of continental integration.

Whatever doubts Grant may have had about the deepening ties between Canada and the United States, they were unlikely to appear in “Canada—An Introduction to a Nation.” Governments, after all, do not produce such pamphlets as exercises in self-criticism and it hardly would have been politic for an aspiring young scholar, writing under the auspices of the Department of External Affairs, to indulge strong doubts about the country’s diplomatic direction. Grant’s personal correspondences, however, suggest that these doubts did exist. Privately, he seemed to suspect that the growing Canada-US bond was not so much a link that joined the new world to the old, but a chain that bound Canada to a new master.<sup>50</sup> There was also some indication that Grant had begun to question the intentions behind American policy toward Britain. In what was almost a passing remark to his former professor, Grant commented that “it always seemed a shame the way the USA made England give up all its capital invested in the USA before it would grant Lend Lease.”<sup>51</sup> His indignation would doubtless have been greater had he realized that England had been forced to liquidate its holdings, not just in America, but throughout the Empire, as a precondition for receiving Lend-Lease.

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<sup>50</sup> Grant recounts how he offered his “solitary cheers” when the French-Canadian nationalist politician, Henri Bourassa delivered a speech that criticized Mackenzie King’s handling of the country’s external affairs. “Foreign policy,” Bourassa declaimed, “for years dictated by G.B., ‘mais maintenant plus servant à Washington.’” Letter to Maude Grant, Summer 1943, in *Selected Letters*, 111.

<sup>51</sup> Letter to R.A. Trotter, November 3, 1942, in *Selected Letters*, 103.

Grant made no further mention of the difficult measures imposed on England during the Lend-Lease negotiations. But the seed of doubt that had been planted in his mind would have plenty to nourish it in the years to come, for it was not the last time that England would be forced to absorb very tough conditions to secure American economic aid. A second financial blow came in 1945 once the war had ended. Britain had all but ceased exporting goods during the war, leaving it with an enormous trade deficit, for which Lend-Lease made up the shortfall. When the war came to a close, however, the United States Congress precipitously cut off Lend-Lease, forcing Britain to seek a loan from Washington. “We had to have the loan,” remarked the newly elected Prime Minister, Clement Attlee. “Without it would have been impossible to exist, certainly without hardships on a scale no one had a right to ask of the British people at the end of a long war.”<sup>52</sup> Congress agreed to the loan, but only reluctantly, and at an unexpectedly high rate of interest. Tougher still, Britain was also asked to give guarantees that it would take early action to make its currency convertible, and also abandon the preference system that had been put in place to protect trade with other members of the Empire. Grant was outraged by the “cruelly hard” terms of the loan.<sup>53</sup> “The Americans,” he wrote, “have extracted every drop of blood from this island and it is in such a precarious state that it can do nothing but accept.”<sup>54</sup> He was convinced that the United States, after having been a beneficiary of England’s immense and costly war effort, were trying to “smash Great Britain” while it remained in a weakened state. He also felt certain that the animus that some Americans felt toward Britain was based on a

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<sup>52</sup> Clement R. Attlee, *Twilight of Empire: Memoirs of Clement Attlee* (New York: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1962), 134.

<sup>53</sup> Grant, Letter to Maude Grant, 1945, in *Selected Letters*, 125.

<sup>54</sup> Grant, Letter to Alice Boissonneau, December 23, 1945, in *Selected Letters*, 128.

tragic misapprehension of Britain's true international vocation. Many Americans, Grant claimed, thought that the British Empire was summed up by the bluster and bellicosity of the old warhorse, Churchill. What they overlooked, he continued, was that Churchill did not "represent England's views as to a world of peace, merely the war years."<sup>55</sup> But Britain was also committed to much more progressive goals, ones that were best captured in the notion of the British "Commonwealth."<sup>56</sup>

### **The Empire: Yes or No?**

Although Grant failed to cleave to this terminological distinction, "The Empire: Yes or No?" was taken up with the attempt to elucidate just what this more progressive goal was.<sup>57</sup> As the title suggests, Grant was specifically concerned with the question of whether Canada would be best served by maintaining its traditional ties to the British Empire. Grant's answer at this time was enthusiastically in the affirmative. He described Britain's role as principally that of a "counterweight" to the influence of the United States. It is clear, however, that Grant was concerned with more than offsetting

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<sup>55</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 50, would later remark that "the loan that [British economist John Maynard Keynes] negotiated for [the British] after 1945 guaranteed their being tied to the American Empire."

<sup>56</sup> Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Grant found himself in sympathy with one of the most vocal critics of the Empire, Wendell Willkie, Roosevelt's Republican opponent in the 1940 election. Even before the war was over, Willkie had called for an end to British imperialism in a speech that was reported around the world by the *New York Times* (December 12, 1942). But unlike other critics, Willkie, as the *Times* reported "carefully separated from his criticism the 'British people', for whom he declared his profound affection, and the 'British Commonwealth of Free nations', which has already attained a satisfactory measure of self-government and which he admires." Quoted in Rita Hinden, *Empire and After: A Study of British Imperial Attitudes* (London: Essential Books, 1949), 146.

<sup>57</sup> While debate over the meaning and usage of the terms "commonwealth" and "empire" (as well as their manifold combinations and variations) at bottom represented an important "conflict of ideas," it also produced what Nicholas Mansergh described as a "verbal thicket" which can be difficult to steer through in an economical way (see chapter I of his *The Commonwealth Experience* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), especially pp. 26-29). Since Grant tended to be rather loose in employing these terms, I have for the most part avoided attaching any special significance to his usage.

American power, conceived in narrowly realist terms as economic or military clout.<sup>58</sup> If Grant believed that Canada was better served by aligning itself more closely with Britain than the United States, it was because he felt certain that the former represented a superior form of civilization, and this was not something that could be measured in purely strategic or geopolitical terms.<sup>59</sup> On the contrary, in 1945 it seemed to him that the Empire's power was in large part defined by its refusal to treat foreign policy as a merely strategic matter. In this way it presented a clear alternative to the USSR and the United States, who, on the other hand, *were* primarily driven by concerns that might be described as "geopolitical." Both were principally preoccupied with consolidating power over certain regional blocks in the international realm. Grant attributed little importance to the opposing principles or ideologies that these two empires invoked to justify their expansionist policies. At bottom, both were animated by a desire for supremacy that saw the rest of the world as so much power and wealth to be won in a high-stakes military and economic competition. By contrast, the British Commonwealth was bound together by what Grant described as "world-wide interests," and to his mind, it offered the only alternative to the "menace" of the superpower rivalry between the USSR and the US.

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<sup>58</sup> R. Douglas Francis also makes this point, writing that in the young "Grant's mind the British Empire and commonwealth stood for much more than just a geopolitical counterpull to the two superpowers." "Technology and Empire: The Ideas of Harold A. Innis and George P. Grant," in *Canada and the End of Empire*, edited by Phillip Buckner (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), 292.

<sup>59</sup> William Christian who argues that Grant's political allegiances were determined largely by "calculation" and "circumstance," emphasizes the "practical" nature of Grant's support for the British Empire in 1945. "Was George Grant a Red Tory," 58, 44. Grant, he suggests, was principally influenced by the "geopolitical and political," rather than "religious," arguments of imperialists like his own grandfathers, George Monro Grant and Sir George Parkin. "Canada's Fate: Principal Grant, Sir George Parkin and George Grant," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 34:4 (Winter 1999-2000), 98. I see much more evidence to corroborate Dennis Duffy's opinion in "The Ancestral Journey: Travels with George Grant," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 22:3, 100, that Grant tended to see the Empire from a perspective that gave preeminence to "moral rather than materialistic geo-political" considerations.



To some extent, “The Empire: Yes or No?” was a sign of the times. For many who cared about the survival of the British Empire, America’s arrival on the battlefields was perceived as both a godsend and a threat. “Almost from the time of American entry into the war,” writes one historian, “the debate on war aims included the future of the European colonies. One thing was certain from the American vantage point: the United States did not wage war for the purpose of preserving the British Empire.”<sup>60</sup> Noted authorities on the Empire anxiously set to writing short polemical works in its defence—or more commonly now, its more egalitarian successor, the Commonwealth—against American indifference or hostility.<sup>61</sup> Most highlighted the role that Britain had played in bringing peace, material prosperity and freedom in the form of self-government to her colonies and believed that the best prospects for peace and progress in the postwar world lay in the survival and expansion of the Commonwealth in some form. Even before the war ended there were predictions of a growing polarization between the Americans and the Soviets, and fear that a globe divided by “overmighty regional association[s]” would not “lead forward to peace but

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<sup>60</sup> W.M. Roger Louis, *Ends of British Imperialism: The Scramble for Empire, Suez and Decolonization* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 1019.

<sup>61</sup> A notable example is Sir Keith Hancock, one of the most eminent historians of the Commonwealth and Empire, who pointedly titled the first chapter of his wartime defence of the Empire “The Americans Cut In.” *Argument of Empire*, A Penguin Special (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1943). With more than a hint of condescension, he admonished his American readers to “listen up” before launching into his argument. Another wartime work, Sir Edward Grigg’s *The British Commonwealth: Its Place in the Service of the World* (London: Hutchison and Co., 1943), devotes a chapter to “American Criticism of the British Empire.” Grigg challenges the “belief that the British despite their brave tenacity, are an outworn people, or that they are clinging to an anachronistic imperial system inconsistent with true democracy” (72), arguing that the British Empire “can do more for international and inter-racial co-operation than any other political system, provided it retains its unity and strength” (84). A year after the war, another renowned authority on the Commonwealth, Lionel Curtis (whom Grant had met during his time at Oxford; see his Letter to Maude Grant, June 4, 1940, in *Selected Letters*, 57), published a slim volume which laid out the stakes of the Empire’s survival in its dramatic title, *War or Peace?* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946). Curtis’ first chapter stressed the importance of America’s experience with federalism, seeing in it a model for a greater international arrangement, or “imperial federation,” based on the expansion of Britain’s Empire. He ends the chapter lamenting, “yet Americans are still slow to see that the key to the American problem discovered at Philadelphia is now the key to the international problem that they and the world are trying to solve” (7).

backward to world anarchy.”<sup>62</sup> The British Commonwealth, on the other hand, was said to offer a model of association that pointed the way forward to international peace and unity. Some debate existed over the particular form that an expanded Commonwealth would take.<sup>63</sup> Would it seek to preserve the sovereignty of individual countries, giving rise to a less formal “world-wide community of nations?”<sup>64</sup> Or would was it necessary to strive toward the realization of some form of “world government?”<sup>65</sup> Grant, for his part seemed rather unclear on this question. At one point in “The Empire: Yes or No?” he celebrated the British Commonwealth as a union “bound together in freedom with power decentralized so that each member state has control over its own destiny,” and called this “an example of world order on a small scale.”<sup>66</sup> Only a few pages later, however, he declared that “our aim must be the upward climb of mankind to a perfect and effective world government.”<sup>67</sup>

But whatever form this international order would ultimately take, one thing was certain: it would not be realized without a difficult struggle. “It is all very well to want perfect freedom for all in the world,” Grant wrote. “But merely wanting it will not make it come...It will come with our travail and our sacrifices.” If “The Empire: Yes or No?” was an invocation of an ideal future order, it was also a call to action in the here and now. But this meant working within the existing practical reality to achieve our desired

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>63</sup> W.M. Roger Louis briefly describes the widely divergent views that Hancock and Curtis held on this matter. It seems that their disagreement over what form an expanded Commonwealth should take was overshadowed by their more basic agreement on the importance of the Commonwealth *as such* to the future of world order, and did not prevent the two men from enjoying a healthy mutual respect for one another. “Sir Keith Hancock and the British Empire: The *Pax Britannica* and the *Pax Americana*,” *English Historical Review*, 120:488 (2005): 939-940.

<sup>64</sup> Hancock, *The Argument of Empire*, 147.

<sup>65</sup> Curtis, *War or Peace?*, 38.

<sup>66</sup> Grant, “The Empire: Yes or No?” 104.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

ends. “Nothing is more clearly the lesson of the last years. And at the present stage of human development, varying forms of empire must remain as steps toward that world of perfection.”<sup>68</sup> The British Commonwealth clearly provided the most important step of all “on the ladder upwards.”<sup>69</sup> Thus in a somewhat paradoxical way, Grant's call for a more perfect future order ultimately provided a justification for the present order with all of its manifest imperfections.

### **War and the Fate of British Imperialism**

Despite these warnings about the struggles that lay ahead, the picture that Grant painted of the British Empire was still a strikingly optimistic one. Grant believed that Britain's survival offered the world its best promise of some day attaining peace and prosperity. Conspicuously absent from his portrait of the Empire were any of those domineering and aggressive tendencies that had so vexed Grant just a few years earlier. Although some mention was made of past abuses toward non-white subject peoples, these were no longer seen as symptomatic of British imperialism *per se*, but only of an immature phase of its history. In a rather stark turn-around, Grant now associated the forces of political, social and economic reform with Britain.

The confident tone struck by Grant in “The Empire: Yes or No?” makes it all the more remarkable to contemplate his very different mood upon hearing that the war had ended. “I was in Toronto,” he recalled, “and I remember everybody cheering.” But in the midst of it all Grant somehow felt “very lonely...very far from the rejoicing.” “I really never cried so much on a day in my life. It was the sense of the ruin that the war

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

had been.”<sup>70</sup> Perhaps, overwhelmed by the sense of loss, it was too early for him to celebrate the future that had been vouchsafed by the Allies. But it is also possible that his reaction pointed to a deeper doubt about that future itself—a doubt that had earlier led Grant to a tragic view of the war: victory had brought an end to the unmitigated evil of National Socialism, something that any uncorrupted soul had to welcome. Yet this outcome had been won at a certain price, namely, the triumph of that Anglo-American order that Grant had “hoped would not conquer.”

Whether or not it was his old forebodings about the spread of English-speaking civilization that came rushing back to Grant that day, it was almost certainly only a matter of time before those fears did return. From the beginning of the war he had expressed his private anxieties over Anglo-American imperialism with too much clarity to assume that the optimism expressed in “The Empire: Yes or No?” would last. It was only too predictable, then, that after 1945 Grant no longer spoke of the Empire as a viable alternative to an American dominated international order, even if he did occasionally speak admiringly of their colonial policies. In part this was a question of what today might be described as England’s diminishing hard and soft power resources.<sup>71</sup> But beyond the question of whether Britain had the resources to provide an alternative to American world power, lay the more fundamental question of just how meaningful the difference was between British and American international aims.<sup>72</sup> In

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<sup>70</sup> *The Owl and the Dynamo: The Vision of George Grant*, documentary produced by the Canadian Broadcasting Company, 1980.

<sup>71</sup> As Grant later wrote, “since 1945, the collapse of British power and moral force has been evident to nearly all the world.” *Lament for a Nation*, 84.

<sup>72</sup> In a 1983 essay, Grant spoke even more generally of the “European” influence within American foreign policy. It was recognition of this European legacy within American imperialism that Grant remarked was “extraordinarily absent” in the diagnosis of the war offered by figures like Louis Ferdinand Céline and Martin Heidegger. Both felt that the “defeat of the German armies meant that Europe would be henceforth under the control of the eastern and western continental empires,” but neither gave

later writings, Grant would argue that by the early twentieth century the two great Anglo-Saxon countries had become entangled in a single, shared destiny. Not by accident, the great harbinger of this destiny was also one of Britain's great imperialists, Winston Churchill. "The basic assumption of Churchill's life," Grant wrote, "was that the British future lay in its alliance with the United States—the unity of the democratic-capitalist nations."<sup>73</sup> Although Grant made this remark a full two decades after the end of the Second World War, Churchill's Anglo-American strategy had come under his scrutiny as early as 1946. Grant was incensed by the former prime minister's famous "iron curtain" speech delivered at Fulton, Missouri in March of that year. Churchill's fulminations against the "growing challenge and peril" of Soviet communism were, to Grant's mind, little more than dangerous fear-mongering. But just as troubling was Churchill's proposed solution to the Russian threat. "There is nothing that [the Russians] admire so much as strength, and there is nothing for which they have less respect than for weakness, especially military weakness," he asserted. "If the population of the English-speaking Commonwealth be added to that of the United States with all that such cooperation implies in the air, on the sea, all over the globe, and in science and in industry, and in moral force, there will be no quivering precarious balance of power to offer its temptation to ambition or adventure. On the contrary there will be an overwhelming assurance of security."<sup>74</sup> Initially Grant interpreted Churchill's speech as a cynical attempt to win back the political support that the Conservatives had lost to

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sufficient attention to the fact that "in recent centuries the European races have been the dynamic imperialists," and that the American and Soviet Empires were themselves "but epigonal products of that Europe." "Louis Ferdinand Céline," 379.

<sup>73</sup> *Lament for a Nation*, 75.

<sup>74</sup> Churchill, "The Sinews of Peace," in *Churchill Speaks*, 883.

Clement Atlee's Labour Party in the last election.<sup>75</sup> Eventually, however, he came to believe that Churchill viewed partnership with America as long-term strategy for preserving Britain's international prestige.<sup>76</sup> Since the First World War, "the British ruling classes acted as if their only hope of continuing power was to put their fate into the hands of the American empire."<sup>77</sup> The irony, according to Grant, was that their grand alliance had succeeded, not in buoying the Empire, but in ensuring that it would be supplanted. "High rhetoric about partnership among the English-speaking peoples" could not "cover the fact that Great Britain's chief status in the world today is to do useful jobs for its masters."<sup>78</sup>

## Conclusion

"The Empire: Yes or No?" is written in the voice of a stalwart and passionate supporter of British imperialism. But the fact is that Grant's burst of enthusiasm for the Empire began to burn out shortly after the piece was published. One scholar has recently gone so far as to argue that Grant eventually came to see the British Empire as "a power-hungry, materialistic and amoral entity, the originator of the modern liberal,

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<sup>75</sup> Atlee had been swept into office on a far-reaching and immensely popular program of social and economic reform. Churchill's Fulton speech, as Grant read it, was an attempt to make up for the ground he had lost to Atlee in the domestic realm by fostering a crisis in the realm of foreign policy. While Labour had hardly been meek in dealing with the Soviet Union, Grant believed that Atlee's government was well-disposed to seeking some manner of peaceful co-existence. Such an arrangement served the additional aim of keeping Britain out of a lopsided security alliance with the United States, thus preventing Britain from becoming a "satellite of either of the two colossi." "The Tories in this country," Grant argued, "have only one hope of survival. That is by saying to the country, 'You are through unless you become a satellite of the U.S.A.'" Letter to Alice Boissonneau, spring 1946, in *Selected Letters*, 129.

<sup>76</sup> Churchill "showed himself more than an English nationalist in that he believed that the American experiment was the authentic continuation of English liberalism, and was willing to sacrifice much of his country's greatness to guarantee that the torch of world leadership should be passed in our era to the capitalist republic." George Grant, *English-Speaking Justice*, 54.

<sup>77</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 71. "In 1917," Grant wrote in *Lament for a Nation*, "the English brought in the Europeans to settle their European quarrel. Thirty years later their ally had become their master" (50, n. 11).

<sup>78</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 71. Of Churchill, Grant concluded, "his career had been given to the perpetuation of English power, and yet it had led to the decline of that power. *English-Speaking Justice*, 54.

technological empire, of which the United States was the most recent offspring.”<sup>79</sup> But this almost certainly exaggerates the case.<sup>80</sup> Grant’s disillusionment was never quite so bitter or complete. As the evidence of his wartime letters suggests, Britain never stood quite so tall in his mind, nor had so far to fall as has sometimes been supposed.

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<sup>79</sup> Francis, “Technology and Empire,” 296.

<sup>80</sup> Consider for example the relatively sympathetic portrait of Britain offered in *English-Speaking Justice*. “Whatever else may be said about England,” Grant writes, “there has been more moderation in its domestic politics so far than in any of the other dominating western societies. The English were indeed willing to be more extreme towards non-Europeans than they were at home; but there were some restraints even in their imperial adventures,” 60.

## Chapter 2

### “Above All Nations is Humanity”: Canadian Liberalism and the Continentalist

#### Ideal

Grant did not revisit the idea of a reinvigorated British Empire or Commonwealth in his writing after 1945. On occasion, he still spoke admiringly of Britain’s role in the world, for instance, following the death of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948. “One thing I get from Gandhi,” Grant wrote, “is the great dignity of the imperial power of Britain he combatted and how he saw that.”<sup>1</sup> But Grant did not reserve all of his respect for the British. Notably, he had praise for Gandhi also, calling him a “tremendous saint.” That this saint had done as much as any single individual to bring about the independence of India was a telling fact. Grant, it seems, had already started to reckon with the disintegration of the Empire. Perhaps he still believed that what he was witnessing was merely its transformation into a more egalitarian commonwealth of nations. Yet there was a certain note of finality, almost of wistfulness, in his writing. “The British were truly civilization at its best,” he wrote, marking a moment in history that had already passed.<sup>2</sup>

Whatever small hope Grant may have held on to that the British would once again have their day in the sun was dealt a final blow by events that took place in the Middle East a decade after the end of the Second World War. In the summer of 1956,

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, February 12, 1948, in *Selected Letters*, 148.

<sup>2</sup> At the same moment, Grant’s wife Sheila was preparing a written memorial to Gandhi. Grant later referred to Gandhi as the “greatest figure of our era.” Grant, “Protest and Technology,” 400.



Britain, in secret collaboration with France and Israel, hatched a scheme to reclaim the Suez Canal after its nationalization by Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser. Grant closely watched the events unfold in Egypt and had conflicting feelings about the role played by most parties to the conflict. His feelings were least ambiguous, however, toward Nasser. Grant described the “fanatic religious fundamentalism of the Arabs,” as “pretty unpleasant,” and apparently felt that some sort of action had to be taken against the Egyptian President.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, he was “sorry that the English moved in,” and later concluded that British Prime Minister Anthony Eden had made a “great mistake” in undertaking the invasion.<sup>4</sup> Britain’s only excuse in intervening the way it did was “the refusal of Eisenhower-Dulles to do anything.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed Eisenhower and his foreign secretary were thoroughly vexed by Britain’s actions, seeing them as a reassertion of “old-fashioned gunboat diplomacy.”<sup>6</sup> Determined to cut short any dreams of a rekindled European imperialism, and at the same time hopefully divert a growing international crisis, the US used its influence within the United Nations to impose a ceasefire on the invading forces. The experience of being chastened by its wartime ally before the international community was a humiliation for England.<sup>7</sup> As one British MP put it, “we were forced to admit to the world that we are now an American satellite.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, November 2, 1956, in *Selected Letters*, 189.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, January 3, 1957, in *Selected Letters*, 191.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>6</sup> David Dimbleby and David Reynold, *An Ocean Apart: The Relationship between Britain and America in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Random House 1988; Vintage Books edition, 1989), 227.

<sup>7</sup> “The whole country,” writes Martin Woollacott “had been abruptly demoted.” Its posture of international importance “would never seem convincing again, either to the British themselves or to others.” *After Suez: Adrift in the American Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 23.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1994), 585.

Writing several years later, Grant remarked that the larger effect of the Suez episode was to “[drive] home to the English their exact place in the world.”<sup>9</sup>

The Suez Crisis affected Grant in a way that even he had trouble expressing succinctly. “To speak personally about a world crisis,” he wrote, “what the Suez has done for me is to make me realise how profoundly I am committed to North American life. What I mean by this would take too long to explain here.”<sup>10</sup> One does not have to dig too deeply to see that underlying Grant’s new sense of commitment to North America was a concomitant loss of faith in the Empire that once commanded his admiration and provided him with a positive model of international organization.

It is notable, however, that despite this loss of faith in the Empire, Grant’s harshest criticism during the affair was reserved for the Canadian government of King’s Liberal successor, Louis St. Laurent, which he felt had turned on its old ally by joining in the international outcry and going on the “open attack” against Britain.<sup>11</sup> He was particularly incensed by Secretary of State, Lester Pearson’s remark that Canada would not act as England’s “colonial choreboy.”<sup>12</sup> Grant felt that the comment had been calculated to curry favour with anti-imperialist sentiment, since it was clear that Britain “was really on its knees.” Nor did it seem to Grant that there was much risk that the Empire would someday make it back onto its feet—or at least this was the conclusion that he had reached by the time he wrote *Lament for a Nation* less than a decade later. Indeed, in *Lament* Grant went so far as to argue that the Empire had been in a state of irreversible decline for decades before finally unraveling in the postwar period. “Since

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<sup>9</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 50.

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, January 3, 1957, in *Selected Letters*, 191.

<sup>11</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 30.

<sup>12</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, January 3, 1957, in *Selected Letters*, 191.

1914,” Grant wrote, “Britain had ceased to be a great power.”<sup>13</sup> Canada’s support for the American position during the Suez episode was merely aimed at “limiting the actions” of an empire that was already in its death throes.<sup>14</sup>

What is more, Grant acknowledged that with the collapse of Britain as a world power, and hence as a counterweight to American influence, it was inevitable that Canada would find itself drawn into Washington’s orbit. But it is striking to note how little this recognition affected his assessment of the Liberal party’s role in what he described as the Americanization of Canada after 1935. In his best known work, *Lament for a Nation*, Grant made the controversial claim<sup>15</sup> that the “seeds of Canada’s

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<sup>13</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 49. Two years later, Grant again remarked that the First World War had led to “the elimination of Great Britain as an independent source of civilization in the English-speaking world.” *Technology and Empire*, 70-71. The ultimate effect of the war, Grant remarked, was “to destroy Great Britain as an alternative pull in Canadian life.” *Lament for a Nation*, 84. Ignoring such statements, historians like J.L. Granatstein have criticized Grant and other “conservative” historians critical of King for failing to recognize the material necessity that compelled the prime minister to pursue a rapprochement with America. What Grant and his fellow “King-haters” had supposedly failed to grasp, as Granatstein put it in the intentionally melodramatic title to his 1988 Joanne Goodman Lecture, was that it was Britain’s weakness that forced Canada into the arms of the United States. Granatstein, *How Britain’s Weakness Forced Canada into the Arms of the United States* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989). Granatstein repeated this charge against the “conservative” version of history in *Yankee Go Home?*, writing that “nowhere in this conspiracy thesis...do the British appear.” *Yankee Go Home?: Canadians and Anti-Americanism* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1997), 96.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>15</sup> Several scholars have described King as the victim of a conspiracy theory perpetuated by Grant and conservative historians like Donald Creighton and W.L. Morton. C.P. Stacey was the first one to posit the existence of a conspiracy theory against King. See his *Canada and the Age of Conflict: A History of Canadian External Policies, Volume 2: 1921-1948, The Mackenzie Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 178, 179. J. L. Granatstein later identified Grant and Creighton, as the central figures in this group of “King-haters” and “conspiracy theorists” who supposedly blamed the prime minister for handing the nation over to the Americans. *How Britain’s Weakness Forced Canada into the Arms of the United States*, 5, 7; *Yankee Go Home?*, 96-97. Paul Romney likewise links Grant to the myth that King had “gladly thrown Canada into the arms of the United States.” *Getting It Wrong: How Canadians Forgot Their Past and Imperiled Confederation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 235; see also Malcolm Ross, “Canadian Culture and the Colonial Question,” Canada House Lecture Series, no. 18, (Ottawa, 1982), 8-9. Stephen Kendall Holloway, offering a small variation on this theme, suggests that the real villain for Grant was King’s “minister of everything,” C.D. Howe. *Canadian Foreign Policy: Defining the National Interest* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 136. R.D. MacDonald takes a literary view of *Lament for a Nation*, and offers a more complex account of Grant’s charge against the Liberals. In the end, however, MacDonald argues that Grant casts his Liberal “villains” (the “betrayers of Canada”) in shrill tones as “bastards,” “little more than caricatures, or cardboard cutouts.” “The Persuasiveness of Grant’s *Lament for a Nation*,” *Studies in Canadian Literature* 2:2 (1977). Accessed

surrender” to the United States lay in the Liberal regime of William Lyon Mackenzie King.<sup>16</sup> The seemingly obvious question to be asked is this: what sense did it make to blame the King government for squandering Canadian independence if it was truly fated that the country would become a satellite after 1914?

To explain this tension, it is perhaps useful to begin with a favourite political principle that Grant borrowed from Thomas More: “When you can’t make the good happen, prevent the very worst from happening.”<sup>17</sup> While it is clear that Grant believed that it was inevitable that Canada should be absorbed into the United States, he felt that there were always steps that could be taken to resist this process and prolong the country’s independence. But King and his party were not disposed to taking these steps, Grant argued, and after their return to power in 1935 acquiesced to Canada’s rapid “integration into the continental corporation world” of New Deal America.<sup>18</sup> Grant’s explanation for this Liberal attitude, I argue here, was that many within the Liberal party embraced a conception of progress which in practical terms was consistent with the continued integration of the two countries. This chapter takes a closer look at this progressive ideal, and examines the role that Grant suggested it played in the King government’s dealings with Washington after 1935.

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<sup>16</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 26.

<sup>17</sup> Grant calls this More’s “statement on politics,” (see *George Grant in Process*, 18; “Interview with Gad Horowitz: Technology and Man,” in *Collected Works* 3:599. A. James Reimer describes this attitude in Grant’s thought and writing as “a kind of ‘rear-guard’ political potency” (“George Grant: Liberal, Socialist or Conservative?” in *George Grant in Process*, 56).

<sup>18</sup> Grant, “A Canadian Identity,” 449. Grant considered 1935 a watershed moment in the history of Canada’s relations with the United State. Upon returning to power that year, the Liberal party transformed itself into the “spearhead of continentalism in Canada.” “Inconsistency Ruled in Canada in the 70’s,” *Globe and Mail* (December 31, 1979), 7.

## King and the Liberal Party

Readers familiar with *Lament for a Nation*'s harsh attack on King and his party may be surprised to learn that as a young man Grant actually expressed strong support for the Liberals, an allegiance that was doubtlessly shaped by his own family's ties to the party. Notably, his uncle, Vincent Massey, was president of the Liberal Party and a future governor general of Canada, and Grant would later recall how his family's house in Toronto had occasionally served as a meeting place for Massey and King in Toronto.<sup>19</sup> It was perhaps predictable, then, that at age sixteen, Grant too would declare himself a partisan of the Liberals.<sup>20</sup> In fact, when Upper Canada College held a mock vote in the run-up to the 1935 election, it was Grant who headed the Liberal committee. He continued to express support for King at least partway through the war. His journal entry for November 27, 1942 reads: "I often think that the regime of W.L.M. King is like that of Walpole's—a regime mightily attacked at the time of its being—by the more lively members of society—yet one that we will look back to as a ministry of great prudence—Not that it is the best ideally—but that it is so much better than any practical alternative—in fact the best possible."<sup>21</sup>

Yet less than a year after endorsing King in his journal, Grant revealed a more critical attitude toward the prime minister. In a letter to his mother, he recounted how he cheered during a speech by Henri Bourassa accusing King of subordinating the country's foreign policy, first to London, then to Washington.<sup>22</sup> The change in Grant's attitude toward King perhaps reflected something of his growing concern at the time

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<sup>19</sup> Cayley, *George Grant in Conversation*, 100.

<sup>20</sup> Christian, *George Grant: A Biography*, 26.

<sup>21</sup> Journal Entry, November 27, 1942, in *Collected Works*, 1:29.

<sup>22</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, Summer 1943, in *Selected Letters*, 111.

over American power and the future of Canada's relationship to England.<sup>23</sup> As he later remarked, "since 1940 [it] should have been obvious to any political analyst," that Canada would be "swallowed up," thanks to the political orientation of King's government. Grant revealed something about the nature of that orientation in a letter written three years after the war, which fumed about King peddling "that damn nonsense of the Whig myth."<sup>24</sup> The "Whig myth," as Grant called it, referred to a particular view of the past put forward by British Whig historians that identified historical progress with the triumph of liberalism and constitutional government over all other forms of rule, notably monarchical rule as it was endorsed by Britain's Tory classes. To quote Herbert Butterfield's famous 1931 book, *The Whig Interpretation of History*, "There is a sense in which the whig historian sometimes seems to believe that there is an unfolding logic in history, a logic which is on the side of the whigs and which makes them appear as co-operators with progress itself."<sup>25</sup> In the North American context, the whig interpretation had its corollary in the belief that the New World represented an inherently more progressive, peaceful society than the Old World, dominated as it was by the violent power struggles of its fading aristocratic regimes. As Grant put it in an article written shortly after the war, "the moral catastrophes of the last fifty years are somehow assumed to have happened elsewhere, and we to have been isolated from them. So we can continue to think of our history as the story of Horatio Alger, and still write about the 'development' or 'evolution' of our society."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See chapter 1, esp. 13-14.

<sup>24</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, August 31, 1948, in *Selected Letters*, 151.

<sup>25</sup> Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965, first published in 1931), 41-42.

<sup>26</sup> The remark comes from an undated essay, "Canadian Universities and the Protestant Churches," included in the second volume of Grant's *Collected Works*, covering the years 1951-1959 (23). But there are reasonable grounds to suppose that the letter actually dates from a few years earlier. In a letter to his

Writing in *Lament for a Nation* several years later, Grant explored the influence that this “liberal interpretation of history” had exercised on the Canadian imagination in greater depth. More specifically, he sought to shed light on what he described as the “philosophy” of “continentalism” that had emerged from this interpretation. Continentalism, Grant contended, had found its most authoritative expression in Canada in the works of writers like Goldwyn Smith and F.H. Underhill, both of whom contended that the country was destined to break away from the British Empire and gradually be drawn into a closer union with the United States.<sup>27</sup> In the early twentieth century, the continentalist perspective took the form of the “North American idea,” which celebrated the fact (or supposed fact) that Canada and the United States had enjoyed a peaceful co-existence along the world’s longest common border ever since signing the Rush-Bagot Treaty in 1817.<sup>28</sup> Grant himself gave this notion a restrained nod in his wartime pamphlet, “Canada—An Introduction to a Nation,” written when Grant was still relatively well-disposed toward the continental relationship. “The hundred and twenty-five years of peace since the War of 1812,” he wrote, “were filled with crises and disputes. The triumph is that despite all this friction peace was maintained.” Grant then went on to cite one of the principal claims of the North American idea: “arbitration rather than war became the habit. It is a habit that, with all

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mother from February 12, 1948 (cited above, fn. 15), Grant mentions that he is working on an article about the “the sad fate of the Canadian liberal”—an apt description of the unpublished piece.

<sup>27</sup> See Goldwyn Smith, *Canada and the Canada Question* (Toronto: Hunter Rose, 1891); and F.H. Underhill, *In Search of Canadian Liberalism* (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, Ltd., 1960).

<sup>28</sup> See Donald M. Page, “Canada as the Exponent of North American Idealism,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 3:2 (Autumn 1973), 30-46; and Donald Barry, “The Politics of ‘Exceptionalism’: Canada and the United States as a Distinctive International Relationship,” *Dalhousie Review* 60:1 (Spring 1980), 118ff.

the different kind of cooperation this war has brought, cannot but persist and grow in the coming years.”<sup>29</sup>

King was one of the first Canadian politicians to appeal to some version of the North American idea.<sup>30</sup> From his earliest years as a young labour minister in the cabinet of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and all throughout his later career as prime minister (a position he held concurrently with that of Secretary of State for External Affairs until 1946), King hailed the peaceful relations that existed between Canada and the US as a model to the world. The opening of the Peace Bridge between Buffalo and Fort Erie in 1927, for example, provided an occasion too rich in easy metaphor for King to resist this theme. In a speech marking the event, King noted that on the opposing banks now joined by the bridge, two forts had once stood facing one another.<sup>31</sup> In the days when Britain’s presence was still heavily felt on the continent, the Niagara River had served as a violent border dividing the nations. But that same river, King observed, eventually became part of an “international frontier across which, for over one hundred years, not a single shot has been fired.” This peaceful state of affairs, he argued, was a “history that was unique in the annals of the world.” It was also a history that was largely apocryphal, but that did not stop King from drawing the following “object lesson” from it. However glorious and rich Europe’s past, it was a past stained with blood. But thanks to “a wise and kind Providence,” North Americans had discovered “new world methods

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<sup>29</sup> Grant, “Canada—An Introduction to a Nation,” 89.

<sup>30</sup> Page, “Canada as the Exponent of North American Idealism,” 31.

<sup>31</sup> William Lyon MacKenzie King, “‘One Hundred Years of Peace’: At the Opening of the Bridge Between Buffalo, United States, and Fort Erie Canada, at Buffalo, 7<sup>th</sup> August, 1927,” in *The Message of the Carillon and other Addresses* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1927), 174-78.



of settling matters of international dispute” and could commit themselves to “a perpetual peace.”<sup>32</sup>

King’s celebration of the North American relationship reflected a respect and admiration for American society that Grant believed many Canadians had shared since the nineteenth century. It was not for the most part an unconditional feeling of goodwill; throughout most of its history Canada had been subject to “a kind of suspicion that we in Canada could be less lawless and have a greater sense of propriety than the United States.” This, in turn, led to an “inherited determination not to be American.”<sup>33</sup> But alongside this fear of the United States, there had also grown up a certain admiration for that same nation. The “educated professionals” of nineteenth century Canada, Grant remarked, “that class of ministers, professors, school teachers, lawyers, and doctors” into which Grant himself was born, “quite liked the people of the Great Republic”—even if “they took for granted they wanted to be different.”<sup>34</sup> To many in the nineteenth century, Grant noted, the Republic even seemed to provide the model of a “freer and more open world than the costive colonial society with its restraints of tradition and privilege.”<sup>35</sup>

Grant understood this attraction because he was also an admirer of the United States as a young man. In the early years of the war, this admiration found its object in the figure of Franklin Roosevelt. Amidst the economic and political chaos of the 1930s, Roosevelt “made a deep appeal to Canadians,” preaching the creed of “optimistic liberalism” over the radio. His “patrician voice called out for a world in which the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>33</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 82.

<sup>34</sup> Grant, “Conversation: Intellectual Background,” *George Grant in Process*, 63.

<sup>35</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 101.

injustices of the European past would be overcome,” a dream that was as old as America itself. Grant recalled that his first political memory as a boy was being called inside by his father to listen to the “great man” give his inaugural address in 1933.<sup>36</sup> Although it was not obvious at the time, it was a radio speech that had indirect implications for Canada’s future relationship with the United States. It was in that address that Roosevelt first gave voice to his “Good Neighbor” policy which renounced military intervention in Latin America,<sup>37</sup> and eventually gave birth to the 1934 Reciprocal Trade Agreement Act. It was under this same provision that Mackenzie King signed a trade deal with Washington in 1935 that, in the words of C.P. Stacey, signaled an historical “turning point” for Canada.<sup>38</sup> After this date, Canada’s economic relations would be oriented toward the United States, and no longer Britain.

King evoked familiar continentalist ideals when he announced the reciprocity agreement to the world. “By the force of our example,” the *New York Times* reported him as saying, Canada and the United States would open up “vistas of a surer path to progress and a more lasting road to peace.”<sup>39</sup> A week earlier, while in Washington to

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<sup>36</sup> George Grant, “From Roosevelt to LBJ,” in *Collected Works* 3:466.

<sup>37</sup> Roosevelt did not mention Washington’s military interventions in Latin America specifically in the inaugural but spoke of the need to respect “the sanctity of [its] agreements in and with a world of neighbors.” The speech can be found in its entirety at <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5057/> (accessed on March 14, 2009).

<sup>38</sup> Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict*, 177, 178; “The Turning Point: Canadian-American Relations During the Roosevelt-King Era,” *Canada I* (1972), 1-10. Stacey is not the only scholar to see the deal as a watershed in Canada’s relations with the United States. Also see Gordon T. Stewart, “‘An Objective of US Foreign Policy since the Founding of the Republic’: The United States and the End of Empire in Canada,” in *Canada and the End of Empire*, edited by Phillip Buckner (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 100; Marc T. Boucher, “The Politics of Economic Depression: Canadian-American Relations in the mid-1930s,” *International Journal* 41:1 (Winter 1985-86), 6. Steven Scheinberg likewise describes the 1935 deal as having laid the “foundations” for the “Americanization of the Canadian economy.” “Invitation to Empire: Tariffs and Economic Expansion in Canada,” *The Business History Review* 47:2 (Summer 1973), 237. Richard N. Kottman argues that the reciprocal trade deal laid down the diplomatic groundwork for the Ogdensburg Agreement and Hyde Park Declaration, arrangements which represented significant steps toward Canada’s integration into the American economic and defence spheres. “The Canadian-American Trade Agreement of 1935,” *Journal of American History* 52:2 (September 1965), 275.

<sup>39</sup> *New York Times*, November 16, 1935, 4.

discuss the deal with Roosevelt and his secretary of state, Cordell Hull, King told the latter that he thought their two countries had an “exceptional opportunity to effect a much greater end than that of merely a trade agreement.”<sup>40</sup> “At the present time,” he continued, “the nations of the Old World were fighting each other, practicing the pagan arts of war. If we could give to the world an object lesson of the New World developing the arts of peace, furthering prosperity, while the Old World was bent on destruction, it might be the means of changing the whole world situation.”<sup>41</sup>

King’s extravagant hopes for the deal seemed to lend credence to one of Grant’s central contentions about the continentalist perspective. Whatever the immediate, material benefits to be won from closer trade ties with the United States, continentalism, Grant wrote, was “more than a consumption-ideology.”<sup>42</sup> Ultimately, it was guided by a desire to overcome “the divisive loyalties” and “nationalistic wars” of the European past.<sup>43</sup> King’s commitment to this goal, Grant suggested, made him a natural ally of Roosevelt, whose “liberal rhetoric” “he seems to have admired instinctively.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The Diaries of William Lyon Mackenzie King, November 8, 1935, 9-10. Collections Canada has made the entire King diary available on-line at <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/king/index-e.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Later the same day, when King had retired to his bedroom, he marked the following Biblical passage as “significant and prophetic” in his diary: “And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house was laid,” Ibid., 17.

<sup>42</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 101.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 64. Roosevelt declared that the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act would promote the “the untrammelled movement of goods,” and also, therefore, the “preservation of peace” internationally. “Letter on World Peace [to Dr. Charles Gilmore Maphis],” *The American Presidency Project*, edited by John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15425> (accessed on June 6, 2009). See also Robert Freeman Smith, “The Good Neighbor Policy: The Liberal Paradox in United States Relations with Latin America,” in *Watershed of Empire: Essays on New Deal Foreign Policy*, edited by Leonard P. Liggio and James J. Martin, with a Preface by Felix Morely (Colorado Springs: Ralph Myles Publisher, 1976), 82. Susan Aaronson writes that “Implicit in the legislation,” behind the Reciprocal Trade Acts, “was an understanding that the health of the U.S. economy could not be divorced from that of the world at large” (Aaronson: 171). Kenneth W. Damm sees in the Act “the motive forces behind the GATT and the WTO,” despite the fact that it did not allow for the negotiation of multilateral agreements, but only bilateral agreements, extended to third parties through a Most Favoured Nation provision, (“Cordell Hull, the Reciprocal Trade Agreement Act and the WTO,”

Certainly Roosevelt found King to be a more amenable partner to deal with than the Prime Minister's Conservative party predecessor, R.B. Bennett, who had also attempted to reach a trade agreement with Washington after tariff reductions negotiated with Britain in 1932 failed to restore Canada's economy to health. But the Anglophile Bennett was not as convinced as King that trade reciprocity represented an unconditional good for the country, and his American counterparts found him to be a difficult and unyielding negotiator.<sup>45</sup> King was decidedly more willing to bend to American expectations,<sup>46</sup> and the strong weight of evidence suggests that he managed to communicate this to the Roosevelt administration, providing assurances that they would get a better deal if they deferred finalizing the deal until he was back in office.<sup>47</sup>

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University of Chicago Law & Economics, Olin Working Paper No. 228 (2004), 4. Online at [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=604582](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=604582); (Tim Woods makes a similar connection in his piece "Capitalist Class Relations, the State, and New Deal Foreign Trade Policy" *Critical Sociology* 29:3 (2003), 398. While prior to the realization of these institutions, a more consistent adoption of *laissez-faire* principles would admittedly have required nations to embrace unilateral tariff reductions, "Hull's key insight," Damm explains, "was that unilateral tariff reduction was not in the political cards in most countries and certainly not in the U.S. Congress. One could not expect to get something for nothing. Only the prospect of expanding markets for exports through foreign tariff reduction could lead to a reduction of domestic tariffs (5). King himself understood this to be Hull's strategy. After meeting with Roosevelt and Hull in 1937 he recorded in his diary that "Hull spoke of the problem the present administration had faced in tearing down the economic walls constructed by the Holly-Smut (sic) tariff; that they had had to ascend a mountain and pull down a great part of the structure to reach the levels they were at now; that this had to be remembered by other countries in considering how far America could go. He repeated his desire for an attitude on tariffs which would be multilateral rather than bilateral in the effect of their agreements" (March 5, 1937, 3).

<sup>45</sup> See Boucher, "The Politics of Economic Depression." Shortly after King's election in 1935, Roosevelt's Undersecretary of State at the time, William Phillips, informed the president that King's administration was helping to put together "a new set up which in our opinion is vastly more favourable to the United States than the one which was being considered with Mr. Bennett." Richard N. Kottman, *Reciprocity and the North Atlantic Triangle, 1932-1938* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 107; Phillips to Roosevelt, November 7, 1935, F.D.R. mss, P.S.F. Canada, Box 2.

<sup>46</sup> Stephen Scheinberg argues that America's objectives were well served by the two principal Canadians with whom they had to deal after 1935," King and his deputy minister for external affairs, O.D. Skelton, both of whom "believed that Canada's future was as a part of North America." "Invitation to Empire," 234-235. See also Boucher, "The Politics of Economic Depression."

<sup>47</sup> Boucher claims that there is evidence to suggest that King related this directly to American negotiators while they were in talks with Bennett ("The Politics of Economic Depression," 8). King's strong campaign rhetoric, loudly condemning Bennett's "policies of economic nationalism, economic isolation, and economic imperialism," also left Americans with little doubt about his eagerness to seal a trade deal ["The Voice of the People," A reprint of the statement to the press issued by the Rt. Honourable Mackenzie King on the night of the general elections, October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1935 (issued by the National Liberal

Apparently King delivered on his assurances, prompting one U.S. State Department official to describe its advantages as “staggering...so favorable to us that...it will be recognized generally as a great economic and political asset.”<sup>48</sup>

### **The Corporation and the Administrative State**

King spoke glowingly of how his “close personal relationships”<sup>49</sup> and kindred sense of international duty with Roosevelt and Hull had helped to bring about reciprocity between Canada and the United States. But the fact is that he had not always felt so confident that the President shared his progressive political vision. As Grant remarked, King was at heart a nineteenth-century liberal in the tradition of J.S. Mill, a tradition that in certain respects stood in tension with the political vision of Roosevelt.<sup>50</sup> Mill accepted Montesquieu’s basic premise, that “the pursuit of commerce was the best foundation of a free political order,”<sup>51</sup> and that international commerce was “the principal guarantee of the peace of the world.”<sup>52</sup> Concomitant to this belief was the

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Federation of Canada, Ottawa)]. Reporting on his arrival in Washington to negotiate directly with Roosevelt and Hull, *Time* magazine reported that King’s “hopes for greater success, judging by his campaign utterances, rested simply on the fact that his heart was for trade, whereas his predecessor’s mind had been preoccupied with tariff. The new Prime Minister is by no means an Anglophile.” “Pleasant Thing,” *Time* (Monday, November 8, 1935), accessed on-line on October 18, 2009 at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,755312-2,00.html>.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>49</sup> King, W.L.M., “International Co-operation Essential to Peace, Security and Prosperity,” address in Edmonton, May 18, 1945 in King, *Mackenzie King to the People of Canada, 1945*, a series of addresses by the Right Honourable William Lyon Mackenzie King, Prime Minister of Canada, May-June, 1945 (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1945), 29.

<sup>50</sup> Grant, “Classical Liberalism: John Stuart Mill (1977),” in *The George Grant Reader*, 129; also see Grant’s comments in *Lament* about the influence of Mill and Macaulay on the continentalist philosophy of the Liberal party (101). For a similar assessment of King’s liberalism, see Bruce Hutchison’s *The Incredible Canadian: A Candid Portrait of Mackenzie King, His Works, His Times, and His Nation* (Toronto: Longmans, Green and Company, 1953), 410-16.

<sup>51</sup> Grant, “John Stuart Mill,” 131.

<sup>52</sup> John Stuart Mill, “Chapter XVII: Of International Trade,” in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume III: Principles of Political Economy Part II*, edited by John M. Robson, Introduction by V.W. Bladen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), para. 319. Published online by The Liberty Fund at <http://oll.libertyfund.org>. Montesquieu famously claimed that “peace is the natural effect of trade.” *Spirit of the Laws*, translated by Thomas Nugent, with an

view that humans had a natural desire for self-preservation and liberty, and that individuals would agree to live together under a common government, so long as it limited its purpose to providing the conditions for men to pursue these ends in peace; for government to intervene further than this portended the danger of tyranny.<sup>53</sup> This meant “restricting to the narrowest compass the intervention of a public authority in the business of the community.”<sup>54</sup> “*Laissez-faire*, in short, should be the general practice: every departure from it, unless required by some great good, is a certain evil.”<sup>55</sup>

Roosevelt’s Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act fit well with King’s liberal commitment to open trade, but the Trade Act was just one amidst a flood of government initiatives introduced to deal with the economic crisis of the 1930s. Together these programs amounted to an enormous expansion in the executive functions of the government. “From its debacle in the great depression,” Grant wrote, “capitalism was

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Introduction by Franz Neumann (New York: Hafner Publishing, Hafner Library of Classics, 1949), 316 (book XX, chapter II). It is worth noting that the two claims are not exactly the same: if for Montesquieu, peace was the “effect” of self-interested trade, it was not a principle motivation; Mill on the other hand, suggested that commerce encourages “the uninterrupted progress of the ideas, the institutions, and the characters of the human race” such that it teaches “nations to see with good will the wealth and prosperity of one another” (Mill, *op. cit.*). In Grant’s view modern Canadian liberalism was very much directed by this Millian regard for the peace and prosperity of a common humanity. *Lament for a Nation*, 102.

<sup>53</sup> Grant cites Mill’s argument from *On Liberty* that “the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection,” calling this “the central affirmation of all modern liberal regimes” (“John Stuart Mill,” 132). By this he means that Mill stands in the same philosophical tradition as Hobbes and Locke, who based the creation of the social contract on the natural desire for self-preservation (see *English-Speaking Justice*, 17, 21, 49). At the same time, Grant points out that Mill breaks from “the long tradition of English empiricism” by claiming that our natural desires also lead us in the direction of “higher pleasures” (“John Stuart Mill,” 130). Hence, Mill is more ambiguous about the foundations of society than either Hobbes or Locke, writing for example, that “after the means of subsistence are assured, the next in strength of the personal wants of human beings is liberty”; the natural desire for “liberty,” Mill distinguishes from “physical wants,” suggesting that it belongs rather, to the province of the “moral faculties,” which change and develop as civilization progresses. *Principles of Political Economy*, book II, chapter I (Oxford), 16. Human nature seems to be partly grounded in unchanging desires, partly historical.

<sup>54</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy: A Selected Edition with Chapters on Socialism*, edited with an Introduction and Notes by Jonathan Riley (London: Oxford World’s Classics, 1998), 334 (book V, chapter XI: Influence of Government).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

taught its stake in mass consumption;”<sup>56</sup> the private interests of the producer and the interests of a consuming public could no longer be kept separate. Politicians like Roosevelt now saw it as their mission to create “a society in which high individual acquisition and consumption of goods and services is increasingly open to most in return for comparatively short hours of work and in which an immense variety of commodities is ready to attract and to encourage a vast diversity of human desires.”<sup>57</sup>

King had long had an interest in economic and social reform. After studying political economy as a graduate student at the University of Chicago and Harvard, King served as the Minister of Labour between 1909-1911 in the government of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, before being engaged by John D. Rockefeller as a consultant on industrial relations. In 1918 King published his ideas on industrial reform in a tortuous and tedious work entitled *Industry and Humanity*. Like Roosevelt, King thought it was necessary to bring the interests of the worker and consumer into the calculations of industrial production. But true to his roots in nineteenth-century liberalism, King remained adamant that government was to be no more than a mediator between the interests of Capital and Labour. Direct intervention or “planning” struck him as a dangerous departure from the classical tenets of liberalism,<sup>58</sup> and in his diary he expressed alarm at the “extent to which Roosevelt had assumed the powers of a

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<sup>56</sup> Grant, “Acceptance and Rebellion,” 251.

<sup>57</sup> Grant, “An Ethic of Community,” 24.

<sup>58</sup> Still in Parliamentary Opposition in 1933, King declared himself to be in league with “the anti-planners” in his party, adding “I dread the thought of what may come out of the U.S. experiment” (King Diary, Tuesday, September 5, 1933, 2). Doug Owram records that King “regard[ed] planning ‘as a form of dictatorship’.” *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State, 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 230.

dictator,”<sup>59</sup> and chastised the President for resorting to “extreme demagoguery” to accomplish his ends.<sup>60</sup> While King sympathized with the spirit of many of Roosevelt’s industrial reforms, he emphatically rejected the idea that government should be the instrument of this reform. “I do not like the application by the State in the U.S. & the use of ‘emergency’ methods to do things,” he confided to his diary.<sup>61</sup>

King was certainly not alone in his fear that the New Deal represented an excessive expansion of the state’s power. In the United States the New Deal sparked a political reaction that, according to Grant, reached its inevitable culmination in the “clobbering that Goldwater received in the polls in November of 1964.” Grant believed that the “conservative” opposition to the New Deal legacy that eventually emerged in postwar America was bound to fail, grounded as it was in an “old-fashioned liberalism” that was largely out of touch with the reality that had taken hold in American society. The liberalism of these “conservative” New Deal critics stood principally for “the freedom of the individual to use his property as he wishes, and for a limited government which must keep out of the marketplace.”<sup>62</sup> It was a “nineteenth-century liberalism,” designed to deal with the realities of a nineteenth-century economy, and failed entirely to grasp the fact that since Roosevelt’s election in 1932, economic power had rested not with the small producer, but with the corporations.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Quoted in William J. McAndrew, “Mackenzie King, Roosevelt, and the New Deal: The Ambivalence of Reform,” in *Mackenzie King: Widening the Debate*, edited by John English and John O. Stubbs (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977), 134.

<sup>60</sup> Diary, Friday November 25, 1933, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Diary, Friday, November 24, 1933.

<sup>62</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 77. Barry Goldwater, a five-term Republican senator from Arizona was closely associated with the revival of the conservative movement in postwar America. As Republican nominee for the 1964 federal election, he ran on a platform criticizing the so-called “New Deal coalition” centered around the Democratic Party, but lost by a wide margin to the incumbent Lyndon Johnson.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.



The failure of conservatives to understand how the nature of capitalism had changed in the age of the corporation led to a further misunderstanding about the changing role of government, in Grant's view. The "mass liberalism of the New Deal," he contended, did not amount to the government take-over of industry. On the contrary, government's principal duty was increasingly associated with the "supervision of economic life," while control over the production process was placed even more firmly in the hands of private business.<sup>64</sup> The goal of creating an economy based on full employment and mass consumption was such an enormous, technically complex, and capital-intensive undertaking that it could only be carried out by those immense institutions, the modern corporation. As Grant put it, "I do not think you can produce General Motors cars without something like General Motors whether it is privately owned or publicly owned."<sup>65</sup> Only the giant corporation could marshal the resources needed to research and develop new products and production techniques, to construct the technologically sophisticated plants, to organize labour according to new scientific methods, to deliver goods efficiently to an ever-growing consuming public, and to guarantee their own markets by harnessing new research and advertising techniques to manipulate consumer tastes.<sup>66</sup> No other institution, not even a vastly enlarged modern state, could support an undertaking of this size. "Even when much of the economy is socialized," Grant wrote, "the managers will gradually become indistinguishable from

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<sup>64</sup> Grant, "Acceptance and Rebellion," 251.

<sup>65</sup> George Grant, "The Great Society," in *Collected Works* 3:461. See also John Kenneth Galbraith, *The New Industrial State* (New York: Mentor, New American Library, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, revised 1971; originally published by Houghton Mifflin in 1967), 24.

<sup>66</sup> "It is a platitude these days to point out that the health of the North American economy depends on the ability of manipulators to persuade consumers to be dissatisfied with last year's luxuries, by appealing to all kinds of desires, particularly those associated with snobbery and sex" (Ibid., 27-28).

their international counterparts [in the corporations].”<sup>67</sup> “Western civilization was committed in its heart to the religion of progress and the emancipated passions. Those who accepted such a doctrine found corporation capitalism was a much more suitable regime than the inhibiting policies of socialism.”<sup>68</sup>

Eventually even King came to see something of the limited nature of Roosevelt’s interventions in the economy, and abandoned his hyperbolic descriptions of the President as a “dictator” and “demagogue.” Doubtlessly his change of heart was partly inspired by Washington’s step back from the notorious 1930 Smoot-Hawley Tariff (which had caused Canadian exporters a great deal of pain), and the turn toward a more internationalist, free-trade agenda, signaled by the reciprocity agreement.<sup>69</sup> Whatever the case, by 1935 King had come to recognize the New Deal less as a venture in comprehensive “planning,” and more as a series of *ad hoc* adjustments to the economic order, designed to provide salutary conditions wherein industry could oversee production independent of state interference. It was, in Roosevelt’s own words, a program of “bold and persistent experimentation,”<sup>70</sup> and King was willing to offer his

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<sup>67</sup> *Lament for a Nation*, 90.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 72. This contention distinguished Grant’s argument from that other more Marxian influenced critics of the New Deal, many of whom also believed that it had served primarily to consolidate the power of the corporations, but believed that this was a fate that could have been avoided had Roosevelt been willing to go further with his reforms. See for example, Charles A. Reich’s chapter “The Failure of Reform” in *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970), 41-58; Barton J. Bernstein, “The New Deal: The Conservative Achievements of Liberal Reform,” in *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History*, edited by Barton J. Bernstein (New York: Random House, 1968), 263-288. Also see Paul K. Conklin, *The New Deal* (New York: Cromwell, 1967); and William Appleman Williams, *The Contours of American History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988).

<sup>69</sup> William J. McAndrew, “Mackenzie King, Roosevelt, and the New Deal,” in English and Stubbs, *Mackenzie King: Widening the Debate*, 130-131, 134. {130-148}

<sup>70</sup> Roosevelt used the phrase in a speech made to the graduating class of Oglethorpe University, Atlanta, Georgia, on May 22, 1932 in the run-up to the federal election that year reprinted in part in *New Deal Thought*, The American Heritage Series, edited by Howard Zinn (Cambridge: Hackett, 2003; originally published in 1966), 77-84. Louis Hartz identified this experimentalism as the truly radical element in Roosevelt’s politics. *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution*, with an Introduction by Tom Wicker (New York: Harcourt Brace, A Harvest Book, 1991; originally published in 1952), 263.

cautious approval, provided that the reforms be treated as “only expedients...capable of serving a time.”<sup>71</sup>

In due time, King even began to see Roosevelt’s reforms as part of that special deliverance that the New World had been fated to bring to the rest of the globe. In 1937, with the forces of political extremism threatening to once again plunge Europe into war, King encouraged Roosevelt to consider expanding his mission of social improvement beyond his own borders. “You have made social justice the objective of your domestic policies,” King pointed out.<sup>72</sup> “Why not expand the idea into the world field realizing that to maintain the standards you have here, injustices have to be removed elsewhere,” he continued, adding that, “the United States had more almost than any country to gain by getting the industrial standards raised in other lands.”<sup>73</sup>

But if by the middle of the decade King had grown more sympathetic towards Roosevelt’s methods, he was not impressed enough to adopt them upon returning to office in 1935. “Political victory came to the party that had the least to offer – the party that, so far as the central issue of the welfare state was concerned, had no proposals at all,” wrote one critic.<sup>74</sup> Progress toward reform was also slowed down by the “adverse judicial interpretations” handed down from the Judicial Council of the Privy Office in

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<sup>71</sup> Diary, November 8, 1935, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Diary, March 5, 1937, 13.

<sup>73</sup> King spelled out the urgency of the matter to Roosevelt by asking him “point blank if Europe becomes involved in war, even if the United States is out, do you think it would be possible to avert revolution here? Would not the masses of people say this was their time to seize Government, etc., and gain control?” (Ibid). Over the span of a few years, King had gone from seeing Roosevelt’s New Deal as a part of a demagogic appeal to the people, to a program of reform capable of assuaging the tyrannical impulses of the masses.

<sup>74</sup> Donald Creighton, *Canada’s First Century, 1867-1967* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1970), 220. “Five years of depression had challenged many of the traditional assumptions about politics as well as economics,” writes one of King’s biographers, “but his own views had undergone little change. He still assumed that economic recovery depended ultimately on private enterprise and that governments could only play a secondary role.” H. Blair Neatby, *William Lyon MacKenzie King, 1932-1939: The Prism of Unity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 153.

London which greeted welfare policies as federal government encroachments on provincial jurisdiction over property and civil rights.<sup>75</sup> This all changed with the war, however. Pressured by the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and the Conservatives, both of whom were pushing for social reform, King's government initiated the Canadian welfare state, introducing measures like a family allowance scheme and unemployment insurance. But the war prompted another form of government intervention with socio-economic consequences that Grant found difficult to exaggerate. "Canada, before 1940," Grant remarked, "was largely a producer of raw materials with a small commercial and industrial fringe...[an] essentially agricultural and commercial society."<sup>76</sup> But following the fall of France in June of 1940, "when the Americans were not in the war and the Canadians were, there had to be a quick rising of industrialism to send arms and things."<sup>77</sup> "The Canadian state had to build up a war bureaucracy from scratch," as one study put it.<sup>78</sup> The government arrogated to itself task of "increas[ing] rapidly the supply of everything required for the war effort. And that covered just about everything produced in the economy: arms, ammunition, tanks ships, airplanes, communications equipment, uniforms, eating utensils, blankets, rope, food,

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<sup>75</sup> James T. Patterson, "Federalism in Crisis: A Comparative Study of Canada and the United States in the Depression of the 1930's" in *The Great Depression: Essays and Memoirs from Canada and the United States*, compiled by Victor Hoar (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1969), 9. "By 1941 most Canadians still lacked social insurance, minimum wages or maximum hours, and a well defined system of grants for relief assistance. Though Canada moved closer than America toward national banking, she had to await the 1940's and 1950's for many of the social reforms put through under the American New Deal" (Ibid).

<sup>76</sup> *George Grant in Process*, 63; *George Grant in Conversation*, 54.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 54-55. W.A.B. Douglas and Brereton Greenhous write that before June 1940, "in British eyes, there was no reason to go outside Great Britain," for military equipment and munitions. "The fall of France has shattered this preconception: soon after Dunkirk the Ministry of Supply allocated to Canada about a third of its orders for re-equipping the British army." *Out of the Shadows: Canada in the Second World War* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, second edition [revised], 1995; first published in 1977), 46.

<sup>78</sup> W.D. Coleman and K.R. Nossal, "The State and War Production in Canada, 1939-1945," in *Organising Business for War: Corporatist Economic Organization during the Second World War*, edited by Wyn Grant, Jan Nekkers and Frans van Waarden (New York: Berg, 1991), 48.

fuel... The list was effectively endless.”<sup>79</sup> Federal government expenditures in this period “soared from \$680 million in 1939 to \$5,136 million in 1945, an incredible jump,” while “the federal bureaucracy grew vastly larger, increasing from 46,106 at the beginning of the war to 115,908 in 1945.”<sup>80</sup>

The fact that most of these production contracts were given out to private firms<sup>81</sup> indicated to Grant that the needs of industrialization in Canada would not be balanced by any concern with safeguarding the nation’s sovereignty.<sup>82</sup> “The organization of the war and of postwar reconstruction was carried on within the assumption that government never questioned the ultimate authority of business interests to run the economy,” he wrote. But “after 1940, it was not in the interests of the economically powerful [in Canada] to be nationalists. Most of them made more money by being the representatives of American capitalism and setting up the branch plants.”<sup>83</sup> The

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<sup>79</sup> Paul Phillips and Stephen Watson, “From Mobilization to Continentalism: The Canadian Economy in the Post-Depression Period,” in *Modern Canada: 1930-1980’s Readings in Canadian Social History*, Volume 5, edited by Michael S. Cross and Gregory S. Kealey (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1984), 23.

<sup>80</sup> “...a figure that would continue to grow with the peace.” J.L. Granatstein, *Canada’s War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990; originally published in 1975), 419.

<sup>81</sup> Phillips and Watson, 20-45; Coleman and Nossal, 47-73.

<sup>82</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 61.

<sup>83</sup> “War would not stand in the way of the continental economy,” Wallace Clement has written, “it would consolidate it.” *Continental Corporate Power: Economic Linkages between Canada and the United States* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 82. Clement argues that it was the “war-induced industrialism” which provided the opportunity in the mid-1940s for an unprecedented wave of American direct investment in Canada (83), noting that from the period from 1926-1930 to 1946-1954, foreign financing of Canadian industry fell from about one half to one quarter (79, 88, 89). The drop, he claimed, was partly attributable to Canadian financial capitalists, who “rather than run the risks of supporting indigenous Canadian industrialists... frequently chose to support the more stable and secure companies from the United States,” which “came with a more highly developed technological base... and with secure home markets” (79). By 1959 Canadian financiers provided about 7 percent of the capital used in American direct investments in Canada, while 26 percent came from US sources (88). Clement also observed an increase in the percentage of US multinationals entering the country in the same period by acquiring existing Canadian firms, rather than establishing new ones. Before 1946, only 29 percent of the firms entering Canada did so by buying Canadian companies; between 1946 and 1957 the number had jumped to 45 percent; and between 1956-1967, it had risen to 58 percent. Clement concluded: “The method of financing and the method of entry together show that increasingly in the post-war period U.S.

significance of this whole economic upheaval was first made clear to Grant as early as 1944 or 1945 after seeing a newspaper photograph of Liberal cabinet member, C.D. Howe clashing with strikers in his golf course locker room.<sup>84</sup> For Grant, the image seemed to capture how dismissive, even contemptuous, Howe was of popular reaction to his government's policies, and how convinced he was of the rectitude of his approach, the fitness of leaving Canada's industrialization in the hands of the private business leaders. Howe was an American-born engineer, who, as King's Minister of Munitions and Supply during the war, was the driving force behind the country's economic transformation. "Vested with dictatorial powers over the Canadian economy,"<sup>85</sup> Howe almost single-handedly "changed the country from a very small producing nation to a respectable industrial power."<sup>86</sup> He achieved this miracle, Grant wrote, by producing a new "ruling class composed of such men as E.P. Taylor,"<sup>87</sup> a Toronto business tycoon, who was sent at the expense of his firm to work as one of Howe's "dollar-a-year men," for the duration of the war.<sup>88</sup> Following the war, Taylor made the transition from executive in the Munitions and Supply department to private enterprise seamlessly, using connections that he had made in government to start up

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firms were expanding their Canadian operations with capital obtained in Canada. Both processes contributed to the rapid increase in the U.S. share of control in both resources and manufacturing (89)."

<sup>84</sup> Christian, *George Grant: A Biography*, 108. Grant refers to this photograph in *Lament for a Nation*, 62.

<sup>85</sup> Wallace Clement, *The Canadian Corporate Elite: An Analysis of Economic Power*, foreword by John Porter, Carleton Library Series No. 89 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), 88.

<sup>86</sup> Douglas and Greenhouse, 46.

<sup>87</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 56-57.

<sup>88</sup> Robert Bothwell and William Kilbourn, *C.D. Howe: A Biography* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979), 131.

Argus Corporation in 1945,<sup>89</sup> an investment and holding company that would go on to become Canada's most powerful conglomerate.<sup>90</sup>

But for Grant, the issues at stake in Howe's innovations went beyond the question of national ownership. Taylor's trajectory from business, to politics, to business was indicative of how greatly Howe's policies had eroded the line between government and the corporate world. This erosion, Grant claimed, represented more than just the corruption of politics; it represented its slow death. The state's role had become almost completely ministerial to that of the corporations.<sup>91</sup> Government as political actor had been replaced by government as administration. Grant described the Liberals as "the party of administrators who seem to turn all political questions into administrative ones."<sup>92</sup>

The implications of Howe's policies for politics were hidden from Mackenzie King, who still clung to the idea of politics as the "balancing of interests,"<sup>93</sup> a conception that according to Grant revealed itself as increasingly barren in an age of

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<sup>89</sup> Richard Rohmer, *E.P. Taylor* (Goodread Biographies, Formac Publishing, 1983), 166.

<sup>90</sup> Randall K. Morck, Michael Percy, Gloria Y. Tian and Bernard Yeung, "The Rise and Fall of the Widely Held Firm: A History of Corporate Ownership in Canada," in *A History of Corporate Governance Around the World: Family Business Groups to Professional Managers*, edited by Randall K. Morck (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005), 107.

<sup>91</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 54, 62.

<sup>92</sup> George Grant, "George C. Nowlan Lectures," in *Collected Works* B 607.

<sup>93</sup> Grant, "An Ethic of Community," 36-37. King's academic defenders widely tout this concern with balancing the diverging interests of the country as his central virtue as a politician. (Usually this view is cast as an attempt to salvage King's reputation from earlier detractors who saw in the Prime Minister's conciliatory style nothing more than political opportunism). See, for example, H. Blair Neatby's "Mackenzie King and the National Identity" from the published papers read before the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba, series III, number 24, 1967-1968, 77-87; "The Political Ideas of William Lyon Mackenzie King" in *The Political Ideas of the Prime Ministers of Canada*, the George P. Vanier Memorial Lectures 1968, edited by Marcel Hamelin (Ottawa: Les Edition de l'Université d'Ottawa), 121-137; "Mackenzie King and the Historians," in *Mackenzie King: Widening the Debate*, edited by John English and J. O. Stubbs. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977), 1-14; *William Lyon Mackenzie King, 1932-1939*, 323-24. Also see the various portraits of King offered in J.L. Granatstein and Norman Hillmer, *Prime Ministers: Ranking Canada's Leaders* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1999); Charlotte Graay, "Crazy Like a Fox," *Saturday Night*, (October 1997), 112:8; and Michael Bliss, *Right Honourable Men: The Descent of Canadian Politics from Macdonald to Mulroney* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1994).

corporate capitalism. In the nineteenth century, when business operated on a smaller scale in Canada and lacked the immense planning capacities of the corporation (thus leaving room for a genuine conflict of interest between owners and workers), it may have appeared to make more sense to speak of a balance of interests.<sup>94</sup> But even then the term was misleading, since in reality there was no such thing as a neutral position or ideal balance between the various interests within society.<sup>95</sup> Where government succeeded in creating political unity, Grant believed that it did so, not by finding a mediate position between the divergent interest groups within society, but by bringing those groups together in pursuit of a common good or purpose. The role of articulating this purpose fell to the society's political leaders, which in turn meant that an element of decision was left in their hands; they were responsible for providing society with a "thrust of intention into the future."<sup>96</sup> To be sure, government also drew on a common sense of purpose derived from shared traditions and a shared past to formulate political intentions. But tradition only gave imperfect expression to an unknown providence; it offered purpose, but did not articulate that purpose fully, leaving room for human

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<sup>94</sup> See C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford, A Galaxy Book, 1959; first published in 1956), 259-260.

<sup>95</sup> A similar point was made by Reginald Whitaker who argued that while King may have sought to achieve a balance of interests within society, "the very *acceptance* of this balance itself impart[ed] an ideological colouring to King's range of choices" that was reflective of a *status quo* dominated by big business (1978-79, 58).

<sup>96</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 31. Grant cites Eric Voegelin's discussion of "Representation and Existence" from *The New Science of Politics* to explain his meaning (Ibid., 31, fn. 3). Voegelin concludes with a reflection on Maurice Hariou's argument that "the first task of a ruling power is the creation of a politically unified nation by transforming the preexistent, unorganized manifold into a body organized for action." *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction*, with a foreword by Dante Germino (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987; originally published in 1952), 48. This unity is not something that is simply imposed, however, but is represented "existentially." Within this discussion of existential representation Grant seems to have been drawn to Sir John Fortescue's notion of "the *intencio populi*." "The *intencio populi*," Voegelin explicates, "is located neither in the royal representative nor in the people as a multitude of subjects but is the intangible living center of the realm as a whole. The word 'people' in this formula does not signify an external multitude of human beings but the mystical substance erupting in articulation; and the word 'intention' signifies the urge or drive of this substance to erupt and to maintain itself in articulate existence as an entity which, by means of its articulation, can provide for its well-being" (44).



spontaneity.<sup>97</sup> “The past is only a means of helping...move towards the future,” Grant once remarked in interview.<sup>98</sup> Canada’s early Conservative politicians like Sir John A. Macdonald had stood between past and future in this way, Grant thought, appealing to a sense of “public order and tradition” to initiate the great forward-looking public works projects of the national policy era.<sup>99</sup> In Grant’s eyes, Macdonald was not simply a “deft politician, able to balance the various interests of the nation,”<sup>100</sup> but a political leader who was able to unify the nation around a common intention.

In the modern corporate age, Grant claimed, the distinction between the state and business had largely disappeared, and along with it, the traditional role of government. The political as a distinct realm of action wherein national purpose was articulated had given way to the economic “planning” of the corporation. Within the corporate system, conflicting political interests, reconceived as economic demands, could be manipulated and satisfied through modern industrial production techniques. Fordism promised to overcome what was certainly one of the most enduring of social

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<sup>97</sup> Grant claimed that the possibility of spontaneity rested on an openness to “the question of how it is good to live,” which is the traditional province of philosophy and religion. In an administrative age which values order above all else, “the attempt is made to eliminate that question from the public realm,” in an effort to eliminate the conflict arising from the rival answers and interpretations it inevitably inspires. “Ideology in Modern Empire,” in *Perspectives of Empire*, essays presented to Gerald S. Graham, edited by John E. Flint and Glyndwr Williams (London: Longman, 1973), 197. {189-197}

<sup>98</sup> Grant, “Interview with Gad Horowitz: The Canadian Character and Identity,” in *Collected Works* 3:441.

<sup>99</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 83. The paradox of modern Canada was illustrated by the fact that Macdonald had summoned the formidable resources of modern business and industry to create a society that, unlike the United States, wouldn’t be dominated by modern business and industry. “For all the fruitfulness of the British tradition in nineteenth-century Canada,” Grant wrote, “it did not provide any radically different approach to the questions of industrial civilization. Canadians in particular felt the blessings of technology in an environment so hard that to master it needed courage. But conservatism must languish as technology increases. It was not conceivable that industrial society would be organized along essentially different principles from those to the south,” “Nationalism can only be asserted successfully by an identification with technological advance; but technological advance entails the disappearance of those indigenous differences that give substance to nationalism.” *Lament for a Nation*, 86, 88.

<sup>100</sup> See Charlotte Graay’s portrait of Macdonald at [http://www.cbc.ca/greatest/top\\_ten/nominee/macdonald-john.html](http://www.cbc.ca/greatest/top_ten/nominee/macdonald-john.html).

conflicts, that between haves and have-nots. By calculating that the well-compensated industrial employees would be the ones consuming the well-marketed industrial products, the Fordist model pointed the way beyond the conflict between producer and consumer, capital and labour. What existed instead was a “monolithic certainty about the public good,”<sup>101</sup> which amounted to a tacit acceptance of the corporate-capitalist system as a whole.<sup>102</sup>

Within this system, the state was reduced to “subsidiz[ing] the defaults of the capitalist economy,” to borrow a phrase C. Wright Mills used to describe Roosevelt’s mode of administration.<sup>103</sup> The same sort of marginalization of government took place under King as well, Grant argued, and any talk of “balancing interests” between the corporations and other groups really amounted to little more than “doling out minor concessions” to the latter to prevent opposition from growing.<sup>104</sup> The closest that King himself came to intuiting the diminished role of government under corporate capitalism, was in a notable passage of *Industry and Humanity*. King envisioned the day when the industrial order would become so perfectly consonant with the needs of society, that it would be difficult to see what kind of distinct role would be left for government. It was

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<sup>101</sup> Grant, “Ideology in Empire,” 194.

<sup>102</sup> George Grant, “The New Europe,” in *Collected Works*, 3:199. Under such a system, “all questions of the good life would be settled by the economic boom. You don’t have to think of what classes come to dominance under the boom. You don’t have to think of the quality of life which arises in the civilization of highway 401. Just go on and expand economically and everything will turn out all right.” “The New Europe,” in *Collected Works* 3:199.

<sup>103</sup> Mills, 274.

<sup>104</sup> Grant, “An Ethic of Community,” 37. A similar criticism of King’s practice of “balancing interests” is raised by Reginald Whitaker in his article “Political Thought and Political Action in Mackenzie King” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 13:4 (Winter 1978-79, 58).

“a moot question,” he declared, “whether political and industrial government will merge into one, or tend to remain separate and distinct.”<sup>105</sup>

Government’s proper function, in King’s view of industrial society, was to serve as an arbitrator between the various parties to industry, with the aim of encouraging joint control, such that each would eventually be able to represent its interests directly (that is, without the need for government intervention). King was convinced that such a democratic arrangement of industry would in the end provide its own justification by issuing in greater productivity, prosperity and, ultimately, social harmony. He emphasized that joint control did not amount to each party claiming its own greedy stake in industry, but on the contrary, to each renouncing the right to absolute control over the means of production, and likewise recognizing the rightful place of others within the industrial process. It meant placing the needs of the industrial order as a whole (which encompassed the entire social order) above all sectional interests. Ultimately this even meant seeing “the affairs of Industry [as being] of more general concern than those of Nationality.”<sup>106</sup>

King imagined that the greatest prospects for this sort of ideal industrial order existed within North America. In the class-ridden societies of Europe, industry had all too often been turned toward military purposes by a power-mongering ruling stratum, intent on aggrandizing the state. The New World, he believed, had been insulated from the corrupting influence of European militarism, both through geographic distance and

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<sup>105</sup>W.L.M. King, *Industry and Humanity: A Study in the Principles Underlying Industrial Reconstruction*, with an Introduction by David Jay Bercuson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973; originally published in 1918), 246.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, 335. Elsewhere he wrote, “All that has tended to make the world increasingly one, and to render international conflict on a world scale possible, has within itself also the power to create a world harmony under the spread of right ideas. Industry and the wealth that Industry creates are means to this mighty end. A Commonwealth founded on Industry, not a World-Empire maintained by Force will prove the last word in industrial and political development” (82).

through its more democratic culture and traditions. Canada and the United States, King felt, both demonstrated a greater willingness to put the interests of industry above their separate, national interests and thus provided a model of economic cooperation to the rest of the world. Here again, woven into King's ambitious scheme of industrial reform, was that fixed motif of Canada-US cooperation, the "North American Idea." It was appropriate then that King should trumpet his industrial cause with the phrase "above all nations is humanity."<sup>107</sup> The words, King must have known, came from that most archetypal of continentalists, Goldwin Smith,<sup>108</sup> and expressed what Grant described as a central theme in continentalist thought; namely, "that humanity requires that nationalisms be overcome...If Canadians refuse this, they are standing back from the vital job of building a peaceful world."<sup>109</sup>

King saw no irony in the fact that the biggest leap forward in Canada's industrial development had taken place as the economy geared up, not for peaceful production, but to join in fighting history's bloodiest war. As he remarked to parliament a few months after the fall of France, "personally I do not see that any conflict need arise between our war aims and our peace aims." While it may have been necessary for those on the side of right "to forge and to use against their adversaries the weapons of material power," and in so-doing adopt the same violent means as their enemy, there was no contradiction so long as the ends of their struggle remained true. To defeat Germany, King avowed, was to "bring into being a new social order, an order in which freedom, truth and justice will increasingly prevail in the relations between individuals,

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>108</sup> The phrase has been broadly attributed to Smith, and appeared in his obituary in the *New York Times* (June 9, 1910, 6). It also appeared on the back of a bench that Smith had donated to Cornell University in 1871, and which later sat near the entrance of the University's Goldwin Smith Hall.

<sup>109</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 102.

between classes and among nations.”<sup>110</sup> He offered a similar prediction in a speech a year later, promising that “this war will assume, in human history, the shape of a social revolution, out of which mankind may hope for a new order to emerge; an order in which the power of Right, not Might, will increasingly control, and from which the injustices of the old order, one by one, will be banished.”<sup>111</sup>

King could take solace in the fact that his great ally in the war, Roosevelt, shared his vision of international reform. The war, Grant argued, had been viewed by some in the New Deal administration as a chance to internationalize the reforms of the 1930s (as King had beseeched the President to do two years before the outbreak of the war). It was easy enough to redirect industry’s energies from “mass welfare to total war...the same reformist spirit could be operative in bringing in an international kingdom of the four freedoms.”<sup>112</sup> Roosevelt’s “Four Freedom’s Address” which was delivered to Congress on January 6 1941, set the tone for a new postwar American internationalism, calling out for a world in which the freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom from want and freedom from fear were secured for “all nations, large

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<sup>110</sup> Parliamentary Address, House of Commons, November 12, 1940, 60.

<sup>111</sup> W.L.M. King, “Let Free Men Face Reality,” An Address Delivered before the Canadian Club of Ottawa, September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1941.

<sup>112</sup> George Grant, “The Uses of Freedom—A Word and Our World,” in *Collected Works* 3:197. “The U.S. entry into World War II,” remarked Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, “tied the New Deal indissolubly to the crisis of European imperialisms and projected the New Deal on the scene of world government as an alternative, successor model. From that point on, the effects of the New Deal reforms would be felt over the entire global terrain” *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 233-234. Williams, argued that within the expansionist “framework” appealed to by Roosevelt and others—a framework that was based on an “overseas economic expansion that produced a prosperous, democratic moral society based on private property,” and that was realized “as part of the economic expansion of the large corporation”—America had little choice but to enter the war. “America could not survive as a prosperous democracy even if Germany did not attack the Western Hemisphere.” *The Contours of American History*, 462.

and small.”<sup>113</sup> Amongst the “basic things expected by our people of their political and economic systems,” Roosevelt included, “the enjoyment of the fruits of scientific progress in a wider and constantly rising standard of living.” Roosevelt declared his vision of “world order” to be of such “high concept,” so broad in scope, that there could be “no end save victory.”<sup>114</sup> King was buoyed by Roosevelt’s address, because he knew that it meant that “the U.S. is now in the war.”<sup>115</sup> It also offered up a reformist vision for the postwar period that very much resonated with King’s own progressive hopes. Roosevelt’s saving grace as a politician, King would write at the end of the war, stemmed from the fact that he had kept “in touch with the people”; he had understood “the feeling of the people that if this war is to mean anything it has to mean a social revolution and that the great body of the people are going to have a larger share of their lives.”<sup>116</sup>

So convinced was King that he and Roosevelt were fighting the war for a higher social purpose that he was willing to enter into co-operative ventures with Washington with what Grant characterized as a surprising lack of circumspection. The first such arrangement took shape just after the fall of France in June of 1940, when, at Roosevelt’s request, King hastened to Ogdensburg, New York to discuss the creation of a Permanent Joint Board on Defence to oversee security arrangements for the continent.<sup>117</sup> What came out of the meeting was, according to Donald Creighton, “an

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<sup>113</sup> The address also combined a call for eventual disarmament with a more immediate plea for “a swift and driving increase in our armament production” to help meet the threat to democracy. It can be found online at <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrthefourfreedoms.htm>

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Diary, Monday, January 6, 1941.

<sup>116</sup> Diary, Thursday, July 26, 1945, 2. King remarked that it was Roosevelt’s “infirmity” that had kept this connection with the people alive, in spite of his “drastic extravagances.”

<sup>117</sup> J.L. Granatstein argues that the Ogdensburg Agreement put the country onto the path of American dependency in the area of military defence. See Granatstein, *How Britain’s Weakness*, 29; and

executive agreement,” arrived at in secret, which “effectively bound Canada to a continental system dominated by the United States and largely determined Canadian foreign and defence policy for the next thirty years.”<sup>118</sup> Grant recognized the urgent situation that Canada faced in the summer of 1940: after France’s collapse and Britain’s dramatic evacuation from Dunkirk, Germany appeared poised to invade, not just Britain, but eventually North America also. “It was necessary to for Canada to throw in her lot with continental defence,” he wrote. “The whole of Eurasia might have fallen into the hands of Germans and Japan. The British Empire was collapsing once and for all as an international force. Canada and the United States of America had to be unequivocally united for the defence of this hemisphere.”<sup>119</sup> Yet Grant still faulted King for “failing to recognize the perilous situation that the new circumstances entailed.”<sup>120</sup>

Certainly King’s own rhetoric in describing the Ogdensburg Agreement reflected an almost unbridled optimism over the benefits it promised for Canada, and indeed, the world. Once again evoking the North American Idea, he compared the agreement, both in Parliament and in his diary, to the Rush-Bagot Treaty and the International Joint Commission, and lauded it as “part of the enduring foundation of a

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“Mackenzie King and Canada at Ogdensburg,” 101. The historian F.H. Underhill similarly claimed that the Ogdensburg Agreement marked a ‘revolutionary’ shift in Canada’s relations with the rest of the world. Underhill, “Canada and the North Atlantic Triangle.” *Centennial Review* I (September 1957), 335.

<sup>118</sup> Donald Creighton, *The Forked Road: Canada, 1939-1957* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 44.

<sup>119</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 63-64. As a young man in the spring of 1940, Grant bore alarmed witness to the Battle of Britain from the relative security of Oxford. In a letter to his mother just a few days after the Dutch capitulation, he wrote that “optimism can hardly be in order. Total warfare has started in truth.” “Worse will follow,” he predicted darkly. Letter to Maude Grant, May 19, in *Selected Letters*, 53-54.

<sup>120</sup> J.L. Granatstein, misunderstanding Grant’s point, has criticized him for describing the agreement as (in Granatstein’s words) “a virtual-sell out to the United States.” *How Britain’s Weakness*, 31-32.

new world order, based on friendship and good will.”<sup>121</sup> Somehow he saw this strictly military arrangement as being on a continuum with his ideal of industrial reform, and marveled at “the Hand of Destiny” that had brought “Roosevelt and myself” together to realize it.<sup>122</sup> He described the Ogdensburg Agreement as “part of a definite plan, illustrative of eternal laws of justice,” and exulted that “what has been achieved is greater even than the reciprocity agreement. It is one of the most far reaching agreements ever reached on this or any other continent. It affects world relationships—to what extent we cannot even at the moment foresee; but being on the right lines will prove of permanent benefit to mankind.”<sup>123</sup> The only hint that the agreement with the Americans might provide Canada with cause for concern was offered quite unintentionally in a speech to parliament which described the plan, jarringly, as the fulfillment of “a manifest destiny.”<sup>124</sup>

## Conclusion

When Berlin surrendered to the Soviet army in April of 1945, King believed that he had caught his first glimpse of the “new order” that the war was supposed to deliver to the world. In a speech he celebrated the special relationship that had come to be, largely through his own efforts, that had done so much to bring about Germany’s defeat and that would now provide the basis for the new international order. “I hope I may live to see,” he pronounced, “so far as Canada is concerned, the extension to all nations of the kind of relationship which exists between Canada and the United States and which

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<sup>121</sup> Address to Parliament, (November 12, 1940), 57-58.

<sup>122</sup> Diary, August 22, 1940, 3.

<sup>123</sup> Diary, August 18, 1940, 2-3.

<sup>124</sup> See Granatstein, *Canada's War*, 129. King’s remarks on the agreement appear in the House of Commons Debates for November 12, 1940, “Address to Parliament by Mr. Mackenzie King,” 57.



also exists among the nations of the British Commonwealth.” “I believe there is nothing truer,” he continued, “than that the welfare of each nation and its people increasingly depends upon the common welfare of all.”<sup>125</sup> He did not shrink from using the occasion to remind his audience of his achievement ten years earlier in signing into existence the trade agreement that, in his mind, had portended this moment. Writing in his diary a month later, King consoled himself against a more melancholy mood by reaffirming his commitment to making “the principles of *Industry and Humanity* prevail.”<sup>126</sup>

But, of course, the new order that King looked forward to throughout the years of fighting did not materialize. In the fall of 1946, King recorded with great distress Russia’s increasingly belligerent behaviour within the UN assembly and at the Paris Conferences. Russia was “now operating wholly behind an iron curtain toward her former allies and the rest of the world knew nothing whatever of what she was doing. How far she had progressed in developing her military and other strength.” He feared the very worst, however: “I am really coming of the belief that a third world war is in the making.”<sup>127</sup> Noting that Russia was Canada’s closest neighbour on the north, King contemplated whether it would be possible to establish a peace such as had existed for so long between Canada and its neighbour to the south. But after determining that Russia could not be trusted “even if she said yes to [a peace] agreement,” King offered a rather striking conclusion: “It is an appalling situation. Had the Americans and ourselves not been virtually the same people the Rush-Bagot agreement might never

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<sup>125</sup> King, “International Co-operation Essential to Peace, Security and Prosperity,” 28-29.

<sup>126</sup> Diary, Monday and Tuesday, August 13 & 14, 1945.

<sup>127</sup> Diary, Friday, November 15, 1946, 3.

have been made. Differences of race, religion etc. will operate against any corresponding escape from competitive arming in the North.”<sup>128</sup>

Throughout the war King had been sustained by the conviction that the relationship of “friendship and good will” that existed between Canada and the United States, a relationship that had grown even closer through their economic cooperation during the war, could in fact provide “part of the enduring foundation of a new world order.” He thought he had found a man of similar vision in Roosevelt, who believed that the tremendous industrial machine that the United States had mobilized to fight the war could be directed toward establishing a peaceful world order once the fighting had stopped. This dramatic shift in purpose, of course, did not happen, and the productive capacity that had been unleashed by America’s war effort soon became harnessed to a new military competition. The irony of Roosevelt’s career, according to Grant, was that “one of the great imperialists of American history imagined himself an enemy of imperialism.”<sup>129</sup> Roosevelt, “the very archetype of modern liberalism...used forceful language against war and imperialism at the very time when he was consolidating an empire,”<sup>130</sup> indeed, when he was “establish[ing] the highest tide of American imperialism.”<sup>131</sup> The irony of King’s career, on the other hand, was that he was perhaps “sufficiently held by liberal theory” to believe Roosevelt. King had worked to yoke Canada’s resources to America’s in the hopes of overcoming the imperialist rivalries of the Old World, but instead the country found itself bound to a new empire.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>129</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 64.

<sup>130</sup> Grant, *English-Speaking Justice*, 42

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 94, fn. 2. See also *Technology and Empire*, 72; “The Great Society,” 461.

Not all of King's predictions about the shape of the postwar order were groundless. The massive wartime industrialization in Canada and the United States did give rise to an increasingly integrated North American economy, characterized by rising levels of employment, income and consumption. But the same production system that created this prosperity and relative peace at home also sustained violence abroad. It was not simply that the "massive bureaucracies" of corporate capitalism, as Grant described them, proved capable of planning for the production of both guns and butter. The connection was deeper and more troubling for Grant: As political order was gradually replaced by an administered economic order, and particular allegiances gave way to a "monolithic certainty" about the goodness of the system as a whole, Grant claimed that it became difficult for North Americans to understand why others might resist their system.<sup>132</sup> This same certainty pointed to what Grant saw as the contradictory character of the postwar period: that it was to be an era of violence guided by a conviction that the peace and prosperity enjoyed on this continent was the proper inheritance of all.

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<sup>132</sup> Roosevelt's election in 1932 gave rise to "a different kind of empire from the colonial empires the English and French had," one for which the label "welfare imperialism" seemed appropriate to Grant. "The Great Society," 461. He remarked on the difficulty of recognizing that one lives in an imperialist society "when it is run by governments who talk and sometimes act the language of welfare both domestically and internationally." *Technology and Empire*, 72. Already by 1955 Grant had expressed exasperation with the unquestioned assumption that "what the West had to give" the "underdeveloped countries" of the world "was an unreserved blessing." "The Minds of Men in the Atomic Age," 156.

### Chapter 3

#### **Marxism and Technological Society: The Socialist Option in Canada**

*Lament for a Nation* provides what is almost certainly the best-known commentary on Canada's dramatic rapprochement with America during the King era. But Grant's account was far from the only one, and in the years that followed its publication a growing number of Canadian scholars would join in casting critical attention on the deepening bond between these two nations. In the field of political economy, scholars took up the tools of Marxist analysis to examine the effects of the American investment capital that grew to a floodtide in Canada in the decades after the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> Even amongst Marxists, however, there were important disagreements about the broader historical significance of the nation's absorption into the continental economy. So-called "left nationalists"—a capacious label that was applied to a broad array of academics, artists, and political movements (such as the New Democratic Party and its splinter group, the Waffle)—saw the country primarily as a victim of American capitalist imperialism. A less well-known group of socialist critics, who styled themselves as "orthodox" Marxists, spoke out mainly from within the academy and in the pages of smaller socialist publications. This second group adopted a more internationalist perspective and took a stance against left nationalism, arguing that

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<sup>1</sup> John Myles notes that this critical academic focus on the United States also coincided with a more general disillusionment with American society. "Vietnam, urban poverty, and race riots in the United States along with the discovery of the American empire in Canada undermined the progressive imagery associated with the American model." "Understanding Canada: Comparative Political Economy Perspectives," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 26:1 (1989), 1.

by casting Canada as a victim of capitalist imperialism, left nationalists shielded the nation from its own active (that is, imperialist) role in what orthodox critics described as an expanding capitalist world economy.<sup>2</sup>

Grant had certain sympathies with both perspectives. He certainly shared the left-nationalist conviction that America's economic domination had come at a very high price for Canada—that there had been something worth preserving in Canadian sovereignty. But he was also in essential agreement with the orthodox claim that the nation was itself quickly becoming an active part of the imperialist order emanating from Washington; and he felt that the failure of left nationalists to properly appreciate this fact, tended to produce an exaggerated sense of Canada's freedom of action.

At a more fundamental level, however, Grant had strong philosophical reservations about Marxist theory that put his thought at odds with left nationalists and orthodox Marxists alike. His disagreement with Marx could be seen most clearly in his rejection of the claim that capitalist imperialism was an essentially “reactionary” phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> Marx saw modern imperialism as symptomatic of the greed of the

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<sup>2</sup> Gordon Laxer discusses this divide in “The Schizophrenic Character of Canadian Political Economy,” *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 26:1 (1989), 178-192. For a summary of the debate from the internationalist perspective see William Burgess’ “Imperialized Canada or Canadian Imperialism?” *Socialist Voice*, 95 (October 2, 2006) (<http://www.socialistvoice.com/Soc-Voice/Soc-Voice-95.htm>) Also see the Paul Kellogg’s presentation of the internationalist position in “State, Capital and World Economy: Bukharin’s Marxism and the ‘Dependency/Class Controversy in Canadian Political Economy,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 22:2 (June 1989), 337-362, along with Elisabeth Gidengil’s reply in “Misplaced Polarities: A Comment on ‘State, Capital and World Economy’ by Paul Kellogg,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 24.1 (March 1991), 121-133, and Kellogg’s rejoinder, “An Inverted Paradigm: A Reply to Elisabeth Gidengil.” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 24:1 (March 1991), 135-147. Also see Kellogg’s “After Left Nationalism: The Future of Canadian Political Economy,” *Marxism* 2 (2004) (<http://www.socialist.ca/Journal/m2004/06-AfterLeftNationalism.html>), and Robin Mathews’ reaction, “Paul Kellogg’s Cornflakes; or ‘After Left Nationalism: The Future of Canadian Political Economy,” (<http://www.vivelecanada.ca/article.php?story=2003083115400662>). This exchange also provoked a rejoinder from Kellogg, “Why the Left Needs to Abandon Canadian Nationalism: A Response to Paul Kellogg’s Cornflakes,” (<http://www.vivelecanada.ca/article.php?story=20030915104639575>).

<sup>3</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 68.

propertied classes expanding the reach of the capitalist production system in an endless quest for accumulation.<sup>4</sup> Although Grant thought that Marxist analysis had done much to illuminate the grave injustices and violence wrought by this system, he resisted the claim that under capitalism, modern industrial technology was set to purposes that only served the greedy desires of the rich. Such a one-sided view of capitalist society, Grant felt, could only be sustained by the dubious promise of an age when technology would liberate society entirely from avarice:<sup>5</sup> Against this idealized state of affairs, the present age began to look manifestly avaricious. Grant believed that this assessment of modern imperialism revealed a confusion in the way that Marxists understood their relationship to technology. The utopian promise<sup>6</sup> of social transformation sustained the belief that one could embrace the means of modern industrial production without embracing its imperialist tendencies.<sup>7</sup> The chief effect of this belief, Grant contended, was to obscure the fact that Marxism was in fact committed to the same expanding technological order as capitalist liberalism.

This chapter begins to trace what I argue is Grant's distinctive perspective on the origins of modern imperialism and Canada's relationship to it by highlighting certain points where the Grantian perspective, despite its sympathies with Marxism,

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<sup>4</sup> In capitalist society, "all passions and all activity must...be submerged in avarice," writes Marx in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959), 119.

<sup>5</sup> "Marx held up a total denial of the world as it was in the name of the ecstatic hope that in the name of the ecstatic hope that in history all things are possible, and evil never necessary." Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 100. He "saw with clarity," Grant wrote, "that scientific activity entails the domination of nature by man. And this domination had come to be in a world ruled by the principle of domination of one man by another...The Marxist dialectic claims to show that, though science is itself domination and arisen in a society founded thereupon, it becomes the means of overcoming that domination." "Acceptance and Rebellion," 233.

<sup>6</sup> Grant in fact labelled Marx the greatest of the "utopian prophets" of our modern age. *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 386.

<sup>7</sup> Wedded to a "teleological philosophy" that believes in the "perfectibility of man...technology remains [for Marx] an instrument that serves human good." Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 69.

diverges from the left-nationalist and orthodox Marxist strains of analysis that emerged within the field of Canadian political economy in the 1970s. According to Grant, the expansion of an American-led empire in the twentieth century was fuelled by a faith that identified progress with the development of humankind's capacity to dominate the world through technology. He saw this same faith in technology behind those industrialization efforts undertaken by King's administration in the 1930s and 1940s, that linked us more firmly to the United States. But Grant, as I argue, believed that Marxian political economy failed to grasp the nature of modern imperialism for the simple reason that it too shared this faith in technology as progress.

### **Left-Nationalism in Canada**

Most political economists who concerned themselves with Canada's deepening integration with the United States in the twentieth century saw American industrial capital as the chief instrument of this process. Britain had long been Canada's primary source of investment capital, so it was perhaps only too predictable that as the sun began to set on the British Empire, the country would fall under the lengthening shadow of the new economic and financial giant to the south. This shift from British to American investment capital signalled a change not just in who was financing Canada's industrial growth, but in *how* that growth was being financed.<sup>8</sup> In her seminal left-

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<sup>8</sup> Kari Levitt, *Silent Surrender: the Multinational Corporation in Canada*, with a Preface by Mel Watkins (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970). An earlier work, by the University League for Social Reform *Nationalism in Canada*, edited by Peter Russell, with a Foreword by Frank Underhill (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1966) also included some essays that reflected this growing concern. In the late 1960s and early 1970s three separate reports were issued by government task forces charged with investigating the effects of foreign ownership in Canada: The Watkins Report (1968), The Wahn Report (1970), and the Gray Report (1972). All three studies recommended establishing a federal agency to monitor and control levels of American corporate ownership in Canada. Other academic works that fed into the left-nationalist cause included A. Rotstein and G. Laxer (eds.), *Getting It Back: A Program for Canadian Independence*, for the Committee for an Independent Canada (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1974); Robert M. Laxer, *Canada Ltd.*:

nationalist work, *Silent Surrender*, Kari Levitt argued that before World War I Canada had fallen into “the classic pattern of pre-1913 British foreign investment.” Foreign capital in this period typically came in the form of indirect or portfolio investment. “The investor,” Levitt wrote, “was assured a safe return in solid pounds sterling while the risk—and control—remained with the borrowing entrepreneur and the government of the hinterland.”<sup>9</sup> “Business enterprise was typically national, and with the exception of colonial plantations and mines, entrepreneurial decisions were typically local.”<sup>10</sup> The United States, on the other hand, tended to opt for direct foreign investment. If in the case of portfolio investment “control remains with the borrower,” in the case of direct investment, Levitt pointed out, “it rests unequivocally with the lender.”<sup>11</sup> American foreign investment represented “the intrusion into the Canadian social and economic fabric of a tightly-controlled private corporate enterprise whose operations are likely to diminish, not to enhance the power and effectiveness of Canadian enterprise.”<sup>12</sup>

Some scholars sympathetic to the left-nationalist school questioned elements of this analysis. Naylor and Clement, for instance, questioned Levitt’s suggestion that British portfolio investment had allowed for the development of an indigenous industrial economy.<sup>13</sup> Instead, they saw Canada’s history as a more or less seamless tale of imperial domination: With the end of British expansion in Canada, room was opened up for America’s expansion. But in spite of the divergences between these

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*The Political Economy of Dependency* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973). Ian Lumsden (ed.), *Close the 49th Parallel: The Americanization of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970).

<sup>9</sup> Levitt, *Silent Surrender*, 52, 61.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>13</sup> R. T. Naylor, “The Rise and Fall of the Third Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence,” in *Capitalism and the National Question in Canada*, edited by Gary Teeple (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972); Wallace Clement, *The Canadian Corporate Elite: An Analysis of Economic Power*, Foreword by John Porter (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975).



interpretations, there was fairly broad agreement on one central matter: that Canada had, since the First World War, entered into an association of increasing dependency on American power and capital. The solution for left-nationalists was to be found in the Canadian state. Only by imposing some measure of political control over the economy, some mechanism to restrict foreign investment and ownership, could Canada hope to reverse the process of economic colonization and develop into an advanced industrial power in its own right.<sup>14</sup>

Grant shared many of the left nationalist's central preoccupations. Since his earliest public writings at the end of the Second World War, he had voiced his worry that Canada was putting economic interests ahead of all other concerns, and that this singular focus was leading the country into an incautiously close relationship with its much richer American neighbour.<sup>15</sup> In "Have We a Canadian Nation?" he spoke sympathetically of those movements "like the cooperatives, the CCF, and Social Credit—that want to impose order on the undisciplined money changers," noting that "a respect for law and authority has by and large been a deeper part of our life than in the USA."<sup>16</sup> In the years to come, he would begin to reflect at a more serious philosophical level about the meaning of socialism and Marxism more particularly. In 1956, while on sabbatical in England he began work on a book manuscript, the first chapter of which he described as a "hymn of praise to Karl Marx, as one of the supreme prophetic

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<sup>14</sup> In 1973, based largely on the recommendations of The Gray Report (see fn. 9, above), the Federal Investment Review Agency was established to screen the acquisition of Canadian businesses.

<sup>15</sup> There many obvious parallels between the left-nationalist analysis and Grant's thought have led some scholars to identify his writings with the "dependency school" and with the left-nationalist movement more generally. See Daniel Drache and Arthur Kroker, "The Labyrinth of Dependency," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 7.3 (Fall 1983), 5-6; Gad Horowitz, "Commentary," in *By Loving Our Own: George Grant and the Legacy of Lament for a Nation*, edited by Peter C. Emberley (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1990); Hutcheson, *Dominance and Dependency*, 88-89.

<sup>16</sup> Grant, "Have We a Canadian Nation?," 130.

geniuses.”<sup>17</sup> As the editors of Grant’s *Collected Works* note, many of the themes from this manuscript found their way into his 1958 work, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*.<sup>18</sup> The lecture, which was broadcast across the nation by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, began with a spirited defence of Marx against his more ideologically driven detractors in the North American media and academy. Ultimately, *Philosophy in the Mass Age* also expressed some very strong reservations about Marxism; most notably, Grant felt that Marx’s philosophy was based on an inadequate understanding of “the freedom of the spirit”—something he thought that the liberal West had grasped much more clearly.<sup>19</sup> But this reservation was not enough to prevent Grant from still occasionally referring to himself as a “socialist.”<sup>20</sup> He also continued to speak about government as if it maintained some independence from the corporations. Perhaps the clearest evidence of this could be seen in his contribution to a book of essays published to coincide with the founding of the New Democratic Party in 1961,<sup>21</sup> whose pro-labour policies and support for economic nationalism drew many left-nationalists to its cause. In his essay, “An Ethic of Community,” Grant remarked that, while it was “foolish to believe that the power of government and business stand opposed to each other,” there was still “considerable power rest[ing] with government.”<sup>22</sup> At the same time, Grant admitted that it was an ever greater challenge to hold onto any sense of political purpose

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<sup>17</sup> Grant, Letter to Maude Grant, November 2, 1956, in *Selected Letters*, 189-190.

<sup>18</sup> See *Collected Works* 2, 221.

<sup>19</sup> Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 63. Over the course of the next several years, Grant would begin to develop a much more radical critique of modern liberalism and the individualistic conception of freedom entailed by that doctrine. In his Introduction to the 1966 edition of *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, Grant remarked that the original work had been written while the author “still held by the progressive dogma” (119), and had not fully freed himself from the faith in liberalism and the promise of a technological society in which we are free to make of the world what we want.

<sup>20</sup> Letter to Derek Bedson, late autumn 1962, in *Selected Letters*, 214.

<sup>21</sup> The book was *A Social Purpose for Canada*, edited by Michael Oliver (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1961).

<sup>22</sup> Grant, “An Ethic of Community,” 22.

in the present age. He warned that corporate capitalism was bringing about the decline of “democratic government, founded as it was on the idea that each citizen could and should exert his influence on the course of public affairs.”<sup>23</sup> “More easily than in the past...lives can reflect a surrender to passivity and the pursuit of pleasure as a commodity.” Society “gives men a sense of their own personal freedom while destroying the old orders of life which mediated meaning to men in simpler environments.”<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, the giant institutions that organize their lives as members of this giant planned economy “are so powerful and so impersonal that [they] come to believe that there is no point in trying to influence them.”<sup>25</sup> There is in the modern industrial age, what he described as a “dying away of the individual’s effective participation in politics.”<sup>26</sup>

In the same essay, however, Grant also acknowledged that the advanced industrial age brings with it great opportunity: “North America is the first continent called to bring human excellence to birth throughout the whole range of the technological society.”<sup>27</sup> Prosperity, material abundance, and automation were creating a more egalitarian society wherein every individual would be granted the leisure to pursue something higher than mere work.<sup>28</sup> We were thus being compelled by our

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 25. Grant was not simply describing the fate of the citizen class. Three years earlier, in *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, he remarked that “so great is the power that society can exert over the individual that it even subjects to dominance those very elites who seem to rule...rule becomes ever more impersonal, something outside the grip of any individual” (6).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>28</sup> As Edward Andrew has remarked, even in his “socialist period,” Grant rejected the Marxist possibility that humans would find their fulfillment by assuming control of industry and investing their energies and skills in the labour process itself. “George Grant on Technological Imperatives,” in *Democratic Theory and Technological Society*, edited by Richard B. Day, Ronald Beiner, and Joseph Masciulli (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1988), 308.

circumstances to reflect on matters of deep political significance. Grant ended his essay by posing what seemed to him to be the central questions facing anyone who wanted to reflect seriously on the prospects of political renewal. “If it be probable that in the future human beings grow up in conditions where physical survival does not take most of their time, what then will give life its meaning and purpose? What is worth doing when the robots are doing the work in the factories?”<sup>29</sup> In rather stark contrast with his position in later writings, Grant seemed to leave open the possibility that the technological base on which our corporate economy had been built might some day be turned toward progressive purposes. It is probably just as notable however that he left it at asking questions. Beyond offering some vague prescriptions about the need for public education, Grant gave no definite sense of how this social transformation would occur.

Just two years after the publication of “An Ethic of Community,” however, political events took place that would have a defining influence on Grant’s thought and provide the direct inspiration for *Lament for a Nation*. One important effect of these events was to force him to reassess whatever hopes he had attached to the NDP and to the possibility of countering the “capitalist ethic” in Canada more generally. In February of 1963, the NDP’s federal party leader, and former Co-operative Commonwealth Federation leader, Tommy Douglas, joined forces with the Liberal opposition in Parliament to bring down the minority Conservative government of John Diefenbaker in a vote of no confidence. The vote had been provoked by Diefenbaker’s

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Grant expressed similar optimism in his 1958 lectures, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, writing that “just as our industrial civilization creates the conditions of repression, it also creates the conditions of universal liberation: not only in the economic sense that people who are free from the necessity of hard work have the leisure to pursue ends beyond the practical, but also in the sense that an industrial society breaks down the old natural forms of human existence in which people traditionally found the meaning for their lives. In such situation many persons are driven by the absence of these traditional forms to seek a meaning that will be their own” (12).

refusal to allow nuclear weapons on Canadian soil. Opponents like Liberal leader Lester Pearson argued that this was a breach of commitment on the part of the Diefenbaker administration, which in 1959 had agreed to install Bomarc missiles (which without the nuclear tips “were only useless, expensive metal”<sup>30</sup>) in Canada’s north. Grant interpreted Diefenbaker’s refusal differently. He believed that it had revealed the prime minister’s determination to fight against American domination, and the passionate commitment of his minister of external affairs, Howard Green, to the cause of nuclear disarmament.<sup>31</sup>

The night before the vote, Grant had telephoned Douglas in a bid to dissuade him from supporting the Liberal position.<sup>32</sup> Douglas was unmoved, however, and after helping to bring down the Conservative administration, his party cooperated in Parliament to keep two minority Liberal governments afloat. Grant was appalled by this outcome, and believed that it demonstrated the hollowness of the socialist cause in Canada.<sup>33</sup> In fact, he soon came to the conclusion that socialism had never actually stood a chance in this country. The NDP’s predecessor party, the CCF, had been born out of the hardships of the Great Depression, but had really risen to national prominence during the war, promising Canadian workers a share in the control and benefits of the industrial miracle that their sacrifices were helping to bring about. In 1943, “during the

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<sup>30</sup> Granatstein, *Yankee Go Home*, 130.

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter 3 of Grant, *Lament for a Nation*; and Letter to Derek Bedson, February 1963, in *Selected Letters*, 215. In a 1965 letter Grant claimed that he had first been inspired to write *Lament for a Nation* “because I was so angry that they had brought those horrible weapons into Canada.” See his Letter to Stephen Bornstein, February 20, 1967, in *Selected Letters*, 243.

<sup>32</sup> Grant mentions the call in his letter to Bedson (*ibid.*); see also Christian, *George Grant: A Biography*, 241.

<sup>33</sup> Grant later remarked in interview that “when the NDP voted with the Liberals against people like Howard Green, I never wanted to have any more to do with them. I recognized... that North America is a society that is altogether going to be run at the local level by the bourgeois, and I found more real nationalism in the bourgeois, in the nationalistic bourgeois, than I did in the NDP, who were so full of ideology.” Cayley, *George Grant in Conversation*, 97.

utopian days at the end of the Second World War,” the party looked well positioned to win power in provincial elections in western Canada, and more importantly, in Canada’s industrial heartland, Ontario. “But to have anticipated a socialist Ontario was to hope rather than to predict,” Grant wrote.<sup>34</sup> Ultimately it made little difference to him that the CCF eventually lost the election (to George Drew’s Progressive Conservatives): the party did not, in any case, have a realistic vision for a different sort of industrial society in Canada. In fact Grant felt that there was little to distinguish the CCF’s social policy from the federal Liberals, whose postwar welfare schemes succeeded principally in placating the disaffection of the working class and reconciling its members with the existing industrial system.<sup>35</sup> The social-democratic parties in Canada had “generally acted as if they were ‘left-wing’ allies of the Liberal party,”<sup>36</sup> whose job it was to goad the Liberals in the direction of stronger reform measures.

To be sure, the NDP’s policy triumphs during their years of collaboration with Pearson’s minority governments offered proof that such a strategy could deliver results. In fact, some argued that the reforms won by the NDP in allying itself with the Liberals overshadowed any of the controversy surrounding the origins of the partnership. Michael Byers, for one, dismissed Grant’s claim that “the defeat of Canadian nationalism was symbolized in [the fall of] Diefenbaker,”<sup>37</sup> noting that “Douglas held the balance of power in the two minority parliaments that followed Diefenbaker’s defeat. Together, he and Pearson introduced universal public health care and the Canada Pension Plan and kept Canada out of the Vietnam War.” “Diefenbaker was gone,” Byers

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<sup>34</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 86.

<sup>35</sup> Grant, “An Ethic of Community,” 37.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 87. Following the Diefenbaker’s downfall, Grant angrily referred to the NDP as “a kind of vacuous extension of the Liberals.” Quoted in Christian, *George Grant: A Biography*, 241.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Halil, “*Lament for a Nation Revisited*,” 7.

concluded, “but remnants of a socially conscious Canadian nationalism remained.”<sup>38</sup> Certainly Grant was not insensitive to the benefits of many of these welfare measures which he said had “made Canada a nicer, gentler society” (“My God, my life would have been ruined if we had not had medicare”).<sup>39</sup> At the same time, he did not feel that such social programming undertaken under Liberal government had been enough to build a society that was truly different from the corporate-driven advanced industrial state to the south of the border.<sup>40</sup> It wasn’t that the government had not gone far enough in socializing the Canadian economy; on the contrary, Grant believed that the possibility of direct political control over industry carried with it the risk that government would simply be assimilated to the purposes of the corporation. “Even when much of the economy is socialized,” Grant wrote, “the managers will gradually become indistinguishable from their international counterparts [in the corporations].”<sup>41</sup> Whether ownership of industry rested in Canada or the United States was relatively unimportant in an age when industry itself was international in its reach and responded to the imperatives of an increasingly global marketplace.

### **The World-Economy Tradition**

For left nationalists, a modern technologically oriented, industrial society posed a threat to Canadian nationhood only insofar as its control rested in the hands of private companies. As Mel Watkins, author of the 1968 federal government report on foreign ownership in Canada, put it, “A tolerable future—if there is to be one at all—can mean

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<sup>38</sup> Byers, *Intent for a Nation*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Halil, “*Lament for a Nation Revisited*,” 6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 90. Towards the end of his life, the former self-avowed “socialist,” remarked that he had “very little sympathy in any way for communism, or socialism as a total regime.” Interview by Larry Schmidt, “An Interview with George Grant,” 45.

only the humanizing and democratizing of a technological society presently dominated by corporation capitalism.”<sup>42</sup> Whatever aims Grant shared with left-nationalists, he was wary of the assumption that by directing Canadian industry toward nationalist purposes, the country could extricate itself from American-run corporate-capitalist order that had been spreading north since the First World War.

Grant was not alone in raising this challenge against the left-nationalist perspective. In fact a similar critique emerged from within the field of Canadian political economy itself. Shortly after the publication of Levitt’s seminal work, scholars arguing from an “orthodox” or “classical” Marxist perspective initiated a class-based analysis of the left-nationalist “defence of Canadian nationhood as oppositional to empire.” In its bare outline, the orthodox school’s critique echoed Grant’s claim against left nationalism: Instead of viewing the country as a “victim of imperialism,” they argued, Canada is better understood as a “middle level imperialist power in its own right.”<sup>43</sup> The basic claim of the orthodox Marxist school was that Canada’s economic development, however nationalists chose to represent it, was implicitly directed toward the realization of an increasingly interconnected and international economic order. They argued, moreover, that this had been the case at least since the end of the First World War—the moment at which, according to the left-nationalist narrative, Washington began to exercise its domination over the Canadian economy.

The theoretical grounding for the orthodox argument was found in the theory of imperialism elaborated by Lenin, as well as Marxists like Luxembour and Hilferding.

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<sup>42</sup> Melville Watkins, “The Multinational Corporation and Canada,” in *Canada and Radical Social Change*, edited by Dimitriouss Roussopoulos (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1973), 165. For Watkin’s report, see p. 102, n. 8.

<sup>43</sup> David McNally, “Canada and Empire,” *New Socialist* 54 (November 2005-January 2006), 8. Accessed online on 17/07/2007 at <http://newsocialist.org/newsite/index.php?id=568>.



The one figure who appeared to be foundational, however, was Nikolai Bukharin who theorized the idea of “world economy.”<sup>44</sup> The world economy approach rejected the notion that economic goals and practices could be defined by a distinctly national project, as if springing forth from a pure and unpolluted native soil. The idea that such a nationally oriented economy could be built was an illusion that was traced to the dependency theory of the left-nationalists: The very idea of “dependence,” William Carroll wrote, implied its opposite as well, “an ideal [type] of autonomous development.”<sup>45</sup> Rather than understand Canada’s economy in terms of this idealized duality of dependence and independence, students of the world-economy approach claimed that it was necessary to think of the economy as an international and “interdependent totality” of powers.<sup>46</sup> Dependency theory had encouraged Canadians to view the nation’s role in the world as if it were completely determined by the highly unequal relationship that existed between it and the United States. But when one stepped back and acquired a more global perspective, scholars within the Orthodox school argued, it became apparent that both countries were part of a larger economic order in which neither country stood in a position of absolute weakness or absolute dominance. All national economies ultimately found their place within an increasingly interconnected and comprehensive world economy. It was therefore misguided to try to judge the success of Canada’s “national” economic performance by looking to establish

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<sup>44</sup> See William Carroll, *Corporate Power and Canadian Capitalism* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986); Carroll, “Dependency, Imperialism and the Capitalist Class in Canada,” in *The Structure of the Canadian Capitalist Class*, edited by Robert J. Brym (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1985); also see Paul Kellogg’s, “An Inverted Paradigm: A Reply to Elisabeth Gidengil.” *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 24:1 (March 1991); Kellogg, “State, Capital and World Economy: Bukharin’s Marxism and the ‘Dependency/Class Controversy in Canadian Political Economy’”; Steve Moore and Debi Wells, *Imperialism and the National Question in Canada*, Introduction by Leo Johnson (Toronto: Privately published, 1975).

<sup>45</sup> Carroll, “Dependency, Imperialism and the Capitalist Class in Canada,” 25.

<sup>46</sup> Moore and Wells, *Imperialism and the National Question in Canada*, 20.

some mythical standard of sovereignty vis-à-vis the United States. Canada, like all other nations, had to assess its economic role according to its relative position within a hierarchically structured, international economic order.

Much of this critique of the left-nationalist position was consistent with Grant's criticisms. Although he sometimes spoke about the American domination of the Canadian economy, he emphasized that this was not what could be called a hostile takeover. It was more accurate to say that Canada was being incorporated into (and becoming an active part of) the expanding "complex" of "international capitalism that [had] dominated the West since 1945."<sup>47</sup> The government of King and Howe had played the lead role in initiating this integration, but Grant was quick to point out that the Canadian public enjoyed the considerable material rewards it produced.<sup>48</sup> The idea that the nation was being held back in an underdeveloped state by a predatory master that reaped all of the benefits of this relationship could not be supported. The left-nationalist position was therefore untenable in Canada, Grant concluded. "'Leftist' nationalism is only possible in a less-developed society in which the majority of citizens desires industrialism and believes that this is being prevented by anti-nationalist forces from the capitalist empire. This was not the situation in Canada."<sup>49</sup> "State capitalist society has in Canada overcome the class struggle to the point where there is not going to be war between the rich and the poor," Grant claimed.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 56.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 56, 99. He stated this most clearly in the 1970 Introduction to the second edition of *Lament for a Nation*: "We are not in [the American] empire as are the exploited colonies of South America, but rather with the intimacy of a younger brother status. We have all the advantages of that empire, the wealth which pours in from all over the world, the technology which comes to us through the multinational corporations" (11).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>50</sup> Grant, "The George C. Nowlan Lectures," 607.

What was true of Canada was also in Grant's view true of the West more generally. The triumphs of "Marxist socialism" since 1945, he observed, "have been in authoritarian regimes, in societies that needed the discipline of authority in order to industrialize quickly. The triumphs have not been in the West."<sup>51</sup> Lenin, Grant remarked, had observed that "there is no real proletariat in England; the proletariat for England is really the Third World." "Well, that is true of North America today to a great extent," he observed.<sup>52</sup> Bukharin, notably, had made a very similar claim in his best-known work, "Imperialism and World Economy," which was published two years into the Great War. Singling out England, Germany and the United States, Bukharin wrote that,

Colonial policy yields a colossal income to the great powers *i.e.*, to their ruling classes, to the 'state capitalist trust.' This is why the bourgeoisie pursues a colonial policy. This being the case, there is a possibility for raising the worker's wages at the expense of the exploited colonial savages and conquered peoples.

Such are exactly the results of the great powers' colonial policy. The bill for this policy is paid, not by the continental workers, and not by the workers of England, but by the little peoples of the colonies. It is in the colonies that all the blood and the filth, all the horror and the shame of capitalism, all the cynicism, greed and bestiality of modern democracy are concentrated. The European workers, considered from the point of view of the moment, are the winners, because they receive increments to their wages due to 'industrial prosperity.'

All the relative 'prosperity of the European-American industry was conditioned by nothing but the fact that a safety valve was opened in the form of colonial policy. In this way the exploitation of 'third persons'

<sup>51</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 72.

<sup>52</sup> Cayley, *George Grant in Conversation*, 72. Lenin attributed this observation principally to Friedrich Engels. In a 1916 piece he quotes the following line from an 1882 letter from Engels to the Marxist theoretician, Karl Kautsky: "You ask me what the English workers think about colonial policy. Well, exactly the same as they think about politics in general. There is no workers' party here, there are only Conservatives and Liberal-Radicals, and the workers gaily share the feast of England's monopoly of the world market and the colonies." V.I. Lenin, "Imperialism and the Split in Socialism," *Sbornik Sotsial-Demokrata* No. 2, December 1916. English translation in *Lenin: Collected Works, Volume 23* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), 105-120. Published online by the "Marxists Internet Archive"; accessed on 07/06/2008 at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/oct/x01.htm>.

(pre-capitalist producers) and colonial labour led to a rise in the wages of the European and American workers.<sup>53</sup>

Like Grant, Bukharin believed that much of the European and North American working class had escaped the immiseration that Marx believed was endemic to capitalist production. But unlike Grant who thought there was little potential for revolution amongst the comfortable, well-adjusted working classes of North America and Western Europe, Bukharin still believed that the time would come when the working classes of even the best-fed nations of the West would rise up and “smash the state.”<sup>54</sup> This would come to pass as the consequence a final conflagration, set alight by the capitalist nations of the world, which, in their competition for “world surplus value,” would be driven to pursue nationalist economic policies while building up national militaries with which to project their power into the international field. Writing in 1916, in the midst of the First World War, Bukharin argued that the world was witnessing this final, violent event. He watched as the “working class of the foremost capitalist countries, chained to the chariot of the bourgeois state power,” abandoned whatever security and prosperity they once had and “came to the aid of the latter.” This same act of solidarity with the state, Bukharin predicted, would ultimately be the act that would usher in “the crisis of imperialism and the rebirth of proletarian Socialism.” Having been reduced to cannon fodder in a war fought for the rich, the proletariat would now experience the injustice of

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<sup>53</sup> See Chapter 14 (“World Economy and Proletarian Socialism”) in N. I. Bukharin, “Imperialism and World Economy,” *Monthly Review Press* (no date; first published in English by International Publishers 1929). Published online by the “Marxists Internet Archive”; accessed on 07/07/2007 at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/bukharin/works/1917/imperial/index.htm>.

<sup>54</sup> Following the First World War, Bukharin revised this prediction, suggesting that revolution would follow a more gradual path. See Michael Haynes, *Nikolai Bukharin and the Transition from Capitalism to Socialism* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 56.

the imperial system with perfect immediacy. “Hitherto [imperialism’s] barbarous, destructive, wasteful activities were almost entirely confined to the savages; now it thrusts itself upon the toilers of Europe with all the horrifying impact of a bloodthirsty elemental power let loose.”

The interests of the moment, the temporary advantage accruing to it from the imperialist robberies and from its connections with the imperialist state, become of secondary importance compared with the lasting and general interests of the class as a whole, with the idea of a social revolution of the international proletariat which overthrows the dictatorship of finance capital with an armed hand, destroys its state apparatus and builds up a new power, a power of the workers against the bourgeoisie. In place of the idea of defending or extending the boundaries of the bourgeois state that bind the productive forces of world economy hand and foot, this power advances the slogan of *abolishing* state boundaries and merging all the peoples into one Socialist family.

When the Great War failed to produce the uprising that would overthrow global capitalism, Bukharin persisted in believing that it had at least set the crisis in motion. The revolution would still come, even if it was not to be “a one-time, simultaneous, homogeneous action, extending through the whole world all at once.”<sup>55</sup>

All of this was distinctly at odds with Grant’s assessment of the war and its impact on Western society. Like Bukharin, Grant saw 1914 as “the great dividing line of the modern era...as beginning an absolutely new era” for the West.<sup>56</sup> But it did not mark the beginning of the end for capitalism, or the liberal faith in progress more

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<sup>55</sup> N.I. Bukharin, *Socialism and Its Culture* (New York: Seagull Books, 2006; prison manuscripts originally written between 1937-1938), 225-226. Writing from prison a year before the Second World War (in what would turn out to be the last year of his life), Bukharin once again proclaimed that “the great crisis of capitalism is *at hand*...The first gigantic tremor dealt capitalism a colossal blow. Out of the world war came the proletarian revolution, giving birth to the first enormous oasis of the new world, the USSR” (219). “A second worldwide catastrophe...will bring such masses to their feet, will unleash such forces as the beer-drinking heroes of the swastika and their allies never dreamed of...The worldwide catastrophe of war cannot but end in the inevitable victory of the proletariat and the toilers in a number of countries.”

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Schmidt, “An Interview with George Grant,” 44.

generally. “The ferocious events of the twentieth century may batter the outposts of that faith...but its central core is not easily surrendered,” he wrote.<sup>57</sup> In Canada, men like Grant’s own father, William Lawson Grant, had gone off to fight as part of a generation that saw the British Empire as the very summit of “liberal capitalist democracy.”<sup>58</sup> Although William Grant came back from “the holocaust of the trenches” physically damaged, his faith in “the progressive liberalism of the nineteenth century” remained unharmed.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, Grant had argued that his liberal convictions became even stronger as a result of the war, and he devoted whatever energy remained to him to various reform causes, becoming president of the League of Nations Society and even sending money to the CCF’s charismatic leader, J.S. Woodsworth.<sup>60</sup> This experience was a characteristic one for many of those who lived through the period, according to Grant.

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<sup>57</sup> See his Introduction to the 1966 edition of *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 119.

<sup>58</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 69.

<sup>59</sup> Cayley, *George Grant in Conversation*, 46. Doug Owram, describes W.L. Grant as part of a small group comprising a “new reform elite” in the Canada of the early 1930s. See Chapter 6 of his *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State, 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1986).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 47. Michael Ignatieff has apparently misinterpreted Grant’s comments about the effects the war had on his father’s liberal beliefs, writing “George Parkin Grant, often said that his father had been ruined by the First World War. The Protestant liberal pieties of the Victorian era had not survived the nightmare of the trenches. But this account—of a gentle man living through the ruins of his beliefs and certainties—does not seem right.” *True Patriot Love: Four Generations in Search of Canada* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2009), 110-111. Grant in fact did write that his father was “ruined by the First World War,” but was careful to clarify that he meant “ruined physically—he was terribly wounded. I don’t mean ruined as a human being.” Cayley, *George Grant in Conversation*, 45-56. He went on to describe how the war “led my father into a lot of reform, and into an optimism about reform that would have been part of his liberalism in any case, but became more intense because of the war” (46-47). Elsewhere Grant, who was born in the final year of World War I spoke of being raised “by fine and well-educated people” who instilled in him the values of “what I would call secular liberalism,” or “English-speaking liberalism.” “Conversation: Intellectual Background,” *George Grant in Process*, 62. (Grant again describes the “secular liberalism” of his parents in *George Grant in Conversation*, 54). He perceived that his parents, finding themselves on the other side of “the great gulf...symbolized by ‘1914’...had not seen that the events of this century had shown that there was something radically wrong with western European civilization.” Letter to Peter Self, January 6, 1988, in *Selected Letters*, 376.

The horrors that they had endured only served to deepen, rather than weaken, their commitment to the liberal ideal of progress.<sup>61</sup>

The belief that the wars of the twentieth century would spark the overthrow of capitalism demonstrated what Grant saw as Marx's blindness to the progressive nature of modern society. Marx had tried to capture "the spirit of capitalism" with what Grant described as a "limited account of self-interest."<sup>62</sup> In his "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844," Marx summarized a lengthy analysis of the thought of Adam Smith and other classical political economists by claiming that "the only wheels which political economy sets in motion are avarice and the war against the avaricious."<sup>63</sup> This analysis altogether ignored the deep ambiguity that E.H. Carr, for example, argued lay

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<sup>61</sup> One returned soldier offered a striking description of how his own experience of the war produced a need to believe in the possibility of progress: "I never unfroze fully. The horror of the war was in the background of my mind, although it was suppressed. Although I praised it as something that had made the world safe for democracy, there was always this inner tension. I never faced it clearly. I was tempted sometimes simply to jump over into the pacifist position, you know, and say, 'War's wrong and I'll never have anything more to do with it,' as many did." Quoted in *The Great War and Canadian Society: An Oral History*, edited by Daphne Read, with an Introduction by Russell Hann (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1978), 206.

<sup>62</sup> Grant, "Acceptance and Rebellion," 251.

<sup>63</sup> Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, 68. The assumption that behind the forces of capital accumulation lies the power of human greed can still be found in the more "scientific" or mechanistic elaborations of historical materialism. Bukharin attempted to present Marx's thought as an entirely objective analysis of the historical dialectic, wherein "all social processes are subject to invariable causal laws," comprehensible by the proletariat, which "has no need of ethics" to understand the proper courses of action to be taken. Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: The Founders, The Golden Age, The Breakdown* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005; first published in Polish in 1976; first English publication, 1978), 834, 836. This mechanistic aspect of Bukharin's thought is well evidenced by his description of finance capital: "the all-pervading form of capital, that form which, like nature, suffers from a *horror vacui*, since it rushes to fill every 'vacuum,' whether in a 'tropical,' 'subtropical,' or 'polar' region, if only profits flow in sufficient quantities" ("Imperialism and World Economy," Chapter 3). Accounts such as this one help to explain why critics of the orthodox school in Canada have charged that Bukharin's theories "are cast at too high a level of abstraction...to constitute more than a starting point for the concrete analysis of particular capitalist formations." Gidengil, "Misplaced Polarities," 132. Finance capital is described like a force of nature, expanding ineluctably outward according to its own internal law. Absent from Bukharin's description is any sign that there may be any human passions or intentions driving the process. Yet Bukharin's description of this regime of accumulation was not always so mechanistic. His descriptions of the revolutionary moment, in particular, revealed the dark human passions that lay beneath the system he described. In imagining the proletariat rising up to overthrow the capitalist system in the midst of war, it was not its law-like regularity that incited their fury. What they had come to see for the first time, in Bukharin's words, is "all the blood and filth, all the horror and the shame of capitalism, all the cynicism, greed and bestiality of modern democracy."

behind the ideal of *laissez faire*. The intention behind Smith's political economy, Carr argued, was not to promote a society that licensed selfish individualism at the expense of the community, but on the contrary, to overcome the antagonism between systems of thought that presupposed an entirely egoistic basis for society, and those that sought to subordinate all individual interests in the name of a common good. He credited Smith with "popularizing the doctrine of the harmony of interests," which was readily absorbed by Victorian Christianity to provide "a solid rational basis for morality. To love one's neighbour turned out to be a thoroughly enlightened way of loving oneself." Marx's one-sided reading of Smith entirely ignored what Carr saw as the economist's almost fantastical meliorative project, the "paradise of *laissez-faire*."<sup>64</sup> Grant pointed to a very similar convergence of seemingly amoral and moral purposes within liberal-capitalist society. To many around the world, he observed, "the exaltation of economic enterprise" and profit-making, especially within North America, "seems but the loosing of the law of the jungle and of man's worst instincts." But "though we may admit selfishness in all human activity," he continued, "this is surely an incomplete picture."

Despite the past and present iniquities of capitalism, despite its endemic greed and power seeking, it is impossible to understand its achievements and continuing power unless one sees that in and through the self-interest there moved the idea that economic enterprise was a truly moral activity and served the reformist tradition of freedom... Even the glassiest financial man, whose activism has narrowed to the point of calculation and whose leadership seems nothing but a frozen individual dominance, can believe that he is the instrument of progress.<sup>65</sup>

What critics of capitalism saw as the unvarnished sanction of greed was partly the expression of a belief "that men should emancipate their passions." And this

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<sup>64</sup> Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, 43.

<sup>65</sup> "Acceptance and Rebellion," 251.



emancipation, however, beneficial to the individual, did not serve his or her needs alone: “When men are free to do what they want, all will be well because the liberated desires will be socially creative.”<sup>66</sup> What socialists in Canada had failed to recognize, according to Grant, was that “Western civilization was committed in its heart to the religion of progress and the emancipated passions. Those who accepted such a doctrine found corporation capitalism a much more suitable regime than the inhibiting policies of socialism.”<sup>67</sup>

Grant found one of the clearest and most influential accounts of the liberal idea of freedom in the political philosophy of John Locke. At its deepest level, Grant understood Locke’s scheme as part of “a new primal teaching about nature which is radically distinguished from that which had been traditional to western Europe.” Before the modern age, the dominant account of nature was essentially Aristotelian, “strangely put together” with the Biblical creationist tradition. Within this scheme, Grant wrote, “human beings were understood as directed to a highest good under which all goods could be known in a hierarchy of subordination or superordination. Our lesser goods were seen as pale participations in that highest good.”<sup>68</sup> The Lockean teaching, on the other hand, rejected the idea that human beings could ever attain a reliable “conception of a highest good.”<sup>69</sup> Without a vision of a highest end to direct us, our species was also denied any way of organizing the “lesser goods” that Grant spoke of into an order of

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<sup>66</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 71

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 72, fn. 17. Edward Andrew has pointed out that, as early as 1965, Grant had already predicted that “the Russian empire was doomed, not on the grounds of human rights failures but on the ground of technological incapacity.” “The Russian empire was not as efficient as the American empire in their exploitation of natural and human resources.” “George Grant on the Political Economy of Technology,” *Bulletin of Science, Technology and Society* 23:6 (December 2003), 480.

<sup>68</sup> Grant, *English-Speaking Justice*, 17.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 18.

meaning and priority. Freedom became the individual's freedom to choose amongst equal ends—to pursue his or her own interests.<sup>70</sup>

Grant resisted the suggestion that the Lockean scheme merely abandoned human beings to their greed. If Locke denied that humans could achieve knowledge of a highest good or *summum bonum*, he did not deny that we could have “knowledge of the greatest evil.”<sup>71</sup> His entire scheme was oriented by the negative goal of avoiding the *summum malum*, the manifest evil of violent death. Freedom entailed the freedom to order the world in a way that would conduce to the individual's comfortable self-preservation. Human beings, that is, had to be left free to conquer the unpredictability of nature, to master chance. Grant described this as an essentially technological attitude: “nothing must stand in the way of our absolute freedom to create the world as we want it.”<sup>72</sup>

The modern technologically-oriented notion of freedom was given memorable expression by one of the earliest representatives of the philosophical revolt against the premodern teleological tradition, Machiavelli.<sup>73</sup> “Many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth,” Machiavelli wrote, “for it is so far from how one lives to how one should live that he who lets go of what is done for what should be done learns his ruin rather than his preservation.”<sup>74</sup> But Grant thought that this call to action found an even more recognizable and forceful nineteenth-century echo in Marx's famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: “The philosophers have

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<sup>70</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 70.

<sup>71</sup> *English-Speaking Justice*, 18.

<sup>72</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 69.

<sup>73</sup> In *Lament for a Nation*, Grant followed Leo Strauss in tracing the origins of modernity to a revolution in political philosophy that found early expression in the writings of Machiavelli (73, 104-105).

<sup>74</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, translated with an Introduction by Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, second edition), 61.

only *interpreted* the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to *change* it.”<sup>75</sup> For Grant, this radical sentiment bore witness to Marx’s status as a “prophet” of that same “European humanist hope” in man’s power over nature that had given modern liberalism its footing.<sup>76</sup> And like liberalism, Marxian philosophy was permeated by a far-reaching faith in the liberating potential of technology. But Grant also contended that Marx was less consistent in his attitude toward technology. Locke had realized that the freedom to make of the world what we want, that is to master it technologically, required the rejection of any notion of a higher good. For Marx, on the other hand, technology was understood as “an instrument that serves human good.”<sup>77</sup> Marx did not question that “as man’s control over nature becomes more complete, so the dominant classes who come to power progressively serve a more universal interest of mankind...the gradual emergence of freedom in the world.”<sup>78</sup> But he stopped short of identifying technology with freedom. In modern industrial society, technology was driven principally by the economic interests of the few. Only by unhitching technology from the exclusive process of capital accumulation and putting it at the disposal of all would its true liberating potential be realized. Marx, Grant concluded, believed that there are progressive and unprogressive applications of technology. As such his thought was still bound to the pre-modern doctrine of the “perfectibility of man.”<sup>79</sup> Marx, Grant concluded, had failed to grasp the true “implications of man’s essence being his freedom,”<sup>80</sup> namely, that history did not point in the direction of any final

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<sup>75</sup> Marx, “Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978, second edition), 145.

<sup>76</sup> Grant, “Acceptance and Rebellion,” 229.

<sup>77</sup> Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 65.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-56.

<sup>79</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 65.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

transformation in human relations, but toward “an open-ended progression in which men will be endlessly free to make the world as they want it.”<sup>81</sup>

This theoretical tension at the heart of Marxist thought, Grant contended, led to equally confused consequences in the realm of practice. Marx was committed to a revolutionary transformation of society, to bringing about something entirely new. This meant that the goal of history, as it were, was a result that could “not directly be shown to be related to the historical process.” One practical consequence of this utopian doctrine, Grant claimed, was that, “that great day, despite all attempts to show the contrary, remains in Marxism a mystery.”<sup>82</sup> Marx thus afforded “little attention to the positive content of the Kingdom of Man which he considered lay ahead,”<sup>83</sup> opening up what Grant saw as a curious contradiction between the revolutionary rhetoric of Marxism and its actual or practical relationship to the world. Marx, according to Grant, did not question that “as man’s control over nature becomes more complete, so the dominant classes who come to power progressively serve a more universal interest of mankind...the gradual emergence of freedom in the world.”<sup>84</sup> Consequently Grant saw “in Marx an acceptance of things as they are, because things are leading to a time when all will be as it should be” after the withering away of the state.<sup>85</sup>

It was conceivably for this reason that one found in the writings of Canada’s orthodox Marxians a distinct ambivalence toward modern corporate capitalism. One of the principal recriminations that the orthodox school raised against left-nationalists was

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>82</sup> Grant, “Acceptance and Rebellion,” 267.

<sup>83</sup> Grant, “Conceptions of Health,” 659.

<sup>84</sup> Grant, *Philosophy in the Mass Age*, 55-56.

<sup>85</sup> Grant, “Talk Prepared for the Department of Religion, McMaster University,” in *Collected Works* 3, 659.

that the latter's thinking was consumed by an unqualified fear of "domination by the multinationals" in Canada.<sup>86</sup> Reflecting the Marxist belief that technology could be put to either progressive or non-progressive uses depending upon the social context, William Carroll argued that transnational or multinational investment had to be judged according to the "the internal character of the host society."<sup>87</sup> Others amassed evidence to demonstrate that foreign direct investment had ushered Canada along the path of technological and economic progress, laying the historical groundwork for the eventual transformation of society.<sup>88</sup> The fact that this corporate-driven economic growth had eroded the basis of Canada's sovereignty was a matter of indifference for orthodox Marxists, since it represented the inevitable progress of history toward a "world economy" and the eventual overcoming of all national divisions. Following a rigidly mechanistic reading of Marx, they interpreted distinctions between peoples or cultures as the direct reflection of inequalities existing within the realm of production.<sup>89</sup> This led orthodox Marxists to identify the left-nationalist cause as an essentially conservative project, and the attempt to mobilize the state in the name of preserving some ideal of Canadian nationhood as a futile fight against the forces of historical progress.

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<sup>86</sup> Leo Panitch, "Dependency and Class in Canadian Political Economy." *Studies in Political Economy*, 6 (1981), 9.

<sup>87</sup> Carroll, 1985. "Dependency, Imperialism and the Capitalist Class in Canada," 37.

<sup>88</sup> Glen Williams, for example, has tried to show through an analysis of economic data that foreign direct investment has "historically produced more positive than negative effects on economic growth." *Not For Export: Toward a Political Economy of Canada's arrested Industrialization* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1983), 4. Kellogg also cites Williams' claim in "Kari Levitt and the Long Detour of Canadian Political Economy," 51.

<sup>89</sup> Kellogg, for example, cites the following passage from Marx's *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 2: "In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which corresponds definite forms of social consciousness." See his "State, Capital and World Economy," 340.

As much as Grant sympathized with the idea of using the state as a bulwark against what he saw as the homogenizing effects of international capital, he essentially agreed with the orthodox critique of left-nationalism: Nothing so revealed the confusion of more “socialist” groups like the left-nationalists than their refusal to acknowledge the essentially conservative nature of their projects.<sup>90</sup> Rejecting the orthodox Marxian “doctrine of the withering away of the state,” they instead endorsed “the use of the government to restrain greed in the name of social good.”<sup>91</sup> Levitt, for example, called on government to counter what she, in more polite terms, referred to as the “GNP-fixation” of a society ruled by corporations.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, however, exponents of this more socialist approach joined Marxists and liberals alike in identifying progress with the “emancipation of the passions.” But the difficulty was that even if one accepted the Marxist belief that the passions would eventually be purified of greed, Marx was clear that such a cleansing could only take place when bourgeois property relations—and with them, the state—had once and for all been overcome. Hence, Grant contended that socialism’s conception of the state had always co-existed uneasily with its no less central commitment to the emancipation of the passions. “Even if socialists maintain that their policies would lead in the long run to a society of unrestricted freedom,” he argued, “in the short run they have always been advocates of greater control over freedom.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 72 fn. 17.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>92</sup> *Silent Surrender*, 75.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

## Conclusion

In the end, Grant felt that socialism failed to offer Canadians a compelling justification for this exercise of “greater control” over society. “If there had been an influential group that seriously desired the continuance of the country after 1940,” Grant wrote, “it would have needed the animation of some political creed that differed from the capitalist liberalism of the United States.”<sup>94</sup> But left-nationalism did not meet this need. Many of those who filled the ranks of the CCF and the NDP, or who spoke out for a more social-democratic politics from within the halls of the academy, clearly desired the continuance of the country. What they lacked, in Grant’s view, was a creed that effectively challenged the central aims and assumptions of capitalist liberalism. The point could be illustrated with reference to Levitt who called for a “‘conserving’ nationalism,” that would combat the country’s “domination by the efficiency-mongers of big business, big government or big anybody.”<sup>95</sup> Such a conservatism, she remarked, would derive “from the desire to control and shape the conditions of life within a community. Only the emergence of a new value system within English Canada can ensure the continued existence of a nation here.” What Levitt never explained, however, was how it was that the “emergence of a new value system” was compatible with any meaningful notion of “conservation.”

When socialists voiced the need to protect Canadian nationhood, what they spoke of protecting was Canada’s freedom to decide its own future. But it was strange to think of this as an act of conservation. The conception of freedom being appealed to was expressed in essentially technological terms, according to Grant, as the ability to

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<sup>94</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 61.

<sup>95</sup> Levitt, *Silent Surrender*, 153.

make of the world what we want. It was a conception that socialists and their orthodox critics alike thought would give positive content to their visions of a transformed society, even if they disagreed on whether that transformation would involve the intervention of the state or its overcoming. At the same time, it was a function of this same conception that both groups were forced to remain inarticulate about the nature of their radical projects: To say what it was that would distinguish the socialist or post-revolutionary state would be to limit one's freedom. Liberalism, Grant argued, offered a much more "fitting ideology" for modern society, insofar as it provided a more consistent account of the modern understanding of freedom, putting aside "old-fashioned ideas of the perfectibility of man."<sup>96</sup> In Canada, this conception of freedom found its authentic voice in the Liberal party, which had come of age under the leadership of Mackenzie King. Guided by this understanding of freedom, King had welcomed the deeper association that began to take shape after World War I between Canada and America, that most dynamic of all modern societies. Nor did the work of consolidating Canada's place within the postwar liberal-capitalist order end with King, but was also taken up by his successors within the Liberal party. The only real challenge to this fate, as Grant saw it, arose in the final days of the Diefenbaker administration when the Conservative prime minister and his secretary of state, Howard Green took their defiant stance during the Defence Crisis. Grant believed that their resistance to Washington's pressures to accept nuclear weapons demonstrated that they were much less willing to accept the continentalist vision of Canada's future staked out by the Liberal party after the war. The significance of this action for Grant will be explored further in the chapter that follows; for now it is enough to note that the challenge to

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<sup>96</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 71.



Washington did not come from the socialists within the NDP (or socialists of any stripe). On the contrary, by joining forces with Lester Pearson's Liberals to defeat the Diefenbaker regime, Grant believed that the NDP had demonstrated that they were quite willing to accommodate themselves to Liberal continentalism. In Grant's assessment the NDP's actions could be explained by reference to their Marxian influences. Marx's thought stood upon a fundamentally modern conception of progress, a conception that provided no clear or coherent alternative to the liberal order spearheaded by Washington after the war.

## Chapter 4

### Dragged by Fate: Diefenbaker, Green and the Mandarins in External Affairs

If left-nationalism foundered on what Grant saw as its own theoretical inconsistencies, historical events also conspired against the movement's success in Canada. The unparalleled violence of the two world wars had been catalyzed by political movements appealing to atavistic notions of nationhood, and Grant understood how people were bound to react to the idea of Canadian nationalism: "After the horrors that nationalistic wars have inflicted in this century, how can one have any sympathy for nationalism? Thank God the world is moving beyond such divisive loyalties."<sup>1</sup>

In actual fact, the country's postwar foreign-policy makers did not abandon the idea of nationalism altogether, but they did conceive of Canada's national purpose in such a way that it became identified with the goal of promoting harmony in the international realm.<sup>2</sup> The central architects of this "internationalist" turn in Canadian foreign policy were a group of young men who had been groomed by O.D. Skelton to form the core of the modern professionally trained diplomatic service that Mackenzie

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<sup>1</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 102.

<sup>2</sup> Lester Pearson, who was a top official in External Affairs during this period and whose name is most often associated with the more activist, internationalist strain of foreign policy that emerged from it, wrote in his memoirs, "Everything I learned during the war confirmed and strengthened my view as a Canadian that our foreign policy must not be timid or fearful of commitments, but activist in accepting international responsibilities. To me, nationalism and internationalism were two sides of the same coin." *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, Volume 1: 1897-1948* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 283. Allan Gotlieb has argued that "it is probably true to say there never was a greater correspondence between our idealistic goals and our basic national interest than at this time in our history." "Romanticism and Realism in Canada's Foreign Policy," *Policy Options* (February 2005): 20.

King had charged him with building. This new generation of diplomats injected a more activist, and what many scholars have described as a more “realist,” spirit into Canadian foreign policy.<sup>3</sup> They were convinced that Canada had an unavoidable stake in preventing a repetition of the events of 1939, and they worked tirelessly to see that the nation did its part to contribute to the success of the international institutions that were being built after the war. In *Lament for a Nation*, Grant offered his own portrait of the officials within External Affairs who played such a prominent role in defining Canada’s postwar role in the world (he mentioned only one by name, Norman Robertson, who was undersecretary of state during Diefenbaker and Green’s time in office). But he challenged the perception that they had put Canada’s foreign policy on a more realistic, or clear-eyed footing than it had been on before the war under King and Skelton’s influence. Certainly it was true that they had committed the country to a more activist foreign policy. But what this amounted to, according to Grant, was a more aggressive defence of that same liberal ideal of a peaceful international order that had led King to invest such extravagant hopes in the continental relationship.

The postwar institutions that were to provide the basis of the new international order were in Grant’s view really part of an “international bureaucracy” with its

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<sup>3</sup> Gotlieb writes that “realism-based diplomacy was about to emerge in full flower,” a few years after the war (ibid.) See also J.L. Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935-1957* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1982), 75. In recent years several scholars have challenged the notion that a “seem[ingly] vastly different” (ibid.) foreign policy perspective emerged in the postwar period, claiming instead that King and Skelton, no less than the new generation that they had trained in External Affairs, were guided by an unsentimental, realist foreign policy, that put the national interest ahead of all other considerations. See for example, Denis Stairs, “Realists at Work: Canadian Policy Makers and the Politics of Transition from Hot War to Cold War,” in *Canada and the Early Cold War, 1943-1957*, edited by Greg Donaghy (Ottawa: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 1998); Norman Hillmer, “The Foreign Policy that Never Was, 1900-1950,” in *Canada, 1900-1950: A Country Comes of Age*, edited by Serge Bernier and John MacFarlane (Ottawa: Organization for the History of Canada, 2003). Greg Donaghy, “Coming off the Gold Standard: Reassessing the ‘Golden Age’ of Canadian Diplomacy” (accessed on-line, July 20, 2009, at <http://www.suezcrisis.ca/pdfs/Coming%20off%20the%20Gold%20Standard.pdf>).

administrative centre located in Washington.<sup>4</sup> The organization that Grant focused on most critically in *Lament for a Nation* was NATO. By encouraging Canada's participation in NATO, he argued, the permanent officials within External Affairs were furthering the process of continental integration that had already taken strong hold on King's watch in the interwar period. But to reflect honestly on what Canada was giving up through this integration, he acknowledged, would have required a good deal of courage, since it would have meant admitting doubts about the international order that was being built, and moreover about the underlying ideal of building a more prosperous and peaceful world. After the bloodshed of the two world wars, however, this ideal understandably exercised a strong hold on the national imagination. The officials in External Affairs did not feel a strong enough attachment to the Canada that was being lost, Grant argued, to take seriously arguments against the order that was replacing it. It was for this same reason, he claimed, that Diefenbaker and his secretary of state, Howard Green, did not receive the full support of their top diplomats when they stood up to American pressures to accept nuclear arms. The limited goal of protecting Canadian sovereignty was not enough to justify disrupting relations with America, the leader of the emerging postwar order.

Although Diefenbaker and Green both had strong internationalist leanings, they were also, in Grant's view, gripped at an even deeper level by loyalty to their nation. They insisted that if Canada were to work toward internationalist goals, it would have to do so by exercising its own sovereign powers as a nation rather than by abandoning them. Thus when Washington pressured Canada to cede authority over its own foreign policy and accept nuclear weapons in the name of the "international community,"

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<sup>4</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 4.

Diefenbaker and Green resisted passionately. They saw it as a negation of the independent Canada that they knew, and they refused to take refuge in the consoling belief that this negation would issue in something higher, an as-yet unrealized ideal of international order.

### **Mackenzie King and the League**

Grant recognized Diefenbaker as a deeply flawed politician, at times petulant, anti-intellectual, and parochial. But despite these shortcomings, Grant could not help but be moved by what he saw as the prime minister's deep loyalty to his country, and the courage that accompanied this loyalty. Describing Diefenbaker's determined support for Green during the Defence Crisis, Grant wrote, "one is reminded of Milton's Abdiel: 'Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified.'"<sup>5</sup> Diefenbaker's courage lay not simply in his determination to resist the bald assertions of American power. What required even more courage, in Grant's view, was to resist the liberal dream of progress that many Canadians had historically associated with that power. This was an extraordinarily difficult thing to do after the unprecedented violence of the first half of the twentieth century, Grant asserted. World War I, he remarked, had been a "great disaster for Canada."<sup>6</sup> "It killed many of the best English-speaking Canadians and left the survivors cynical and tired," so that "the energy of that generation was drained away [and] those who returned did not have the vitality for public care."<sup>7</sup> Since its creation, Canada's existence had depended on the population's willingness to forgo the material benefits of economic integration with the United States, as well as the "utopian...ethic of freedom"

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>6</sup> Halil, "Lament for a Nation Revisited," 7.

<sup>7</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 70.

that sustained the America's belief in the unrestrained marketplace.<sup>8</sup> After four terrible years of self-denying service in the name of the common good, it was no surprise that this resolve was broken. When the depression struck only a decade later, the country offered little resistance to the material blessings of trade with the Americans and the lure of an economic philosophy that posited that one could promote one's society's interests by pursuing one's own interests.<sup>9</sup> So it was, Grant wrote, that between the wars "Canada was allowed to slip into the slough of despond in which its national hope was frittered away to the US by Mackenzie King and the Liberal party."<sup>10</sup>

"Canada's survival," Grant added, "has always required the victory of political courage over immediate and individual economic advantage." The remark picked up on a theme that he had emphasized since his earliest public writings appeared at the end of the war. In his 1945 piece, "Canada—An Introduction to a Nation," for example, Grant concluded by describing the friendly relations that had been developing between Canada and the United States in recent decades, but then immediately added a cautionary note: "Few would deny that Canada had anything but peaceful intentions."<sup>11</sup> "Like most smaller nations she has everything to gain from a world of order, justice, and stability—a world where she can sell her goods and conduct her life, free from the ever-pressing fear of war." "Yet like many other countries," he continued, "Canada has not always realized that peace cannot be gained without sacrifice." He then clarified his

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<sup>8</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 83.

<sup>9</sup> "In the curiously credulous atmosphere" of the interwar period, Karl Polanyi observed in 1944, "many took for granted that the solution of the economic problem (whatever that may mean) would not only assuage the threat of war but actually avert that threat forever... Awareness of the essential nature of the problems of politics sank to an unprecedented low point." *The Great Transformation: the Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, Foreword by Joseph E. Stiglitz with a new Introduction by Fred Block (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001; originally published in 1944), 198.

<sup>10</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 70.

<sup>11</sup> Grant, "Canada—An Introduction to a Nation," 89.

meaning: “Though Canada was always a member of the League of Nations, she was not always willing to bear her responsibility as a member of the organization.”<sup>12</sup> Not for the last time, Grant was drawing a connection between Canada’s retreat into the continental relationship with its overwhelmingly dominant neighbour between the wars, and its unwillingness to face up to the challenges of the international realm.

The episode that had most clearly demonstrated the narrow limits of Canada’s commitment to the League of Nations took place in the fall of 1935. As King absorbed himself with the Canada-US trade agreement that was to provide the world with an “object lesson” in peaceful co-existence, a crisis was playing itself out across the ocean which would ultimately put Canada’s commitment to the League to the test—and indeed put the League itself to the test. In October of that year, Mussolini launched his defiant occupation of Ethiopia. Unable to contact either King or his undersecretary of state, O.D. Skelton, Canada’s representative to the League, W.A. Riddell, unwisely took the step (under pressure from other League representatives) of introducing a proposal to expand sanctions against Italy. Both King and Skelton were infuriated by Riddell’s action, which they believed committed Canada to playing a serious role in any further League action against Italy, should the crisis escalate. Fearful that Canada would once again find itself involved in a European war, King publicly distanced the Canadian government from the motion advanced by its own representative. But the government’s unwillingness to stand behind the “Canadian proposal,” as it had been dubbed by the press, had its own effect on the situation. The Italian government duly noted that the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 89-90.

measure had been repudiated by the very country that had introduced it, and publicly declared the embargo “discredited.”<sup>13</sup>

King could at least console himself with the belief that he was contributing toward world peace in another manner, namely by turning away from the fray of international politics to build upon the peaceful foundations laid down in the 1935 reciprocity agreement with Washington.<sup>14</sup> In the summer of 1936, following the collapse of Addis Ababa to the Italians that same May, King delivered a speech in Parliament describing the “tremendous, absorbing and paramount tasks” Canada faced “of achieving economic development and national unity, which with us take the place of the preoccupation with the fear of attack and the dreams of glory which beset older and more crowded countries.”<sup>15</sup> It was a fitting prelude to a speech that he gave at the League a few weeks later in which he once again drew the contrast between the peaceful state of relations within North America and the violence and militarism endemic to Europe.<sup>16</sup> One critic called it “possibly the most effective plea—and certainly the most sustained—ever made from that tribune for a League limited to conciliatory functions and bereft of even theoretical coercive power.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Eayrs, James, *In Defence of Canada: Appeasement and Rearmament* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 25. Brock Millman argues that Canada in fact played a greater role in bringing about the failure of sanctions than many later accounts of the Abyssinian Crisis (which often place the balance of the blame on Britain) have assumed. “Canada, Sanctions and the Abyssinian Crisis of 1935,” *The Historical Journal* 40:1 (1997).

<sup>14</sup> Two months after the Riddell incident, King listened approvingly to a Congressional address by Roosevelt which offered “a clear intimation to Italy she cannot expect oil from U.S.” “That should help bring about peace,” King quipped to his diary, without a hint of irony. But what pleased King the most about Roosevelt’s address was that it accompanied this tough talk with a reference to Canada and ‘The Good Neighbour’ policy. King took this to be “fine evidence of the world significance of our reciprocity agreements—the New World redressing the balance of the Old.” King Diary, January 3, 1936, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Eayrs “A Low Dishonest Decade,” 62.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> S.M. Eastman, “Canada at Geneva: An Historical Survey and its Lessons,” originally published in 1946, excerpted in *The In-Between Times: Canadian External Policy in the 1930s*, edited by Robert Bothwell and Norman Hillmer, Issues in Canadian History Series (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1975), 140.



As Grant saw it, this aversion to international entanglements helped to explain why a politician who styled himself as a nationalist had so few qualms about seeking closer relations with a neighbour that seemed poised to swallow his country up. Grant complained that King's "refusal to recognize the facts of life" and confront the uncertainties and danger of the international realm, had led him to seek security in the American fold.<sup>18</sup> As storm clouds gathered across the ocean, it was all the more tempting for a liberal faithful like King to find solace in the idea of a tranquil North American island, absorbed in peaceful economic activity.

### **The External Affairs Mandarins**

Following the Second World War the direction of Canada's foreign policy passed into the hands of a different group of people with different ideas about the nation's place in the world. Amongst the principal architects of this shift were Hume Wrong, Norman Robertson and Lester Pearson, the talented young Oxford-educated men that O.D. Skelton had trained to be his top officials within the Department of External Affairs.<sup>19</sup> If King and Skelton had tried to reconcile the aims of Canadian nationalism with a foreign policy that was "almost akin to isolationism," this new generation of civil servants believed that "nationalism...marched hand in hand with internationalism."<sup>20</sup> Wrong, Robertson and Pearson were all determined to make sure

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King's biographer, H. Blair Neatby, observed that "the League, as [King] envisaged it, was a forum for discussion, at which disputing nations could present their case and where the pressure of world public opinion would help to make both sides more reasonable. He took it for granted that Canada did not need the League because Canada could always settle its international difficulties amicably." *William Lyon Mackenzie King, 1932-1939: The Prism of Unity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 138.

<sup>18</sup> Grant, Letter to Maude Grant, February 12, 1948, in *Selected Letters*, 149.

<sup>19</sup> For a digestible sketch of their personalities and influence, see Andrew Cohen's, *While Canada Slept: How We Lost Our Place in the World* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2003), especially Chapter 1.

<sup>20</sup> J.L. Granatstein, *A Man of Influence: Norman A. Robertson and Canadian Statecraft, 1929-68* (Toronto: Deneau, 1981), 137.

that Canada had a fair hand in shaping international institutions like the United Nations and NATO in the postwar period. Their more activist approach was motivated partly by a more tough-minded understanding of international politics. The rise of Hitler had put to rest the view that had earlier prevailed in External Affairs, that the proper role of an international institution like the League of Nations was “not to assemble force to use against force, but to tackle the economic, social and political causes of war and tension.”<sup>21</sup> “By the late thirties,” John W. Holmes remarked, “there was something very unreal about the insistence of some officers in the department and the more extreme academics that fascism could be cured, or at least could have been cured, by fair treatment for German, Italian and Japanese exports.”<sup>22</sup>

On first reflection, it may have seemed that this new generation of officials offered the answer to Grant’s complaints against King. Unlike the Prime Minister, they were apparently quite willing to “face the facts” of international existence. They accepted the need for a foreign policy that was not simply concerned with continental security, and were determined to see Canada taking up larger responsibilities on the world stage. Yet at least one scholar has claimed that it was precisely this group of officials that came up for “some of the hardest knocks” in *Lament for a Nation*,<sup>23</sup> a comment that tends to ignore how measured and subtle his criticism of External Affairs actually was. Grant acknowledged, for instance, that these were men who “had given

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<sup>21</sup> John W. Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace: Canada and the Search for World Order, 1943-1957, Volume I*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 20; Granatstein, *A Man of Influence*, 80.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 21. “The younger new men—Pearson, Wrong, Robertson *et al.*,” wrote Granatstein, “may have agonized over neutrality versus a Canadian role in the world, but they actively sought involvement and they were less intellectual, less troubled, and more convinced that Hitler was an evil that had to be destroyed whatever the rights and wrongs of Canadian status and Canadian rights.” *The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935-1957* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1982), 75.

<sup>23</sup> Stairs, “The Political Culture of Canadian Foreign Policy,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 15:4 (December 1982), 685, n. 36.

their lives to government service and presumably wanted to serve a sovereign Canada.”<sup>24</sup> (This appraisal did not apply to Pearson, who Grant claimed had left the civil service to pursue his personal ambitions as a politician.)<sup>25</sup> Indeed, he wrote that “it would be a travesty to deny that most of them wanted to preserve their country.”<sup>26</sup> And he could speak with some inside authority on this matter, since his father, William Grant, had helped Skelton in training the young men who made up the new Department of External Affairs.<sup>27</sup> Some of these men, like Hume Wrong (who had been helped into government by Grant’s uncle, Vincent Massey),<sup>28</sup> continued to have friendly contact with the Grant family. Upon Wrong’s death in 1954 Grant wrote to his own mother to express his condolences, describing Wrong feelingly as “a great public servant,” and someone who had “taught many others the proper form of government service.”<sup>29</sup>

It is true, however, that in *Lament for a Nation*, Grant also assigned some of the blame for the collapse of the Diefenbaker government, and the subsequent admission of nuclear arms into the country, to the officials within External Affairs. But Grant knew that he was directing his criticisms at men who most probably still had “some feeling for the continuance of their nation.”<sup>30</sup> Certainly he would have admitted this about Norman Robertson, whom he singled out in discussing the bureaucracy’s role in Diefenbaker’s defeat.<sup>31</sup> As undersecretary of state during most of Diefenbaker’s time in office, Robertson worked closely with the prime minister’s secretary of state (and close friend), Howard Green, a figure Grant greatly admired for being the true stalwart in the

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<sup>24</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 63.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>27</sup> Ignatieff, *True Patriot Love*, 86.

<sup>28</sup> Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men*, 116.

<sup>29</sup> Grant, Letter to Maude Grant, January 28, 1954, in *Selected Letters*, 182.

<sup>30</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 63.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

fight to prevent American nuclear weapons from entering the country.<sup>32</sup> Robertson was not simply a dutiful subordinate to his minister, but shared Green's abhorrence of the bomb.<sup>33</sup> In fact, as his biographer tells it, it was Robertson who first planted the idea in Green's head that Canada should go back on its earlier decision to accept nuclear arms.<sup>34</sup> Robertson, therefore played a principal role in defining Diefenbaker's stance in the Defence Crisis, a stance which Grant insisted "occasioned the strongest stand against satellite status that any Canadian government ever attempted."<sup>35</sup> It seems unlikely that Robertson's role in defining the Diefenbaker administration's anti-nuclear position would have gone unrecognized by Grant.

The fact of the matter is that Grant said little in *Lament for a Nation* that would raise questions about the intentions of men like Robertson toward Canada. On the contrary, Grant's real complaint was that this new breed of officials supposedly lacked the strength of character to see their intentions through. They may have wanted what was best for their country, but they were not made of the sort of "diamond stuff" that this required. Having been "educated in the twilight scepticism of Oxford liberalism" this new generation of functionaries lacked "the stamina to be...nationalist[s] in the

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<sup>32</sup> Grant himself admitted that he "actually admired Howard Green more, because he refused atomic weapons for Canada." Judy Steed, "George Grant Goes Home Again: Interview with George Grant," *Globe and Mail* (Saturday, July 9, 1983), Fanfare 3.

<sup>33</sup> According to Basil Robinson, an External Affairs Officer and member of the Prime Minister's Office, between the Secretary and Undersecretary, it was "Robertson, particularly, [who] took the anti nuclear viewpoint to heart." See Erika Simpson's, article "New Ways of Thinking About Nuclear Weapons and Canada's Defence Policy," in *The Diefenbaker Legacy: Canadian Politics, Law and Society Since 1957*, Canadian Plains Proceedings 30, edited by D.C. Story and R. Bruce Shepard (Winnipeg: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1998), 38.

<sup>34</sup> Granatstein, *A Man of Influence*, 339.

<sup>35</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 31.

twentieth century.” They did not harbour a “realistic attitude” toward the times and had been too “shelter[ed]” from the realities of Canadian existence.<sup>36</sup>

### **Internationalism and the Lessons of the War**

What was it, then, that was so inadequate, from a nationalist perspective, about the foreign policy perspective permeating External Affairs after the war? An important clue emerges from Grant’s own “internationalist” writings from the end of the war, in which he looked to the British Empire as a possible foundation for world order. Like Robertson, Wrong and Pearson, Grant’s foreign policy reflections at this time were heavily influenced by the experience of the war and Hitler’s rise to power in the 1930s. The advent of fascism had forced Grant to “modif[y] his pacifism,” in the words of one biographer.<sup>37</sup> “Sadism and perverted tyranny” had taken root “in the very centre of our Western world,” Grant wrote in “The Empire—Yes or No?,” and had “organized...to tear our footling optimism into shreds.” By the end of the war, “the dream of liberal mankind that we were on the edge of Utopia” lay in tatters.<sup>38</sup> It had become clear to Grant (albeit “very late,” he admitted) that “it was not the pious talk of idealists” that would stand in the way of “fascism and the forces of evil.”<sup>39</sup>

What Grant called for in “The Empire—Yes or No?,” however briefly he may have held the position, was for Canadians to commit to an internationalism that would stand on guard against a recurrence of this evil. He insisted, however, that for such a foreign policy to be meaningful it would have to be, not “some vague internationalism,

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>37</sup> T.F. Rigelhof, *George Grant: Redefining Canada* (Montreal: XYZ Publishing, 2001), 66. [← first time you mention this source. Full cite?]

<sup>38</sup> Grant, “Empire—Yes or No?,” 123.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 104.

but the concrete internationalism of our membership in the Commonwealth.”<sup>40</sup> To begin with, Britain had long international experience, and could build upon the governing structures and political relations that it had already established around the world as an imperial leader. But more importantly, in Grant’s view, Britain also stood upon goals and traditions that Canadians identified with and that could inspire the nation’s loyalty. It was this loyalty to the Commonwealth, he asserted, that explained Canada’s willingness to come to Britain’s side in the past and “bear its responsibility to the world.” It had made Canada “a country of 1914 and 1939 rather than 1917 and 1941.”<sup>41</sup>

Grant admitted that the Commonwealth was not universal in its reach, and allowed for the eventuality that it would one day be replaced by a more perfect world order.<sup>42</sup> But the immediate goal of his writing was to discourage such hopes in the present. Although the Commonwealth represented an imperfect form of internationalism, it was better to accept an existing order that, if limited, was at least effective, than to appeal to a perfect order that did not exist. The argument helped to shed some light on his later suggestion in *Lament* that the internationalism that took root in the Department of External Affairs after the war was somehow grounded in a naïve or unrealistic understanding of the world. There was, it seemed, a contradiction, or at least a tension, between the tough-minded assertion that vigilance was required in order to preserve order in the world, and the conviction that we must strive to realize a more perfect order than had existed before. Insofar as vigilance was required, it had to be admitted that this more perfect order did not actually exist; but the belief that such an

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<sup>40</sup> Grant, “The Empire—Yes or No?,” 110.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 103. See also, Grant, “Canada—An Introduction to a Nation,” 89; and Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 69.

<sup>42</sup> Grant, “The Empire—Yes or No?,” 105.

order was possible pointed to a future transformation in human affairs whereby the need for vigilance would be overcome, if only gradually. He followed his portrait of the internationalists within the Department of External Affairs with one of the most intriguing passages in *Lament for a Nation*. Grant claimed that if one looked beyond “the confused strivings of politicians, businessmen, and civil servants,” one would find a deeper goal guiding our society today, the ideal of “the universal and homogenous state”—“a world-wide state,” in which “the curse of war among nations...and war among classes would be eliminated.”<sup>43</sup>

Behind the internationalist’s call for a more clear-eyed, realist view of the international realm, then, Grant identified a rather sanguine ideal of a peaceful world order to come. In an evocative, almost dreamlike, letter from 1941, Hume Wrong, the most sternly realist of the mandarins within External Affairs, provided striking testimony to this tension.

I have for years thought, and I still think, that war is the worst of avoidable evils. I wonder if that is the right frame of mind. Might it not be better to accept recurrent war as an inevitable feature of life—inevitable not in a strictly logical sense (for war is the most absurd of human activities), but in the practical sense that we can’t avoid it because of imperfections of our civilization and had better therefore try to fit it into our scheme of life rather than regard it as the negation of our ordinary aims and purposes? I don’t like this idea, but we might make a better peace if we accepted it as true.

...I can bring myself to hope that war will end in an immense fluidity, submerging old loyalties, blurring national and class distinctions. If so, there would be greater hope of salvation, not at once but eventually. We may have to endure chaos in order to struggle through to order. If we can keep a sense of human decency, of toleration, a respectable order might emerge from the chaos in time.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 67.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Holmes, *The Shaping of Peace*, 26.

Wrong's realism consisted in the recognition that perhaps it might be "better to accept recurrent war as an inevitable feature of life." But he did not see this admission as a "negation" of his deeper longing for a day when war would "end in an immense fluidity, submerging old loyalties, blurring national and class distinctions." He expressed no doubt that this was the actual goal of our striving, or that it represented a desirable aim.

When Grant wrote "The Empire—Yes or No?," just four years after Wrong had written his letter, he also felt compelled to reflect on the nature of the war that he had just lived through. He did not, however, take up Wrong's question of whether war was "an inevitable feature of life." Grant did, it is true, characterize the fascist war machine as a "sign[] of the evil in the heart of man";<sup>45</sup> but this would turn out to be a claim with very different implications. For if war was merely a sign of man's evil (and not itself "the worst of all... evils," as Wrong claimed), the elimination of war from history did not necessarily entail the elimination of evil. Thus Grant eventually came to experience strong philosophical reservations about the modern desire to overcome war once and for all. The belief that war was the worst of all avoidable evils went hand-in-hand with the idea that its overcoming represented the greatest of all possible goods.<sup>46</sup> But if we accepted the possibility that evil was something that could not be overcome<sup>47</sup>—if it was

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<sup>45</sup> Grant, "The Empire—Yes or No?," 123.

<sup>46</sup> These mutually-sustaining conceptions of evil and good were apparently present from the early beginnings of modern thought. Grant, notably, claimed that the universal and homogeneous state had been most fully realized in the United States, the Lockean regime par excellence. Locke's philosophy "does not provide us with the conception of a highest good," Grant wrote, "but... does provide us with knowledge of the greatest evil," namely, death. *English-Speaking Justice*, 17. Yet from this negative goal, Locke somehow points the way to an "account of the best political regime," one based on the "rational... dominating desire for comfortable preservation" (17,18).

<sup>47</sup> In his 1967 essay, "Canadian Fate and Imperialism," Grant made the claim that war "is coeval with human existence." *Technology and Empire*, 72. It is not clear whether Grant meant by this that war will



a delusion to suppose that we could bring about perfect goodness in the world—then we were forced to contemplate the possibility that human beings would always have to be willing to fight for what is good.<sup>48</sup> The overcoming of struggle or conflict, from this perspective, merely indicated indifference to the question of what is good.<sup>49</sup> The attainment of “peace on earth” would be “at the price of the end of all noble and great deeds,” the absence of any concern for what is good.<sup>50</sup>

### **Loyalty and the Bomb**

Glimpses of this deeper reflection on the meaning of conflict began to appear in Grant’s writings only a few years after the war. In a 1948 letter (the same letter in which he had eulogized Gandhi, and as it were, the Empire itself)<sup>51</sup> Grant lauded the way that the British had exercised their imperial authority, writing that they had been “just [and] firm, caring only for this world and the bayonet used wisely.”<sup>52</sup> What he admired about the Tory party in Canada, likewise, was that they “were always fair, straight and honest that civilization was only maintained by the bayonet, and rightly.”<sup>53</sup> His meaning was clarified in a public writing from roughly the same period: “Conservatism has many

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exist so long as our species exists, or rather that war will persist so long as our species retains what is distinctively or naturally “human” about it.

<sup>48</sup> Grant went further than this in a 1969 lecture, reflecting on the possibility that “the ultimate basis of conflict is division as to what is good.” “George C. Nowlan Lectures,” 608.

<sup>49</sup> In the modern Idealist tradition, stemming from Kant, Grant argued, evil was treated as a “radical” force, something to be overcome. In the Platonic-Christian tradition to which he subscribed, evil was not considered the “opposite” of good, but “indifference” to it. Grant, “Conversation: Theology and History,” in Schmidt (ed), *George Grant in Process*, 106,107; in this same discussion Grant makes one of his most explicit statements against the universal and homogeneous state, saying that “I am sure that the world-wide universal state would be a tyranny” (103) Evil could never be entirely overcome, and “goodness itself is an ambiguous mystery,” (Grant, *Technology and Justice*, 75), and thus always, presumably, a potential source of contention.

<sup>50</sup> Grant, “George C. Nowlan Lectures,” 608.

<sup>51</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>52</sup> Grant, Letter to Maude Grant, February 12, 1948, in *Selected Letters*, 148.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

faults, but at least it is less naïve about human sin than liberalism.”<sup>54</sup> Liberalism, on the other hand, was guided by “that hoary old lie...that men are easily and naturally good.”<sup>55</sup> Grant characterized Liberals like King and Skelton as “misguided whigs,”<sup>56</sup> and complained that the prime minister had always “hid the real issues from the Canadian people and helped to keep them at the level of political immaturity that we are at.”<sup>57</sup> “Even the Americans,” he added, “are more mature than us, for they are faced with the exigencies of power.” King had appealed to the “isolationist-humanitarian-nationalist” impulses of Canadian Liberals—allowed them to hide from the exigencies of power, as it were.<sup>58</sup> Now, as a consequence, King and his supporters were forced to “prepare for atom warfare to spread the civilization of Hollywood.”<sup>59</sup>

Grant did not explain what the connection was between King’s isolationist impulses and Canada’s slide into the world of American entertainment and “atom warfare.” But his meaning was made clearer when one compared the bomb to that more primitive weapon mentioned in the same letter, the bayonet. The latter was an instrument that still required a measure of courage and willingness to sacrifice on the part of the soldier. It was not, therefore, compatible with a society that gave itself over completely to the self-absorbed economic activities of the individual. It was, however, a fitting symbol for Canada’s loyalty to the Commonwealth, which was “too great an institution,” Grant remarked, “for Canadians to put our membership in [it] on the basis of selfishness.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Grant, “Canadian Universities and the Protestant Churches,” in *Collected Works 2*, 30.

<sup>55</sup> Grant, “The Teaching Profession in an Expanding Economy,” in *Collected Works 2*, 184.

<sup>56</sup> Grant, Letter to Maude Grant, February 12, 1948, in *Selected Letters*, 149.

<sup>57</sup> Grant, Letter to Maude Grant, August 31, 1948, in *Selected Letters*, 151.

<sup>58</sup> Grant, Letter to Maude Grant, February 12, 1948, in *Selected Letters*, 148.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>60</sup> Grant, “The Empire—Yes or No?,” 122.

The bayonet was also an increasingly obsolete weapon, and therefore provided a fitting symbol for an empire in decline. The American-led order which supplanted the British Empire was founded on a very different conception of security—a conception which was neatly summed up for Grant in the invention of the atom bomb. Unlike the technologically primitive bayonet, the bomb was the product of a “mass scientific society” devoted to endless “economic expansion through the control of nature by science.”<sup>61</sup> But the bomb was also the device that allowed this society to grow by freeing a reserve army of citizens from the duties of the bayonet, allowing them to become subordinate parts of an expanding industrial economy, administered at every level through the cooperation of government and the corporation. These were not just the engineers, scientists, professionals, and entrepreneurs needed to build and expand the industrial base of society, but also the modern consumers who helped to sustain it through the purchase of domestic industrial goods.<sup>62</sup> Liberals like Mackenzie King and O.D. Skelton, anxious to spare Canadians the cost of any more sacrifices in the name of security, had in Grant’s view too willingly submitted to this administrative order.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Grant, “The Minds of Men in the Atomic Age,” in *Collected Works*, 2, 157.

<sup>62</sup> “America’s western allies,” writes Victoria de Grazia, “had little trouble finding majorities convinced that economic security could not be achieved without military security, and that this could best be achieved under the American nuclear umbrella. This was all the more true as it became evident that such a commitment not only did not interfere with, but in fact greatly enhanced, the share of the national product available for consumer goods and services.” De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance through 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2005), 356.

<sup>63</sup> Grant, Letter to Maude Grant, February 12, 1948, in *Selected Letters*, 149. Gregory A. Johnson has likewise criticized King for accommodating himself too easily to the logic of the bomb. King’s refusal “to commit Canadian troops to the British cause” in Asia to help end the war, Johnson points out, undermined any moral objection that he might have had to the use of the bomb on Japan in 1945. “An Apocalyptic Moment: Mackenzie King and the Bomb,” in *Uncertain Horizons: Canadians and their World in 1945*, edited by Greg Donaghy, (Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1997), 109. Only once, Johnson notes, did King admit to himself the terrible calculus underlying his own policy, writing in his diary that the bomb could “be justified through the knowledge that for one life destroyed, it may save hundreds of thousands and bring this terrible war quickly to a close.” King’s Diary, August 4, 1945; quoted in Johnson, 110.

Grant had grave doubts whether a society that no longer called for sacrifice was in any way desirable. He associated the goal of creating such a society with liberalism, which in the Lockean formulation posited a political order held together by nothing more than “our consciousness of what we have to lose (life itself) if we do not put up with the convenient rules of the game. The fear of violent death is the reason for setting up those rules and it remains the final reason for staying with them.”<sup>64</sup> The problem that this introduced for liberal society, however, was the following: “If avoidance of violent death is our highest end (albeit negative), why should anyone make sacrifices for the common good which entail that possibility?...Why should anyone care about the reign of justice more than their life?”<sup>65</sup> In a consistently liberal society, then, there would be no good transcending the individual desire for self-preservation—no cause for which one would be willing to fight and sacrifice oneself. In Grant’s view, “the atomic age” was helping to bring such a society about. With the invention of the atom bomb, security was now largely left to a weapon so powerful that the idea of war had almost become an absurdity.<sup>66</sup> Grant struck at the troubling logic underlying this model of security in a provocative talk delivered before a conference that had been largely devoted to studying Canada’s security situation. “Is the only question how we can escape simple animal destruction?”<sup>67</sup> he asked pointedly. “Or is the question what is there about the human race that makes it worthwhile that it should survive? I can imagine a prosperous society, without war, of healthy animals adjusted to worshipping

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<sup>64</sup> Grant, *English-Speaking Justice*, 21.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>66</sup> As another harsh critic of Canada’s security relations with the United States, James M. Minifie put it, “Existence as well as peace is threatened by massive nuclear war...But there is no more futile exercise than preparing for a conflict which could not be survived. The meaningful conflict is economic.” *Peacemaker or Powder-Monkey: Canada’s Role in a Revolutionary World* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1960), 11.

<sup>67</sup> Grant, “The Minds of Men in the Atomic Age,” 284.

their machines which could be so disgusting that one could will that it should be destroyed.”<sup>68</sup> It was a shocking statement, but its brutality was mitigated when considered in the context of Grant’s broader thought. For even if he was capable of “imagin[ing]” a society devoid of higher loyalties or any sense of a common good, he often expressed a faith that it would never actually come to be. He predicted that as “the modern world...moves toward politics becoming administration,” there would at the very least be “revolts against administration in the name of politics.” “There are...going to be those revolts, and I think one should rejoice in them,” Grant claimed.<sup>69</sup>

### **The Defence Crisis**

Diefenbaker and Green’s refusal to be cowed by Washington during the Defence Crisis constituted just such a revolt for Grant. For Norman Robertson, Ottawa’s struggle was defined by a commitment to the international community—a principled opposition to the global threat posed by nuclear weapons.<sup>70</sup> For Diefenbaker and Green, Grant suggested, the struggle had been more directly inspired by a loyalty to the nation. He argued that, from a nationalist perspective, there was something “consistent and inevitable” in Green’s anti-nuclear policies.<sup>71</sup> Historically, Canada’s international role “was to mediate between the United States and western Europe, particularly Great Britain,”<sup>72</sup> which had “been a source of Canadian nationalism...provid[ing] a counter-

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<sup>68</sup> Elsewhere Grant contemplated the possibility of “something worse” than “the threat of total war which might mean our physical extinction,” namely, “the destruction of our souls, of our very humanity” through the acceptance of “economic prosperity and suburban middle class life...as an end in itself.” “The Teaching Profession in an Expanding Economy,” 183.

<sup>69</sup> Schmidt, “Conversation: Philosophy,” 143,144.

<sup>70</sup> “However strongly he may have felt on the nuclear question,” writes Granatstein, “Robertson did not see that so much as an American threat to Canada as a world problem.” *A Man of Influence*, 350.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

thrust to the pull of continentalism.”<sup>73</sup> But as “the Commonwealth had so little substance” in the postwar era, Grant remarked, “the only role now possible [for Canada] seemed that of an independent agent in the United Nations, exerting influence for disarmament.”<sup>74</sup>

Unfortunately, the UN was only as strong as its strongest member, and that member was the United States; no amount of noble speech in the name of the international community would change that fact. From the perspective of a principled nationalist like Green there may have been something “consistent and inevitable” behind the idea of a sovereign Canada using its voice within a neutral UN to press its ‘ally’ in the direction of disarmament. From a practical perspective, however, Canada was far from fully sovereign, and the UN, less than neutral; and both of these facts were symptomatic of America’s irresistible predominance. “I see the Americans with a great powerful empire,” Grant made clear, “and I don’t expect very much from a great powerful empire as far as sanity about nuclear weapons goes, any more than I would from Russia. I do not take seriously the possibility of changing American policy.”<sup>75</sup> But the question was not simply one of recognizing how enormously powerful and unmovable the American empire was. “The regime in the Soviet Union is not one that any sane man could want to live under,” Grant stated. “Now in the light of that, one has some sympathy for the doctrine of deterrence in the United States.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>75</sup> Schmidt, “An Interview with George Grant,” 39. Grant made these comments during the renewed arms race of the Reagan years, but mentioned that he had been forced to consider the same issues in writing about the Diefenbaker years.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 38. Hugh Donald Forbes has alluded to the fact that Grant may have subtly criticized Green in *Lament* for failing to recognize this reality. *George Grant: A Guide to his Thought*, 77-78.

Green's campaign for nuclear disarmament was in principle the right course to follow for someone who was foremost a Canadian nationalist; but Grant raised questions as to whether Green had been "wise" to adopt a posture that antagonized the United States.<sup>77</sup> "In any political system on earth," Grant asseverated, "you have to accept certain realities."<sup>78</sup> It was easy to set one's hopes for change too high when determining "how far one should act against" a "regime with which one does not feel any sympathy...[whose] purposes pass beyond those with which one lacks sympathy and begin to appear monstrous." "As in all practical matters," Grant continued, "this judgment is one requiring not only true principles, but also *phronesis*," or to use the more familiar term ("which loses much in its Latinized translation"), prudence.<sup>79</sup> Politics, in order to be effective, had to deal with the practical reality it is given, and avoid the pursuit of principled impossibilities. Diefenbaker, in Grant's sketch, was a much more practically oriented politician than Green,<sup>80</sup> and this practicality was reflected in his position during the Defence Crisis. The prime minister "was no pacifist, no unilateralist, nor was he sentimental about Communism," Grant wrote.<sup>81</sup> Unlike Green, he had apparently given little thought to the question of whether a nuclear-armed Canada was consistent with the goals of Canadian nationalism. Although he was a solid defender of both the UN and the Commonwealth, and felt "attached to the country's internationalist image,"<sup>82</sup> he did not expend a great deal of time meditating on how this

<sup>77</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 45, 46.

<sup>78</sup> Larry Schmidt, "An Interview with George Grant," 39.

<sup>79</sup> Grant, "Revolution and Tradition," in *Tradition and Revolution*, The Frank Gerstein Lectures, York University 1970, edited by Lionel Rubinoff (Toronto: Macmillan, St. Martin's Press, 1971), 90. {79-95}

<sup>80</sup> Diefenbaker "hadn't a thought in his head," <sup>80</sup> Grant remarked, before adding that "it may be good for practical people not to have thoughts in their head." Cayley, *George Grant in Conversation*, 149.

<sup>81</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 48.

<sup>82</sup> Costas Melakopides, *Pragmatic Idealism: Canadian Foreign Policy, 1945-1995* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1998), 53. Melakopides offers a portrait of the Diefenbaker period that highlights the

nationalism fit within a broader understanding of history, or within a broader view of world affairs;<sup>83</sup> and in the absence of an overarching international vision, he was inclined to accept rather uncritically many of the practical realities that existed within the international realm. He did not see the need to take a principled stand against “American world policy” the way Green quite openly had. His was “a much more limited nationalism,” than that of his secretary of state.<sup>84</sup> He insisted only that “Canadian defence policy should not be determined in Washington.” This was “the one thing [Diefenbaker] would not stomach,” Grant repeated.<sup>85</sup>

At times Grant almost seemed to reduce Diefenbaker’s nationalism to a concern with guarding certain purely formal powers or political functions, notably the country’s ability to decide upon its own foreign policy. But of course, even a formal decision or policy must have a substance or content of some sort. In the event, the substance of Diefenbaker’s defence policy was heavily influenced by Green’s more principled stance against nuclear arms—albeit adapted in the prime minister’s typically pragmatic fashion: “If nuclear arms were necessary for North-American defence, Canada would take them.”<sup>86</sup> However, until such time as these arms proved necessary, the government reserved the right to determine its own national policy, which in practice amounted to deferring (potentially indefinitely) the decision to accept the nuclear warheads. Grant

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consistencies between his foreign policy and the internationalism of the early postwar era. See Chapter 4: “Diefenbaker’s Internationalism, 1957-1963,” 52-65.

<sup>83</sup> Grant chastised Diefenbaker for his “yahooism,” and for treating the university community with “neglect and contempt.” See *Lament for a Nation*, 41-42. He made no attempt to come up with a “clear definition of conservatism” that might satisfy the needs of an “intellectual nationalism.” He “turned to administrators and technicians, to those with the minimum of intellectual conviction,” rather than enlisting the abilities of a figure like Donald Creighton, the historian who “had defined the conservative view of Canada to a whole generation.” In interviews Grant referred to Diefenbaker as a “simple” man, a figure without “great intelligence,” an essentially “practical” man, *etc.* See for example, Halil, “*Lament for a Nation Revisited*,” 7; Cayley, *George Grant in Conversation*, 149.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.



did not pretend that Diefenbaker fully grasped how Green's more principled objection to the arm's race coalesced with his understanding of Canadian nationalism. Rather, he claimed that Diefenbaker stood by Green on the missile question out of a sense of loyalty.<sup>87</sup> This loyalty was in turn built upon a shared love and devotion to the country and to its British past.<sup>88</sup> Diefenbaker saw in Green's advocacy on behalf of Canada in Parliament and at the UN the passionate devotion of someone who cared deeply about the continuance of his own nation and its traditions. People who lead "busy lives," Grant argued, "aren't meant to think very much," and have therefore always been more dependent on tradition to guide them.<sup>89</sup> Diefenbaker was one of those practical types who very much relied on tradition, and Green, through his exertions as the nation's top diplomat, was an exemplar of how Canada's traditions could be articulated in the modern world.

The government's position on the nuclear question was put to the test, however, following the dramatic confrontation that took place in the waters surrounding Cuba in October of 1962. After forcing a showdown with the Soviet Union over its attempts to place nuclear missiles on the island, President John F. Kennedy ordered Canada's contingents within NORAD<sup>90</sup> to go on high alert without first consulting the Canadian government.<sup>91</sup> Diefenbaker waited forty-eight hours to comply with Kennedy's demand, and to add insult to injury, insisted that the affair should be referred to the United Nations for arbitration. This refusal, Grant writes, eventually brought the weight of the

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 44, 49.

<sup>89</sup> Cayley, *George Grant in Conversation*, 57-58.

<sup>90</sup> North American Air Defence Command (now North American Aerospace Defence Command) was the joint Canada-US organization brought into being under Diefenbaker in 1958 to meet the threat posed by Soviet long-range bombers, capable of carrying nuclear loads across the Arctic.

<sup>91</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 43-44.

American government down on Diefenbaker's head. Determined to crush the prime minister's independent streak, Washington began to exert strong pressure on Canada to move ahead with plans to make its Bomarc missiles nuclear-ready.<sup>92</sup> But "the old war-horse would not budge from his principle: The government of the United States should not be allowed to force the Canadian government to a particular defence policy."<sup>93</sup>

Diefenbaker was determined to defend his country's independent policy on nuclear weapons as well as the minister who had largely defined that policy; indeed, these two loyalties, to country and friend, were intertwined in Grant's view. "Diefenbaker's nationalism," he argued, was "established by the fact that he stood by Green, and would not accept the American demands, even when it was in his overwhelming interest to do so."<sup>94</sup> The price of Diefenbaker's actions was to provoke an election, in which the Kennedy administration would intervene to help dislodge an uncooperative foreign government.<sup>95</sup> The prime minister's willingness to sacrifice his own self-interest in the

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<sup>92</sup> In *Lament for a Nation*, Grant mentioned a press conference given in Ottawa by NATO's recently retired Supreme Commander, General Norstad on January 3, 1963. Norstad remarked that Canada would not be fulfilling its commitments to NATO if it failed to provide nuclear arms for the Honest John rockets and CF-104 fighter jets that it had procured for its contingents in Europe. Grant also referred to a press release put out by the American State Department on January 30 disputing remarks made by Diefenbaker in a defence policy speech five days earlier, notably his claim that Canada was in a position to arm itself with nuclear weapons if necessity demanded it. The State Department release read, "The Canadian Government has not yet proposed any arrangement sufficiently practical to contribute effectively to North American defence." Quoted in Peter C. Newman, *Renegade in Power: The Diefenbaker Years*, with an Introduction by Denis Smith, Carleton Library, Number 70 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973; originally published in 1963), 366. In a later interview, Grant recalled an account of a conversation that Diefenbaker claimed to have had with Kennedy: "Kennedy said, 'You have to take the nuclear missiles,'" and Diefenbaker said, 'Well, we're not going to,' and Kennedy said, 'We won't give you loaders for wheat to China... we'll cut off loaders and we'll cut off your selling wheat to China.' Diefenbaker said: 'We have a loader company,' and Kennedy said, 'It's American-owned.'" And Diefenbaker said: 'We'll take it over.' And finally he said to Kennedy, 'You're not in America now, President Kennedy.'" Cayley, *George Grant in Conversation*, 98-99.

<sup>93</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 43.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>95</sup> Grant noted that Kennedy had sent his own election expert, Louis Harris, to advise Pearson in the running of his campaign, as he had done in the 1962 federal election. *Ibid.*, 47. Harris' "intensive studies on Canadian voting behaviour... were considered key contributions to the Liberal victory of 1963."

name of a higher loyalty, to Grant's mind, represented an attachment to Canadian nationhood that was very much out of step with the more individualistic breed of liberalism that had come to dominate the country's political life, particularly in the wake of Mackenzie King's long tenure. "Nothing in Diefenbaker's ministry," Grant wrote, "was as noble as his leaving of it."<sup>96</sup> Recalling Diefenbaker's actions twenty-five years after the Defence Crisis, Grant remarked to his interviewer: "Do you know the Latin tag, *'fata volentem ducunt no lentum trahunt?'* The fates lead the willing, and drag the unwilling. I like the people who are unwilling."<sup>97</sup>

### **Diefenbaker and the Foreign Policy Mandarins**

Grant was not blind to Diefenbaker's failings and found plenty to chastise in both the prime minister's policies and his character. One of Grant's recurring complaints was that Diefenbaker's loyalty too often descended into crude prejudice.<sup>98</sup> One way that this manifested itself was in his attitude toward French Canada:<sup>99</sup> As

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Newman, *Renegade in Power*, 267. Grant also referred to a scathing editorial on Diefenbaker that had been printed by Kennedy's "friend[...]," the publisher of *Newsweek*.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>97</sup> Halil, "Lament for a Nation Revisited," 7.

<sup>98</sup> Whatever price Grant put on loyalty in his thought, he claimed to reject "the ethic of my country right or wrong." Grant, "Excerpt from a Fragment on War," in *Collected Works*, 2, 461. The "love of one's own" was a limited and fragile thing if it was accompanied by an unwillingness to reflect on the good manifested in the loyalties and traditions of others as well. But Grant adopted the Platonic position that such a reflection does not begin with an abstract conception of the good, but must instead begin with what we experience as good or bad in our own lives as mediated through custom and tradition. This is what made "one's 'own' so important," he remarked; namely its "availability for being known by us, and known as good." Only from such knowledge could one go on to understand the good in what others hold to be their own. Schmidt, "Conversation: Theology and History," 105. A willingness to defend one's own traditions was thus a necessary condition for one who wished to understand something about the traditions of others. It was obviously not a sufficient condition for such knowledge, however, and Grant criticized Diefenbaker for his parochialism in government.

<sup>99</sup> Grant observed that Diefenbaker's attitude toward the French was partly determined by his Baptist roots. He picked "the most God-awful French-Canadian lieutenants" Grant remarked, "because he had all this prejudice—stupid, foolish prejudice against Catholics, which made him very poor as far as French Canada went." Cayley, *George Grant in Conversation*, 99. Grant also saw this narrowness in Diefenbaker's attitude toward the Americans. He could be "a stupid old bugger," Grant remarked, recalling how he had once walked around with Diefenbaker in New York listening to him mutter, "I don't

prime minister he had failed to recognize their distinct needs, partly because he was too influenced by a more American concept of individualism that ignored the right of the French nation, but also partly because he belonged to a generation of English Canadians who nursed a bitter prejudice toward French Canadians because of their resistance to fighting in the name of the British Empire during World War I.<sup>100</sup> Grant also criticized Diefenbaker for “fail[ing] to win the respect of the civil service” and for denying them an effective role in his administration. “No modern state,” wrote Grant, “can be run without great authority in the hands of its non-elected officials. In such an uncertain nation as Canada, the civil service is perhaps the essential instrument by which nationhood is preserved.”<sup>101</sup> Grant argued that this was especially the case in a country like Canada, where a strong central government was needed to counter the forces of business, which naturally pulled the country in the direction of Washington.

But if Diefenbaker had failed to cultivate the respect of the civil service, they also shared much of the blame for the poor state of relations between the bureaucracy and the government. “The best civil servants were devoted to both the British account of their function and the conception of a sovereign Canadian nation.”<sup>102</sup> The “British” model of civil service combined a well-educated class of experts and specialists, who saw it as their primary task to carry out the policies of the government of the day. Since

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like it down here. I really don't trust them.” Halil, “*Lament for a Nation Revisited*,” 7. In *Lament*, however, Grant defended Diefenbaker against the charge that his politics were inspired by simple anti-Americanism (46-47, 50).

<sup>100</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 39, 40. Grant's feelings on the Conscription Crisis are made clear in a rare expression of approval for King, who in 1917 had the sense to reject the “fanatic[al]” attempt by some Anglo-Canadians to “force” the French to fight. King's position was to his “political credit,” he remarked (before adding parenthetically, “and God knows he needs credit somewhere”). *Technology and Empire*, 70.

<sup>101</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 36-37. In 1960 Diefenbaker's administration launched the Glassco Commission, which conducted an aggressive investigation into the techniques and methods of the federal bureaucracy, and whose recommendations, in Grant's view, amounted to “limiting the civil service in the name of free enterprise.”

<sup>102</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 37.

the civil servant was not an elected representative of the people, and thus could not be checked by the voter, it was important that he or she not show partisanship or attempt to steer policy in a direction that sets their own will or judgment against that of the government. To enter into the realm of policy direction carried with it the risk of letting personal ambition overrun the desire to loyally serve one's country.<sup>103</sup>

In Canada, Grant argued, the internationalist ideal of a peaceful world order exercised a stronger pull on many civil servants than their commitment to loyal national service. "Some of the senior civil servants were certain they knew what was best for Canada, both internally and externally, and they were not willing to accept the fact that elected leaders," like Diefenbaker and Green, "could sensibly advocate alternative policies." Diefenbaker's stubbornness in the face of American demands, Grant speculated, had been interpreted by some as having damaged Canada's reputation as "the good ally."<sup>104</sup> However single-minded or pushy the Americans could be in their dealings with other nations, its leadership was still essential to institutions like NATO, which formed the very basis of the emerging postwar order. Hence, following Diefenbaker's defeat, Pearson was "welcomed back to office by the deputy ministers," who associated his win with a triumph for internationalism.<sup>105</sup> Even Robertson, who so vehemently opposed accepting nuclear arms on Canadian soil, was relieved by the

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<sup>103</sup> Ken Rasmussen has argued that Diefenbaker's troubled relationship with the civil service was partly a product of his attachment to the "'Whitehall model' of political-bureaucratic relations." Diefenbaker's distrust of the bureaucracy was "understandable, given the role the federal Liberal party played in building up the senior civil service in the two decades following World War II," writes Rasmussen. "Yet the curious fact about [his] distrust of these officials was that he did not act to replace them, or make any structural adjustments to supplement their 'Liberal' advice." Instead, he simply "reasserted the notion of a political/administrative dichotomy," and insisted on enforcing the traditional "division of labour between Cabinet and the senior civil service." "Bureaucrats and Politicians in the Diefenbaker Era: A Legacy of Mistrust," *The Diefenbaker Legacy*, 155.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 36, (see also fn. 4, and p. 65 for context).

change of government. Despite Pearson's rapid move to open the border to the American weapons, Robertson happily resumed his position as undersecretary of state under the new prime minister.<sup>106</sup> If Pearson had compromised Canada's ability to decide upon its own defence policy, at least he would do no further damage to Canada's role as a friend of the United States and advocate for the international community. The goals of internationalism trumped those of nationalism where a harmony of purpose could not be reached.

## **Conclusion**

As influential as Robertson's views on nuclear disarmament had been in shaping Diefenbaker and Green's position during the Defence Crisis, it was the two politicians, rather than the civil servant, who showed the deeper determination to resist Washington. Grant suggested that the internationalism that dominated the Department of External Affairs after the Second World War had cushioned men like Robertson from the tough reality that Canada now faced living next to a nuclear giant. It was a perspective that encouraged a view of history as a process whereby the traditional sovereignty of the state would gradually give way to the needs of an emerging international order and the interests of individual nations would merge with those of all. Hence, Robertson was able to take solace in the fact that even if Canada lost this particular battle to Washington, it would still be around to fight for the ultimate goal of international harmony. Green and Diefenbaker, on the other hand, had faced up to the situation in a much more honest and determined way, in Grant's view. Their assessment of the

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<sup>106</sup> Granatstein writes that there was "no doubt that Robertson was delighted by the election results." *A Man of Influence*, 356. However much he disapproved of Canada's accepting nuclear weapons, "at least Pearson's government had a clear policy, one that appeased the United States" (357).

challenge that Washington posed was not measured by the ideal order that might be won in the future, but by the concrete nation that stood to be lost in the here and now.

## Chapter 5

### Tyranny and Wisdom

Shortly after the Conservative downfall, Grant wrote to a friend that he had “never felt such political loyalty as I feel for Green and Dief. Whatever the PM lacks, he spoke unequivocally for Canadian independence.” He compared the Canadian leader to Britain’s Conservative prime minister, Harold Macmillan, who Grant thought had compromised his country’s independence by seeking to strengthen defence ties with the US. “While Macmillan purred while he was being raped, Dief fought.”<sup>1</sup>

In Grant’s view, Diefenbaker’s political foe, Pearson, had also been too eager to make good with the United States. He had purred rather than fought as Washington made its advances. If the metaphor seemed somewhat crass, it might be noted that Pearson himself once asked whether Canada was not particularly vulnerable to Americanization because it took place through “seduction instead of rape.” If “the answer must be yes,” he continued, “why not relax and enjoy it?”<sup>2</sup> Of course, the answer was not “yes,” in his view. As precarious as the situation seemed, it was still possible for Canada to avoid out-and-out domination by its neighbour. In fact, Pearson believed that so long as it always maintained a realistic awareness of America’s economic and military superiority, the relationship could actually serve to strengthen rather than weaken Canada’s standing in the world. Pearson understood that in the

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<sup>1</sup> Grant, Letter to Derek Bedson, February 1963, in *Selected Letters*, 215.

<sup>2</sup> Pearson made the remark in an address to the 1969 Couchiching Conference. Quoted in John Kelsey, “World ties hold key, Pearson says,” *Globe and Mail* (July 29, 1969), 1.



international realm ideals counted for little without the power for effective action; and within the Western alliance power rested with the United States. Pearson recognized that if Canada wanted to get along in this world, it would have to go along with Washington.

At times Grant talked about Pearson as if he were driven solely by a concern with “what pays politically.” And in Pearson’s view it paid to recognize that our best interests are served by serving the interests of the powerful. Grant even went so far as to suggest that any loftier internationalist proclamations on Pearson’s part acted merely as a cloak and justification for the advancement of American power. “He could use the rhetoric of ‘internationalism’ even more effectively than Green,” he wrote, “but he knew it for what it was.”<sup>3</sup> At other times, however, Grant took a very different tone, acknowledging that Pearson was driven by genuinely internationalist ideals—even if Pearson himself did not fully recognize their influence.<sup>4</sup> This apparent inconsistency in Grant’s portrait of Pearson, I would suggest, was not accidental. Rather, it pointed toward an ambiguity that reached to the very core of Pearson’s view of international affairs. On the one hand, his pragmatic attitude was nourished by what could be described as a very realistic assessment of Canada’s role in the world—a recognition that Canada had limited means at its disposal and therefore had to be flexible about the

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<sup>3</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 48. “Internationalism,” Grant commented elsewhere, “generally means just being a servant of English-speaking capitalism,” that is, “doing what IBM or the American government wants.” *George Grant in Process*, 105.

<sup>4</sup> Grant begins Chapter 5 of *Lament for a Nation* with the claim that “the aspirations of progress have made Canada redundant. The universal and homogeneous state is the pinnacle of pinnacle of political striving” (67). In the next paragraph he suggests that Pearson was also guided by these aspirations, even as he (in Grant’s view) ushered us deeper into the fold of the Americans. Remarking on a photograph that appeared during the 1963 election showing the Liberal leader reading a copy of Will Durant’s *The Dawning of the Age of Reason*, Grant wrote, “to Durant, the age of reason is the age of progress. The book was therefore appropriate reading for Pearson, who was about to persuade Canadians to adopt American atomic arms” (68).

goals that it pursued. On the other hand, the very notion that our ends are ultimately mutable in this way was grounded in a particular view of human nature that revealed a much higher aspiration. Human beings “can always, in some degree at least, transform a situation in which they find themselves,” Pearson wrote in 1954. “They can take creative action which, while tailor-made as it were to fit the environment, is in no sense merely a product of it.”<sup>5</sup> In this way, our species takes hold of its proper agency as “the fundamental criterion of all things temporal.”<sup>6</sup>

Pearson had given apt expression to what Grant described as one of the deepest assumptions of the age of progress, the belief that as human beings “we can creatively will to shape the world to our values,” or as Grant more commonly put it, the belief that “man’s essence is his freedom.”<sup>7</sup> This same belief, Grant contended, had implications for how society viewed the realm of international relations. The notion that all human beings shared a common essence (that is, freedom), posed a direct challenge to the idea that there are natural differences that separate individuals or nations. In a world where man’s essence was his freedom, all existing divisions appeared to be arbitrary and in principle, nothing prevented us from working toward overcoming them. Grant argued that this was in fact “the governing goal of ethical striving” today—the desire to bring about a world without social divisions: “the universal and homogeneous state.”<sup>8</sup> However dimly they may have perceived it, he contended, practical men like Pearson were guided in their actions by this goal.

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<sup>5</sup> L.B. Pearson, *Words and Occasions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 130.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>7</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 32.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

## The Universal and Homogeneous State

The phrase “universal and homogeneous state” was coined by the French bureaucrat and Hegelian scholar, Alexandre Kojève. Grant first encountered the idea in an exchange between Strauss and Kojève surrounding Strauss’ 1948 book, *On Tyranny*.<sup>9</sup> In 1964, Grant published “Tyranny and Wisdom,” a commentary on the original Strauss-Kojève debate which also contained his most sustained reflection on the idea of the universal and homogeneous state. Unlike his much better known *Lament for a Nation*, in which Grant wrote at some length about the historical details of Canada’s postwar foreign policy, “Tyranny and Wisdom” had nothing to say directly about our nation’s external affairs. It might, therefore, seem like an odd place to look for Grant’s views on such an ostensibly practical field as Canadian foreign policy,<sup>10</sup> especially at a time when it was being dominated by such avowedly practical men as Pearson and Robertson.<sup>11</sup> As if to confirm this opinion, Grant began the essay by more or less pointing to the impractical nature of his own speculations. He characterized it as little more than a scholarly commentary on certain matters of theoretical importance

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<sup>9</sup>Kojève’s review article “Tyranny and Wisdom,” and Strauss’ “Restatement,” were included in a 1954 French edition of the book, which appeared in English in 1964. A revised and expanded version of *On Tyranny*, edited by Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth, and including the personal correspondence between Strauss and Kojève, was published in 1991, by the Free Press (New York), and in 2000 by the University of Chicago Press. The present writing relies upon the 2000 edition.

<sup>10</sup> Canadian foreign policy since the Second World War has often been celebrated as an eminently practical enterprise. James Eayrs related this to what he called the “British style,” that is, “empirical, pragmatic, expedient, shying away from abstract principle, distrustful of doctrine.” *The Art of the Possible: Government and Foreign Policy in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 153.

<sup>11</sup> The choice seems less obvious still when one considers how eager some critics were to paint Grant’s work as being too academic, as floating too far above the realm of actual practice to be politically relevant. H. Graham Rawlinson and J. L. Granatstein, for example, write that Grant was “not someone who understood clearly...the politics of the time.” They characterize him instead as an “academic philosopher” dealing in hack theories and preaching “gloomy hopelessness” to Canadians. *The Canadian 100: The 100 Most Influential Canadians of the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1997), 185-88. A far more serious reader of Grant, Janet Ajzenstat, writes that Grant’s writing, however elevated on the page, “turns to lead when translated into a prescription for Canadian democracy.” *The Once and Future Democracy: An Essay in Political Thought* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 178.

brought to light by the original exchange between Kojève and Strauss,<sup>12</sup> explicitly disavowing any intention of joining the debate as an intellectual equal, let alone of resolving it.<sup>13</sup>

For anyone looking for direction from Grant, this posture of intellectual humility in this debate may begin to look more like irresolution. But I argue that beneath its self-effacing presentation, “Tyranny and Wisdom” is a work conceived with great patience and care. In it, one glimpses the earliest expression of Grant’s mature position on the proper relationship between learning and political responsibility. Grant also showed us what sort of posture the conscientious thinker might assume in facing up to the most important political phenomenon of our time, the coming to be of the universal and homogeneous state. To offer one tentative remark about this posture: Grant rather self-consciously presented himself as a “scholar” who doubted his own ability to offer practical prescriptions which would address the most important issues of the day. This would seem like a supremely un-political stance to adopt, especially in an age when influential policy-makers were (as they still often are) celebrated for devoting

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<sup>12</sup> Grant claimed that he intended only “to comment on certain propositions and arguments [raised by the Strauss-Kojève debate] which interest me because they appear to be fundamental to political theory.” (82-83)

<sup>13</sup> “Tyranny and Wisdom,” 85, 86. Borrowing a phrase that Marx used to describe his early encounters with Hegel’s writing Grant proposed simply to “plunge into the controversy.” “Tyranny and Wisdom,” 85, 86; for a reference to Marx’s comment, see Frederick G. Weiss’ editorial remarks in *Hegel: The Essential Writings* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 254. In the opinion of some of Grant’s commentators, he never quite managed to emerge from the debate’s murky depths. See Drury, *Alexandre Kojève*, 250, 263; Zdravko Planinc, “Paradox and Polyphony in Grant’s Critique of Modernity,” 34. Much of Grant’s subsequent writing, Drury and Planinc argue, was merely an unconscious imitation of the arguments and assumptions of either Strauss or Kojève. By Drury’s measure, Grant did not even manage to do this well, adopting Strauss’ “rhetoric and his melancholy about modernity,” while apparently completely misunderstanding him. There are good reasons to question this glib evaluation, however. The strongest of these comes from Strauss himself, who called Grant’s essay, “without any question the most thoughtful statement about my intention that I have ever seen” (Christian, *George Grant*, 225). It is worth adding that Strauss made this comment some time after Kojève had written his own assessment of Strauss’ book.

themselves to the pragmatic search for opportunities.<sup>14</sup> But it may also be precisely in such an age that doubt, acting as a brake on this search, could have its most political effect.<sup>15</sup>

At the most obvious level, the debate between Strauss and Kojève turned on their widely divergent visions of modernity. According to Grant, contemporary society was characterized by “the drive toward the universal and homogeneous state.” This was, he argued, “the dominant ethical ‘ideal’” today, and the very terms in which “our society legitimizes itself to itself.”<sup>16</sup> Whereas “Kojève affirms that the universal and homogeneous state is the best social order and that mankind advances to the establishment of such an order,” Strauss claims that “the universal and homogeneous state, far from being the best social order, will be (if realized) a tyranny, and...destructive of humanity.”<sup>17</sup> These violently clashing portraits formed the

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<sup>14</sup>“The art of the possible” is the phrase used by the well-known scholar of Canada’s postwar foreign policy, James Eayrs. Eayrs was presumably drawing on Bismarck’s description of politics as the art of the possible (quoted in his *Complete Works*, 7 [1924]).

<sup>15</sup> In an introduction to his re-published essay, Grant seemed to hint that it was intention to achieve a political effect with his writing. After admitting that “both the controversy and my comments on it may seem over festooned with the trappings of scholarship,” Grant assured the reader that “[t]here is every reason to be suspicious of the trappings of scholarship these days. There is nothing phonier in our present universities than the exaltation of scholarship as if it were an end in itself. To be neuter before the question of good leads to that boasted neutrality in the multiversity which denies itself in its service of the modern state.” “Tyranny and Wisdom,” 81. If we take Grant’s own avowal seriously, we must suppose that he was not being “neuter” before the question of good.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 86, 92. In the introduction to *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 5, Strauss wrote, “for the foreseeable future there cannot be a universal state, unitary or federative.” Both Thomas G. West and Nathan Tarcov interpret this as a critical reference to the United Nations. See West’s “Leo Strauss and American Foreign Policy,” in *The Claremont Review of Books*, (Summer 2004), and Tarcov’s “Will the Real Leo Strauss Please Stand Up,” in *The American Interest* 2:1 (Sept.-Oct. 2006). Neither makes much of the distinction that Strauss drew in this instance between a “unitary or federative” state. (Mark Blitz, also speaks about the “doubt” that Strauss encouraged toward the United Nations “and other attempts at world federalism or a world state” without exploring whether there is a meaningful difference to be drawn between such ideas. “Government Practice and the School of Strauss,” in Kenneth L. Deutsch and John A. Murley, *Leo Strauss, the Straussians, and the American Regime* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 440; Strauss himself, however, appears to have made a distinction between the competing visions of a more utopian sort of liberalism which, like communism, ultimately looked to the establishment of a “universal and homogeneous state” and a more “pragmatic” liberalism which looked to “a federation of all now existing or soon emerging states, with a truly universal and

backdrop against which the discussion between Strauss and Kojève took place. Grant quoted a single paragraph from each thinker to sketch out their respective understandings of what the universal homogeneous state, if realized, would look like. He began with Kojève, whose description incorporated a very concise, Hegelian interpretation of Western history within it. The first attempt to establish a universal empire began with Alexander, Kojève wrote. Alexander, as the student of a philosopher, had come to recognize the existence of a human “nature” or “essence” that rose above the limited bond of race.<sup>18</sup>

While Alexander’s empire managed to overcome differences between different states, it did not manage to overcome differences *within* states. Citizenship was still limited by the opposition between master and slave. “Thus his universal state,” wrote Grant, “could not be homogeneous—a society without classes.”<sup>19</sup> It would take the idea of a “*fundamental equality*,” grounded in the belief in a single God to overcome the divisions left in place by the “Socratic-Platonic” notion of “essence.”<sup>20</sup> Christians found their common humanity not by “mixing” or intermarriage between races, but by “negating” racial qualities, and “synthesizing” them through the free act of “conversion.” Whereas “mixing” could take place without disturbing the class structure within societies, “conversion” created a wholly “new” ground of unity, between human

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greatly strengthened United Nations.” Quoted in Thomas L. Pangle, *Leo Strauss: An Introduction to His Thought and Intellectual Legacy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2006), 84).

<sup>18</sup>“For Alexander, the disciple of the Greek philosophers, Greek and Barbarian have the same claim to political citizenship in the Empire in so far as they HAVE the same human (i.e., rational, logical, discursive) “nature” (=essence, idea, form, etc.), or that they *identify* “essentially” with one another as a result of a direct (=“immediate”) “mixture” of their innate qualities (achieved by biological union).” Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 87; Kojève, “Tyranny and Wisdom,” 172.

<sup>19</sup>Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 87.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*; Kojève, “Tyranny and Wisdom,” 172.

beings. There could be no justification for letting old divisions dictate who could or could not become part of this new unity.<sup>21</sup>

While the universal state attained to a higher synthesis through the introduction of a new social homogeneity, the effects were limited by the fact that this entire unity took place on a “transcendent, theistic, religious basis.” The universal and homogeneous community anticipated by St. Paul “did not and could not engender a *State* properly so called.” The final transformation of the ideal of universality and homogeneity into a political reality would have to await the advent of modern philosophy. “[T]he religious Christian idea of human homogeneity could achieve real *political* import only once modern philosophy succeeded in secularizing it.”<sup>22</sup> This task was begun by early modern thinkers—most importantly Hobbes<sup>23</sup>—and brought to its completion by Hegel. “Thus,” Grant wrote, concluding his sketch, “the universal and homogeneous state became a realizable political order (because of modern philosophy) and has been, is, and will be made actual by rulers.”<sup>24</sup>

Modern philosophy, in another manner of speaking, made possible the completion of that empire initiated by Alexander. When the ideal that guided political action could be expressed in perfectly rational terms and was, in principle, accessible to all—when the state became the “goal and the outcome of the collective labour of all and each”—then the ancient distinction between masters and slaves would finally be

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<sup>21</sup>For St. Paul there is no “essential” (irreducible) difference between Greek and Jew because both can BECOME Christians, and they would do so not by “mixing” Greek and Jewish “qualities” but by *negating* and “synthesizing” them in and by this very negation into a homogeneous unity that is not innate or given but (freely) *created* by “conversion” (Ibid.).

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 173.

<sup>23</sup>See Kojève’s letter to Strauss, November 2, 1936 in Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 231.

<sup>24</sup>Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 88.

overcome. Ruler and ruled alike would be “satisfied.”<sup>25</sup> While the brief outline of Kojève’s thought traced by Grant was intriguing, it was less than intellectually satisfying. After describing Western history, in barest outline, as a not fully conscious attempt to realize the ideal of the universal and homogeneous state, we are told that this very interpretation of history is the one, the only, understanding of our purposes guiding political action today. But it is far from evident from Grant’s cursory sketch of Kojève’s argument why this should be so. Nor are we helped much by going directly to the passages in Kojève’s essay that Grant was drawing on. Kojève’s intent in that section of his writing, was, according to Grant, to communicate Hegel’s “proof,” found in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, that “the universal and homogeneous state is the best social order and that mankind advances to the establishment of such an order.”<sup>26</sup> But since, as Grant pointed out, Kojève merely “sketches the argument of that book in a few pages of his essay,” we can hardly expect that his teaching will be complete in the way that Hegel’s is. Perhaps this is why Kojève placed such stress on Hegel’s authority in his own writing. As Grant noted, “Kojève returns again and again...to the point that Hegel alone has recognized fully the relation between the modern negation of theism and man’s freedom to make the world (history).”<sup>27</sup> If Kojève had fully communicated Hegel’s proof, this iteration would not be necessary.

The obstacle that Kojève encountered in trying to communicate Hegel’s teaching was, in fact, a fitting example of the very “problem” that Hegel set out to “resolve” in his writing:<sup>28</sup> “[T]he philosopher’s supreme goal is the quest for Wisdom

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<sup>25</sup>Kojève, “Tyranny and Wisdom,” 146.

<sup>26</sup>Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 86.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>28</sup>Kojève, “Tyranny and Wisdom,” 152, 167.



or Truth,” wrote Kojève, “and this quest, which a philosopher by definition never completes, is supposed to take *all of his time*.” How then is Kojève to package Hegel’s teaching—the most comprehensive Truth—for those of us who have not spent so much time reading Hegel? How, in particular, can Kojève present Hegel’s teaching to those who could most benefit humankind with it, namely, those who hold political power? As Kojève notes, “Truth to tell, governing a State also takes *all of a man’s time*.”<sup>29</sup>

This problem has been “discussed” by philosophers throughout the ages, Kojève tells us, but only Hegel pointed to a “*definitive* solution.” Perhaps, then, he suggested, “one might try to resolve the question by going beyond *discussion* with philosophers and using the ‘objective’ method Hegel used in order to reach ‘indisputable’ solutions.”<sup>30</sup> Since Kojève’s essay, by his own admission, did not rise above the level of mere “discussion,” his sketch of Hegel’s solution was necessarily incomplete. At best, Kojève provided us with a glimpse of the whole teaching. Ultimately, readers had to be prepared for a good deal more work if they wanted to verify Kojève’s claims and come to a complete understanding of Hegel themselves.

Kojève affirmed, “that the universal and homogeneous state is the best social order and that mankind advances to the establishment of such an order” by tracing Hegel’s solution to the age-old problem of the seeming incompatibility of the requirements of philosophy and politics. Strauss’ description of the universal and homogeneous state, on the other hand, reasserted the intransigence of the problem. In Grant’s words, Strauss affirmed “the classical realization that only the few are capable

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 163.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 167.

of pursuing wisdom.”<sup>31</sup> This same realization made the philosopher a singularly unlikely candidate for political rule. This was not simply because his political duties would leave the philosopher with less time to devote to the pursuit of wisdom, but also because the political life, being closed to the truths of philosophy, would mire the philosopher in concerns of a “lower” order. Strauss wrote,

It seems reasonable to assume that only a few, if any citizens of the universal and homogeneous state will be wise. But neither the wise men nor the philosophers will desire to rule. For this reason alone, to say nothing of others, the Chief of the universal and homogeneous state, or the Universal and Final Tyrant, will be an unwise man, as Kojève seems to take for granted.<sup>32</sup>

This tyrant or chief, having neither the time nor capacity to follow the thoughts of the wisest men, would grasp at ready-made political formulae to justify his rule. Those who were naturally inclined to question, and to strive for understandings that were not limited by the demands of political contingency would be silenced. The very idea that such understanding was possible would be extinguished by converting everyone to the belief that the most important things could be known by all. The Universal and Final Tyrant “must command his biologists to prove that every human being has, or will acquire, the capacity of becoming a philosopher or a tyrant.”<sup>33</sup> Genuine philosophy would come to an end and the entire order of society would be underwritten by suspicion and terror. Grant summarized Strauss’ conclusion: “if the universal and homogeneous state were to be realized, it would be a tyranny and indeed the most appalling tyranny in the story of the race.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 94.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 95; Strauss, “Restatement,” *On Tyranny*, 211.

<sup>33</sup>Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 96.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 95.

Strauss' depiction of the final tyranny was nightmarish. He described a condition that was terrifying precisely because it would be imposed on us without our recognizing it, like a darkness that imperceptibly enshrouds our lives. The modern drive toward universality and homogeneity, Strauss warned, was guided by an understanding of politics that was blind to the phenomenon of tyranny. A proper understanding of tyranny was open only to those who were able to bring the most serious sort of philosophical reflection to bear on the matter. But the philosophical life, as his description stated, was open to "only a few." Strauss shared this assumption with Greek classical thinkers like Xenophon and Plato, both of whom, on Strauss' reading, provided a complete understanding of the experience of tyranny but directed their teaching only to the few.

### **One World or Two**

Kojève and Strauss offered starkly contrasting sketches of what Grant called the dominant political ideal of modernity, the universal and homogeneous state. Although Grant was insistent that the debate should be of more than merely scholarly interest to us, he also tended to treat it primarily as a tool that could guide us in "thinking" about modernity, rather than "acting" in it. Strauss and Kojève, he claimed, had reflected on the practices and beliefs guiding modern society at the deepest level, and their sketches allowed us to see, at a single glance, the fruit of this reflection. They offered "the incipient political philosopher" a place to begin his or her quest to understand modernity. Other commentators have stressed the consciously political character of the positions outlined by Strauss and Kojève. In the case of Kojève, a fairly obvious connection can be made between his vision of the universal homogeneous state and his

own role as one of the architects behind European Union. While Kojève did not foresee the realization of a universal state anytime soon, his desire to see Europe's fractured political landscape synthesized into a single bureaucratic organization was certainly informed by this ideal. In the case of Strauss, who spent his life within the academy and apparently avoided direct contact with political life,<sup>35</sup> it is more difficult, and certainly more controversial, to draw a direct link between his position in the debate and a concrete political teaching. There are, however, certain details in his portrait of the final state that at least in an indirect way suggest such a link.

For the classical thinkers, Strauss argued, the emergence of a universal state seemed impossible. The reasoning behind this skepticism depended on the assumed divide between the wise and the unwise. "Wise rule" would require that wise men be allowed to rule according to their understanding. But since the understanding of wise men was beyond the grasp of the unwise, the wise could rule only by making their understanding accessible to the unwise either through its dilution or through the exercise of absolute power. The first possibility, a program of general "education" for the unwise, with the unavoidable dilution of knowledge entailed by that project, could more properly be called a propaganda campaign from the perspective of the wise.<sup>36</sup> It would mean abandoning the pursuit of wisdom and occupying oneself with the "low" requirements of politics. The wise man, therefore, would not desire to rule. The second possibility, absolute rule of the wise, Strauss suggested, would require the brutal suppression of the unwise; it was to be anticipated that such rule would therefore be resisted with the same brutal force. Reflection on the classical position, as Strauss

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<sup>35</sup>Allan Bloom, *Giants and Dwarves: Essays 1960-1990* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 236.

<sup>36</sup>Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy? And Other Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988; originally published by The Free Press, 1959), 46.

presented it, led us to the inescapable conclusion that, “what pretends to be absolute rule of the wise will in fact be absolute rule of unwise men.” This, in turn, meant that divisions would always be a permanent part of political life, and that any attempt to overcome these divisions would only succeed in intensifying them. “For the universal state requires universal agreement regarding the fundamentals,” Strauss wrote, “and such agreement is possible only on the basis of genuine knowledge or of wisdom. Agreement based on opinion can never become universal agreement. Every faith that lays claim to universality, i.e., to be universally accepted, of necessity provokes a counter-faith which raises the same claim.” Owing to the absence of a common ground of agreement between the wise few and the unwise many, Strauss argued, the classics regarded universal agreement as an impossible ideal. “The utmost in the direction of universality that one could expect is, then an absolute rule of unwise men who control about half of the globe, the other half being ruled by other unwise men.” If this should sound like a bleak prospect, Strauss hinted that it could be worse: “It is not obvious that the extinction of all independent states but two will be a blessing. But it is obvious that absolute rule of the unwise is less desirable than their limited rule: the unwise ought to rule under law.” While both halves might be subject to the rule of unwise men, in the best case scenario, only one of these halves would be under their “absolute” rule; if fortune was with them, “the other half” would only live under the limited rule of “other unwise men.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Strauss, “Restatement,” 193.

In reading this analysis, one can hardly avoid reflecting on the global political reality that was quickly taking shape at the time of Strauss' writing.<sup>38</sup> In the perception of many, the world was dividing into two Cold War factions, defined by two antithetical political alternatives: absolute rule and the rule of law. The classical view, as Strauss laid it out, almost seemed to presage the emergence of this Manichean divide. The most fundamental division in political life, according to Strauss, was one between the wise and the unwise. "Liberal or constitutional democracy," while far from perfect, "comes closer to what the classics demanded than any alternative that is viable in our age."<sup>39</sup> It allowed wisdom to survive by limiting the power of the unwise. If there was to be any hope for wisdom's recovery and survival, then, it lay in protecting this alternative. Some of Strauss' strongest critics, as well as his staunchest supporters, have understood his argument as a call for a spirited defence of Western liberalism's American homeland. As Thomas L. Pangle has written, "those of civic ambition who are influenced by Strauss' reflections" are likely to possess, and to provoke in others, an awareness of "the fragility at the heart of our regime and to become all the more aware of the need for thoughtful action not only to defend modern liberalism but to shore it up."<sup>40</sup>

There was an inherent elitism in Strauss' defence of American liberal democracy. What elevated the United States above rival regimes was the possibility that

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<sup>38</sup>Alexander Duff has made the suggestion in his own discussion of "Tyranny and Wisdom," that "it would be interesting to consider Strauss and Grant's different judgments of the American regime," a discussion which "might include some consideration of the Cold War and the Soviet Union, for example..." (123, n. 20).

<sup>39</sup>Strauss, "Restatement," 194.

<sup>40</sup>Pangle, *Leo Strauss*, 83. See also James Atlas, "A Classicist's Legacy: New Empire Builders," *New York Times*, (May 4, 2005, Week in Review); Blitz, "Government Practice and the School of Strauss"; Shadia B. Drury, *Leo Strauss and the American Right* (New York: St Martin's, 1997), 152; Mark Lilla, "The Closing of the Straussian Mind," *The New York Review of Books* (November 4, 2004), 55-59.

the American system offered the “few” (through its legal protection of the rights of the individual) the opportunity to rise above the common concerns of the many and pursue the path of wisdom (although by allowing those who were capable of it to attain to this higher sort of understanding we could apparently expect the moral tenor of the entire society to be raised). The need to defend this possibility was given particular urgency in our time by the fact that the wisdom of the classics had been all but lost to us. As we shall see, Grant found reason to question this defence of liberalism. He found that he could not take for granted that the pursuit of the “genuine knowledge or wisdom” of the classics should be elevated above all other activities, for it was far from clear that such wisdom or knowledge was attainable for us in the first place. When one fleshes out the implications of Grant’s doubt, one can begin to see how it might inform certain of his judgments in the realm of foreign policy. For if the search for classical wisdom or knowledge that Strauss advocated was in fact a futile one, it would seem that, perceptions notwithstanding, there was no plausible basis for elevating the activities or goals of the few above those of the many, and more to the point, there was no obvious basis for elevating the regime that legally protects the activities of the few from the regime which offers no such guarantees (and in fact sees such protection as the basis of oligarchy).<sup>41</sup> Moved to exert itself against its enemy by an exaggerated sense of its

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<sup>41</sup> In *Lament for a Nation* Grant challenged the belief of “American conservatives” that “whatever the imperfections of American government, it remains at least formally constitutional, while the Marxist societies are tyrannies,” and therefore that “the United States must be accepted as the guardian of Western values against the perversions of Western revolutionary thought as they have spread into the East” (74). This thinking, he said with reference to Strauss (73, n. 18), was based on the contention that the United States had been founded on a philosophical “wave” which “started with Machiavelli and Hobbes and found its bourgeois expression in such British thinkers as Locke, Smith, and Hume.” Although this wave of thought represented an attack on the classical teaching, it still contained some residue of “the classical view of nature” which placed limits on man’s ability to shape his own political reality. Communism, on the other hand, had its philosophical roots in a second wave of thinkers beginning with Rousseau, and spreading “out into the world through Kant and Hegel,” which posed a more radical break with the

unique mission in the world, the power which saw itself as the great protector of liberal freedoms would ultimately accelerate the expansion of a society not fundamentally different from the one emanating from Moscow. Although Grant was less direct about the matter in “Tyranny and Wisdom,” elsewhere he left no doubt that when he spoke of the “universal and homogeneous state” as the dominant modern “ideal,” he included the United States in that modernity. Indeed he repeatedly described America as the very “spearhead” of our modernity, and “the most radical force for the homogenizing of the world.”<sup>42</sup>

### **Strauss’ Silence on Technology**

If Grant had reservations about Strauss’ appeal to the teaching of the classics, it is partly because it implied what he saw as an almost unthinkable practical challenge to modernity. For Strauss, the “classical framework”<sup>43</sup> was superior to what he labeled “the modern notion of philosophy or science” because the latter rejected the classical insight that only the few are capable of wisdom. Modern philosophy or science, therefore, not merely was incapable of understanding the real nature of modern tyranny, which was characterized by the rule of the unwise many; modern tyranny was in fact “made possible by modern science.”

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classical view and fed utopian political aspirations. That doubt about the perfectibility of the political realm, which had earlier sheltered the individual from the forces of political manipulation and control were progressively eroded. Grant allowed that there is “some truth in the claim of American conservatives. Their society does preserve constitutional government and respect for the legal rights of individuals in a way that the eastern tyrannies do not” (75). But he argued that it was today founded less on the classical view of our natural limits, and the concern with freedom that grew out of that view, and more on a sort of political inertia which reified the (mostly formal) institutions and social structures already in existence. The defenders of liberal society today were members of the “influential classes” whose very status was linked to a doctrinal attachment to the liberal guarantees of individual property ownership, limited government and the like. Conservatives in our epoch, Grant remarked, maintained whatever “structure of power,” is required to prevent political dissolution. “They provide the external force necessary if the society is to be kept together” (79).

<sup>42</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 58.

<sup>43</sup> Strauss, “Restatement,” 178.



Grant was concerned with exploring one particular implication of this claim about modern science that he felt received conspicuously little direct treatment in Strauss' writing. According to Strauss, classical thought contained an understanding of our ends that was out of reach of the broad mass of humankind. Modern science, on the other hand, lowered the bar and looked to ends or goods that could be grasped by all. One way that this new orientation manifested itself was in the sort of knowledge that was capable of "popularization or diffusion,"<sup>44</sup> for instance by being communicated in the form of methods or formulas. Secondly, modern science directed our practical efforts away from lofty goals that were unlikely to be realized by ordinary individuals and sought to produce certain, and measurable, ends or results. Strauss described it as a science "based on the unlimited progress in the 'conquest of nature.'"<sup>45</sup> Grant was intent on emphasizing the fact that this conquest found its clearest manifestation in our society in the modern pursuit of "technological advance."<sup>46</sup>

Strauss' writing, Grant pointed out, raised an implicit theoretical challenge to the modern natural sciences and the technological achievements they support. For the very same reason, Grant found himself compelled, in "the interests of charity," to offer a defence of modernity: "[N]o writing about technological progress and the rightness of imposing limits upon it should avoid expressing the fact that the poor, the diseased, the hungry and the tired can hardly be expected to contemplate any such limitation with the equanimity of the philosopher."

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 97. In later writings Grant specified that the word "technology" described both a specific type of understanding and a means of making something: the "unity of knowing and making." He preferred the English word technology, to the French word "technique," in which this fusion of *techne* (art) and *logos* (science) was lost. Grant, *George Grant in Conversation*, 133; Grant, "Thinking about Technology," in *Technology and Justice* (Toronto: Anansi, 1986), 12.

“Strauss is clearly aware of this fact,” Grant added. “One could wish however that he had drawn out the implication of it in the present controversy.”<sup>47</sup> Indeed, as Grant noted elsewhere, the subject of modern science was largely absent from Strauss’ writing as a whole.<sup>48</sup> Grant’s criticism confronts us with a rather curious portrait of Strauss: Grant presented him as a thinker who raised the most serious critical doubts about technology, implicitly, while rarely discussing technology *as such*. Strauss’ strategy begins to make sense, however, when we consider that the technological sciences were, for Strauss, one manifestation of a larger revolution in thought whose animating principle “can best be stated negatively.”<sup>49</sup> Its representative thinkers, men like Machiavelli and Hobbes, turned away from contemplation of those ends identified as man’s highest by ancient thinkers like Plato and Aristotle, and instead directed thought toward the more mundane project that Bacon labeled the “conquest of nature.” Although Strauss sometimes borrowed the language of these thinkers to describe their project, he rejected the positive meaning that they gave to it. Instead, he assessed modern thought from what he took to be the perspective of the classical tradition that it initially rejected and has all but replaced today. Technology, therefore, was implicitly treated as symptomatic of a “loss” that had been effected through this turn in modern thought.

To reach the heart of Grant’s challenge to Strauss one must contemplate the intrinsic difficulties in communicating something that has been lost. If the reader does not already recognize the loss, how can he or she be convinced that such a loss exists? Strauss offered us the authority of the scholar, or philosopher. He had, in a sense, turned

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>48</sup> Cayley, *George Grant in Conversation*, 72.

<sup>49</sup> Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?*, 40, 47.

away from the dogmas of contemporary thought to gain an intimate familiarity with those same Greek teachers that modernity has rejected. But must we rely entirely on Strauss' authority, or can he direct us to those same teachings in such a way that will allow us to make up our own minds? Grant took a step in this direction by following many of the textual references adduced by Strauss to support his interpretation of the classical teaching. In particular, Grant attempted to assess Strauss' assertion that "the classical political philosophers considered the possibility of a science that issues in the conquest of nature as " 'unnatural,' *i.e.*, as destructive of humanity' and that therefore they turned their minds away from it." Grant found some evidence to support the claim. Most notably, he saw a clear Xenophontic statement that "Socrates considered the practical application of physical philosophy to the control of nature to be 'meddling' in a way that men should not."<sup>50</sup> But Grant was quick to add that the matter could not be settled in this way. And it is clear, from this example anyway, why Strauss' scholarly direction brings us no closer to breaking our dependence on authority, however deeply it may lead us into the texts. At most we can say that we have momentarily turned our attention away from the possibilities of modern technology, by learning from Strauss, who has also turned away, by learning from the ancients, who also turned away. But lest this take on the appearance of a very mundane joke, we must assume that someone, somewhere down the line, had a reason for turning away. We must assume, in other words, that the ancients were not only turning *away* from something, but were also turning *toward* something, *i.e.*, toward a "higher" sort of knowledge that informed their rejection of a technologically oriented science.

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<sup>50</sup>Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 97.

One of Grant's central criticisms of Strauss was that his argument relied too heavily on an appeal to the authority of the Greek texts he knew so well. Grant made his point in a somewhat understated fashion. He began by quoting the following passage from Strauss: "The classics...knew that one cannot be distrustful of political or social change without being distrustful of technological change....They demanded the strict moral-political supervision of inventions; the good and wise city will determine which inventions are to be made use of and which are to be suppressed."<sup>51</sup> This, as Grant had already noted, was a claim of tremendous significance for us moderns who had so totally given ourselves over to the possibilities and promises of technology. Since such comments struck at the very heart of our practical reality, the matter could not be left at vague pronouncements.<sup>52</sup> "To ask the question, by what criteria the rulers of the good

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 101.

<sup>52</sup>Given the political context within which Grant was writing, it is no doubt significant that he challenged Strauss' silence on technology in the name of "the Marxists."

To the Marxists, the Greek philosophers turned their backs on technological advance because they wished to perpetuate the aristocratic society in which the majority of human beings served a minority through peasant and slave labour. The classical conception of philosophy and science, as the attempt to understand the eternal causes of all things, was the response of an aristocratic class desiring to perpetuate the social order most acceptable to itself. The theoretical standpoint of Greek science, admiring the contemplation of necessity, was related to the fear that the practical applications of science would destroy the privileged positions of those who were enabled to have leisure because of the work of the masses. (1969a: 98)

In Strauss' *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971; originally published in 1953) a book regarded by some as a classic defence of the American polity, a single passage is explicitly devoted to answering what Strauss labeled the "rather common" view of "Marxist or crypto-Marxist" thinkers (143). The Marxist charge, he indicated, was based on a denial of the very different nature of the philosopher's activity—on a "denial of the possibility of philosophy." Not able to understand the ends pursued by the philosopher, the Marxist also failed to appreciate why the philosopher's concerns had to remain exclusive of those of "the many." "The common people," Strauss wrote, "had no sympathy for philosophy and philosophers. As Cicero put it, philosophy was suspect to the many." To sum up the Marxist critique of the classical philosopher, and Strauss' brief response: The Marxist charged that the distinction between the philosopher and the many was based on class interests rather than on differences intrinsic to their activities; Strauss responded by arguing that the Marxist failed to see that the philosopher and the many were not separated by class interests but by differences intrinsic to their activities. Strauss' reaction to the Marxist attack was basically to reassert the very claim that was being assailed, namely the claim to the privileged understanding of the philosopher. There was little room for middle ground in this debate. Notably absent from Strauss' response was any mention of the classical philosopher's "presuppositions." In *Time as History*, published in 1969, Grant briefly provided a justification, part political, part philosophical, for studying Marx. He described what he called an

and wise city were to make these determinations, or did in fact make these determinations,” Grant wrote, “would, I presume, draw from Strauss the reply: by that virtue and piety which are described in the leading classical books on moral and political philosophy.” Grant’s “presumption,” revealed a certain apprehension about Strauss’ writing. What his comment suggests is that Strauss’ argument, at least in its present form, stood on a certain circularity. The classical writers, Strauss wrote, advised that the good and wise city would place limits on technological change. And how do we know that this advice is good advice? Because we find it in the classical writers. “The issue,” Grant concluded, “then returns to the completeness, adequacy and concreteness of that teaching. Strauss’ position would be easier to understand if he would explicate the classical teaching on this matter.”<sup>53</sup>

Grant’s argument suggested that to “explicate the classical teaching,” Strauss had to do more than simply affirm that the classics did not regard nature as something to be conquered through the application of scientific reason. Instead, Strauss had to offer some sort of positive understanding of how the ancients *actually did experience nature*. Having delivered this challenge, however, Grant immediately followed it with another quote, which he viewed as “germane” to the subject. In this passage, Strauss appeared to acknowledge the very need that Grant had identified, namely the need to recover the

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“inoculation” against Marx’s thought that had taken place in the West since 1945. Because “[o]ur chief rival empire has been ruled by men who used Marx’s doctrine as their official language,” Grant explained, “[t]he thought of Marx... appeared as a threatening and subverting disease” (1969b: 49). This situation produced a “spate of refutations of Marx... [w]ritten with the purpose of inoculating others against any contagion, rather than with thinking the thoughts that Marx had thought.” While Grant actually acknowledged that “[m]en may have to attempt this inoculation if they are concerned with the stability of a particular society,” he felt that it was an ineffective way of “inoculating those most important to inoculate.” Grant seems to have suggested that those who appeared to have been successfully inoculated were usually more docile types to begin with, unlikely to be stung by politically dangerous thought.

<sup>53</sup> Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 101.

classical understanding of nature. “It would seem,” Strauss wrote, “that the [classical] notion of the beneficence of nature or the primacy of the Good must be restored by being rethought through a return to the fundamental experience from which it is derived.”<sup>54</sup> What is more, Strauss even appears to have provided some indication of where this might be found. “The opinion that there occur periodic cataclysms,” he wrote, “in fact took care of any apprehension regarding an excessive development of technology or regarding the danger that man’s inventions might become his masters and his destroyers. Viewed in this light the natural cataclysms appear as a manifestation of the beneficence of nature.”<sup>55</sup>

Since Grant provided very little context and no commentary with this quote, we cannot be entirely certain of his purposes in recording it. Was he acknowledging that, while Strauss did not offer a complete teaching on the subject, he at least provided some preliminary indications of where we may look to rediscover the classical alternative to the modern natural sciences? Careful reflection on Strauss’ words in fact opens up another possibility. There is a strange ambiguity at the heart of this passage that raises doubts as to Strauss’ intentions. On the one hand, he wrote of “rethinking” the classical idea of nature, and of “returning” to the fundamental experience underlying that experience. The language here could be read as a proposal, an outline for a project to be freely undertaken by competent individuals. Yet the sort of experience that is being sought would seem to defy such a voluntaristic searching. According to classical opinion, the beneficence of nature manifested itself in “periodic cataclysms” that saved us from being enslaved by our own technology. As Grant made clear, for most people

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 102; Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1959), 299.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted by Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 102.

living in the modern world, it was hardly self-evident that nature would be acting beneficently by destroying the very technological edifice on which our fondest dreams and hopes had been built. Indeed, if such a lesson were self-evident, on any theoretical analysis, we would reign in our technological advancement. Presumably, then, it is only through the very experience of the destruction of the technological edifice that its malignancy in our lives is revealed, along with the beneficence of a violent, but restorative nature. The classical teaching articulated by Strauss in some ways recalls the Old Testament story of the Tower of Babel. In this story too, it is not self-evident that humankind's most ambitious projects deserve to be met with catastrophic failure. We know that the destruction of the tower was good only because the lesson is revealed to us, in retrospect, by the author himself.

Grant took up the subject of technology to address what he saw as a lacuna in Strauss' position. In short, he felt that Strauss paid insufficient attention to the strong moral argument to be made in favour of modernity, given the undeniable material benefits of the modern technological sciences. Grant made a point of noting that this was not simply an oversight on Strauss' part. Strauss was "clearly aware" of the argument, Grant thought, but Grant offered no speculation as to why Strauss avoided a more adequate discussion of technology.<sup>56</sup>

Grant argued that, in evoking his unsettling portrait of the universal and homogeneous state, Strauss was insufficiently clear about the fact that it rested on

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 103. Elsewhere Grant warned the serious thinker against entertaining "any belief in a return to some past. Why? Because if he thinks that any return to some thinker of the past is possible—even to the greatest thinkers, Plato, Aristotle, or Hegel, incomparably greater as I have said than anything he is capable of—then he will not face the obscurity which comes with the situation of mastery... Political science has become technical just because its practitioners do not face the fact that the political has become obscure for us in the technological age." Grant, "George C. Nowlan Lectures," 624.

unproven classical assumptions. This same tendency to overstate the evidence of the classical teaching also led to a peculiarly negative account of modernity. In particular, technology was understood by Strauss, not as part of a positive project involving a new understanding of nature, but primarily as a rejection of an older, classical understanding of nature. Grant, by contrast, tried to demonstrate that it was far from clear in reading Strauss what exactly this classical understanding might be. Hence, there would seem to be room to question the “negative” account of technology that was present in Strauss’ thought.

### **The English-Speaking Tradition**

By drawing attention to what he regarded as Strauss’ unsatisfying treatment of the topic of modern technology, Grant pointed to a curious and somewhat troubling feature of Strauss’ writing. Namely, Strauss generally rejected the universal and homogeneous state with confidence and clarity, he failed to provide a similarly clear and probing exploration of the *consequences* of rejecting it. More particularly, Strauss did not provide a measured and philosophically convincing discussion of exactly what stood to be won or lost by turning away from modern science and technology. Without such a discussion, there would seem to be good reason for more philosophically questioning minds to be wary of Strauss’ strong denunciations of the universal and homogeneous state.

On the face of it, Grant seems to have pointed to a shortcoming in Strauss’ analysis, insofar as it did not explicitly lay out what a return to classical science would mean for a modern technological society. On closer analysis, however, it becomes clear that Grant suspected Strauss’ silence on the topic of technology to be deliberate. To



understand the reasoning behind this suggestion, it is necessary to look at Grant's account of the two distinct purposes animating Strauss' work. Ostensibly Grant set out to describe these two purposes in order to pre-empt the confusion that he felt was likely to greet Strauss' readers. He commented that Strauss' intentions "might well have been made clearer," and even expressed his hope that they would be made clearer in future editions of *On Tyranny*.<sup>57</sup> Yet, Grant also made the suggestion that Strauss had deliberately made his intentions difficult to grasp. More precisely, Grant hypothesized that Strauss had consciously introduced a certain ambiguity into his writing in order to send different messages to different audiences.

More recently, Mark Lilla has cast a stark light on the striking divergence between North American and European scholarly opinion on Strauss. Rejecting the possibility that this split represents any ambiguity in Strauss' writing, however, Lilla sees it as entirely the product of his interpreters. Lilla argues that in the United States, Strauss' followers believe that his thought "begins and ends with politics, specifically American politics."<sup>58</sup> American Straussians put their master's writing to partisan political purposes, Lilla reports, in some cases going so far as to invoke his legacy as the hidden justification of neo-conservative policy. Strauss' European readers, on the other hand, "...find no such partisan drift." Instead, European academics see Strauss as preoccupied "most fundamentally [with] the possibility of restoring the Socratic practice of philosophy as a way of life."<sup>59</sup> This Strauss, Lilla writes, "understood

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 93, n. 17, 103 n. 29.

<sup>58</sup>Lilla, "The Closing of the Straussian Mind," 57.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 55. Steven B. Smith has also argued against what he sees as the neoconservative misappropriation of Strauss. *Reading Leo Strauss: Politics, Philosophy, Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Unlike Lilla, who aligns Strauss with his apparently more Socratic, politically-detached European students, Smith argues that Strauss' thought led him to a deep concern with the political survival of liberal society, but makes the case that he would have sympathized with critics of neoconservative

Socrates to be a *zetetic* thinker who unraveled problems and left them in suspension.” Far from being an advocate of any particular political creed, this Strauss believed that “[p]hilosophy lives within a permanently open horizon, leaving unsettled many basic questions regarding morality and mortality.”

Lilla does not hesitate to offer his own judgment on the trans-Atlantic debate. “American life is hard on all European legacies,” he writes. “Where but in America could a European thinker convinced of the elite nature of genuine education find some of his pupils making common cause with populist politicians?”<sup>60</sup> As Lilla sees it, Strauss’ American followers have gotten him wrong, managing almost to flip his purposes on their head. While it is true that in his personal correspondences Grant was critical of some of Strauss’ American “epigones,”<sup>61</sup> he also recognized that Strauss’ purposes were complex and could not be described as simply and as clearly as Lilla would have us believe. Grant believed that to some extent Strauss cultivated the distinction between his English-speaking and his European audiences. And it is worth noting that Grant offers this speculation in an essay written well before the actual divide described by Lilla had manifested itself.

Grant’s most direct comments on the matter are found in two footnotes recording his reaction to the final paragraph of Strauss’ “Restatement.” According to Grant, Strauss’ purposes were “beautifully described” in this passage, which originally appeared only in the French version of his essay.<sup>62</sup> Grant later quoted a line from the

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foreign policy, particularly in their rejection of the 2003 American invasion of Iraq (see especially 199 and *ff*). For a thoughtful challenge to Smith’s argument, see Clifford Orwin’s review of *Reading Leo Strauss*, in *Commentary* 121:5 (May 2006), 76-78.

<sup>60</sup>Mark Lilla, “Leo Strauss: The European,” *The New York Review of Books* (October 21, 2004), 59.

<sup>61</sup>Letter to Edward Andrew, 1987 in *Selected Letters*, 369; see also his letters to David Bovenizer, 270, and Johnathan Mills, 326, in the same work.

<sup>62</sup>Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 92, n. 17.

same passage, but left it untranslated, expressing his strong wish “that Strauss would include it in any reissue of his English essay.”<sup>63</sup> In this final paragraph, Strauss drew attention to the conflicting “presuppositions” concerning the nature of Being that underlie the exchange between himself and Kojève. Their debate highlighted the philosophically questionable nature of their respective presuppositions. It demanded, in a certain sense, that they left them behind as they “apparently [turn] away from Being to Tyranny.” Although there is much more that could be said about this passage, one can certainly find in it a statement of what Grant referred to as Strauss’ primary purpose. In another footnote Grant offered some speculation as to why Strauss decided to leave this important paragraph out of the English version of *On Tyranny*: “Perhaps it is not too rash to infer that Strauss did not include it because of the general lack of interest in metaphysical questions among English-speaking intellectuals.”<sup>64</sup> He clarified this point somewhat in another note, suggesting that these same intellectuals have been content to simply treat Hegel as a “gentleman Idealist,” rather than take seriously the much more radical and unsettling implications that Kojève drew from his writing, particularly from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. While Grant once again disavowed any claim to being an expert on Hegel, he did affirm that Kojève’s interpretation of Hegel was “incomparably nearer to the original than such English interpretations as those of Caird, Bosanquet and Russell.”<sup>65</sup> Kojève’s “atheist” and “existentialist” Hegel depicted history as the progressive realization of humankind’s perfect freedom. This freedom, however, was

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 102, n. 29.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 86, n. 12. Grant repeated this sentiment at various points in his career. In a late interview with David Cayley, for example, he remarked, “people would debate this, but I think the Germans are infinitely more serious, as a philosophic people, than the English or the Americans have ever been.” *George Grant in Conversation*, 150.

<sup>65</sup>Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 84, n. 10.

achieved by cutting us free from all metaphysical supports or notions of an “ahistorical eternal order.”<sup>66</sup> In Strauss’ understated words, Kojève’s Hegel forced one to admit that the classical presuppositions concerning the most fundamental matters, that is, concerning the very nature of Being, were “not self-evident.”<sup>67</sup> The English-speaking intellectuals to whom Grant referred fell very generally into one of two camps. British “idealists” ignored the deepest implications of Hegel’s thought, revealed by Kojève’s existentialist interpretation of his work, which saw in the idea of History a profound challenge to all previous beliefs, grounded as they were in notions of an ahistorical order. For these men, the discovery of History did not so much force us to confront a crisis of meaning at the heart of modernity, but in a sense supplied a new ideal to guide modernity. Realists like Russell, on the other hand, caricatured Hegel as a metaphysician who pretended to an *a priori* understanding of the universe that has more in common with religion than reason.<sup>68</sup> Knowledge of the world can only be known through a “piecemeal investigation” of empirical experience, and the inductive inferences we can draw from these particular facts.

## Conclusion

If Grant showed us that Strauss’ purposes were not simple to understand, it must be said that Grant hardly made his own purposes transparent. His insistence that Strauss make his primary argument more explicit to English-speaking audiences created the

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>67</sup>Strauss, “Restatement,” 212.

<sup>68</sup>See “Chapter XIV: The Limits of Philosophical Knowledge,” in Russell’s *The Problems of Philosophy* (Home University Library, 1912). Russell labeled Hegel the “great representative in modern times” of that school of philosophers (the predominant school, in fact) who “profess to be able to prove, by a priori metaphysical reasoning, such things as the fundamental dogmas of religion, the essential rationality of the universe, the illusoriness of matter, the unreality of all evil, and so on.” Russell remarked that there was “undeniably something sublime” about Hegel’s system, but then attempts to show, in the space of a few short pages, that it ultimately rests on “much confusion and many unwarrantable assumptions.”

impression that he saw in it a more convincing response to Kojève. But in fact, Grant indicated that this response was not altogether satisfying: Strauss contended that Kojève's claim about the best possible state was not self-evident, and therefore rested on a presupposition, even though, according to Grant, Strauss clearly "knows that for Hegel-Kojève the truth about the best social order is not prior to an interpretation of history and could not be known except at a certain epoch."<sup>69</sup> (As Gerard Lebrun has written, presuppositions are precisely what Hegel claims to have overcome through his comprehensive understanding of history).<sup>70</sup> In the absence of a clear and distinct argument that might decisively disprove Hegel's contention that the ultimate truth is to be found in his historical synthesis, the most that could be said is that Kojève's argument *may* have rested on a presupposition. Strauss' argument, then, did not undermine the authority of the Hegelian intellectual in any decisive way.<sup>71</sup> As one commentator on the debate put it, if Strauss gave up his non-Hegelian philosophical commitments, "then, perhaps, [he] might become wise."<sup>72</sup> In which case, it might be

<sup>69</sup>Grant, *Technology and Empire*, 91.

<sup>70</sup>Gérard Lebrun, *La Patience du Concept: Essai sur le Discours Hégélian* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 11; Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, assembled by Raymond Queneau, edited by Allan Bloom and translated by James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1980; first published in 1969 by Basic Books from the 1947 French edition *Introduction à La Lecture de Hegel*, by Gallimard), 193. See Hegel's own comments to his students in his Introduction to *The philosophy of History* with an Appendix from *The Philosophy of Right*, translated with an Introduction by Leo Rauch (Hackett Publishing: Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1988; originally compiled in 1840 and reprinted in 1928 by Glockner in Hegel's *Sämtliche Werke*): "The only thought which philosophy brings with it, in regard to history, is the simple thought of Reason—the thought that reason rules the world, and that world history has therefore been rational in its course. This conviction and insight is a *presupposition* in regard to history as such, although it is not a presupposition in philosophy itself" (12). "What I have said so far, and will say again, is not just to be taken as a presupposition of our science, but as a summary of the totality—as the *result* of the discussion upon which we are embarking, a result that is known to *me* because I already know that totality [italics original]" (13).

<sup>71</sup>"At no point in his writings," Grant remarked, had Strauss "argued at length with Hegel's claim to have included history within metaphysics, and with the resulting relation between concepts and time." *Technology and Empire*, 92, n. 17.

<sup>72</sup>Barry Cooper, *The End of History: An Essay on Modern Hegelianism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 336.

added, Strauss would also come to realize that his earlier “classical” presuppositions concerning the ahistorical, or eternal nature of truth, are in fact false.

Strauss’ French-language “Restatement” would appear to have left matters at a draw between two mutually admiring thinkers. Strauss indicated that he was compelled to recognize the position of such a worthy interlocutor, even if, in the end, he would return to his own. But Grant raised uncertainties as to whether there really could be such an accommodating resolution to the debate. By remaining open to Kojève’s Hegelian thesis, Strauss remained open to fundamental doubts about his own position. Instead of being left with firm opinions about the nature of human experience, he was left with questions. In a later essay, Grant remarked that the attempt to contemplate the origins of things was “an abyss in which our minds are swallowed up. That it is an abyss easily leads to the modern assertion that it is not a real question, and therefore not worth thinking about.”<sup>73</sup> He then added, “[i]t is worth repeating that the recent power of the English-speaking peoples has encouraged human beings to ignore that question.”<sup>74</sup> Later in the same essay he made a similar comment about the English-speaking world, but this time using Hegel to support his claim: “Societies which are so confident of their power in the world have little need of philosophy. ‘The owl of Minerva only begins to spread its wings in the dusk.’”<sup>75</sup>

Grant believed that political power tended to promote a characteristic thoughtlessness about the question of what constituted the good for human beings, or what ends we were best fitted to pursue. “Members of classes,” he wrote, “are liable to

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<sup>73</sup>George Grant, *Technology and Justice*, 63.

<sup>74</sup>See also his remarks in “Confronting Heidegger’s *Nietzsche*,” in *The George Grant Reader*, edited by William Christian and Sheila Grant (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

<sup>75</sup>Grant, *Technology and Justice*, 81.

consider their shared conceptions of political goodness to be self-evident when their rule is not questioned at home, and when they are successfully extending their empires around the world.”<sup>76</sup> “The long ascendancy of the English-speaking peoples,”<sup>77</sup> meant that they were particularly prone to such thoughtlessness. “No other great western tradition has shown such lack of interest in thought, and in the institutions necessary to its possibility.”<sup>78</sup> Strauss believed that liberalism, as it existed in America, at least offered the sort of guarantees of individual freedom that would allow those who cared and were capable, to counter this thoughtlessness. Grant feared that the tradition of thought had become so atrophied in the liberal countries of the English-speaking world, that to seek to “shore up” the influence of liberalism against hostile ideologies was to spread this atrophy even further.<sup>79</sup> To expand the reach of liberalism was not to extend the political conditions for freedom of thought, but to feed the already overwhelming dominance of a single, monolithic ideal, the universal and homogeneous state. Grant felt that the first task of thought today was to try to recognize just how determinatively this ideal shaped the aspirations of our age. He did not encourage the belief that one could escape it, since such a belief was more likely to stem from a failure to recognize the pervasiveness of its influence. He therefore rejected the attitude of conservatives within the liberal West, most particularly in the United States, who believed that in spurning communism, they were spurning the dangers of modern utopianism.

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<sup>76</sup> Grant, *English-Speaking Justice*, 48. As Clifford Orwin summarized in his review of *English-Speaking Justice*, “absolutely nothing succeeds so absolutely as absolute success.” *University of Toronto Law Journal* 30:1 (1980), 110. The long ascendancy of Anglo-Saxon liberalism meant “that it was for all practical purposes impossible to think it. The long ascendancy of the English-speaking peoples fostered their sense of themselves as the vanguard of human progress, and closed them to all troubling doubt.”

<sup>77</sup> “In the case of England since Waterloo, and the United States since 1914” (ibid.)

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>79</sup> The rather dark note struck in the final line of *English-Speaking Justice* made this clear.

In recent years, foreign policy scholars in Canada have tried to fight against what has been described as the “Pearsonian myth,”<sup>80</sup> that is, the notion that Pearson and his colleagues in the Department of External Affairs after the war were guided by “idealist” aspirations<sup>81</sup> of building a peaceful international order. Against this we are offered a portrait of men committed to a “‘realist’ calculus”<sup>82</sup> that shunned the empty dream of a unified and peaceful world, governed by “a form of transnational politics.”<sup>83</sup> Recognizing that the world was at war, and that the “origins of the problem lay not with the United States, but with Soviet aggressiveness and with the ominous institutions and doctrines that were at its root,” these men, we are told, pragmatically accepted the reality of a “benign pax Americana.”<sup>84</sup> Grant argued that diplomats and politicians like Pearson, who were so busy making the *ad hoc* decisions that were meant to strengthen the postwar international order, and Canada’s place within it, were hardly in a position to reflect on the larger meaning of their actions.<sup>85</sup> In *Lament for a Nation*, Grant’s most popular book, he directed the full force of his considerable rhetorical and analytical resources against Pearson, and described the unseen ideal behind his “confused strivings.” In “Tyranny and Wisdom,” he stood back and laid out the incredibly difficult

<sup>80</sup> Greg Donaghy, “Coming off the Gold Standard: Re-assessing the ‘Golden Age’ of Canadian Diplomacy.” Available online at <http://www.suezcrisis.ca/pdfs/Coming%20off%20the%20Gold%20Standard.pdf> (accessed on 09/09/2009).

<sup>81</sup> Denis Stairs, “Realists at Work: Canadian Policy Makers and the Politics of Transition from Hot War to Cold War,” in *Canada and the Early Cold War, 1943-1957*, edited by Greg Donaghy (Ottawa: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 1998), 111. See also John English’s, “‘A fine romance’: Canada and the United Nations, 1943-1957,” in the same volume, *Le Canada au début de la guerre froide*; and Norman Hillmer, “The Foreign Policy that Never Was, 1900-1950,” Canadian External Affairs 4. Available online at [http://www.orchestrationcanada.ca/files/conference\\_papers/2002/4a-hillmer.pdf](http://www.orchestrationcanada.ca/files/conference_papers/2002/4a-hillmer.pdf) (accessed on 04/09/2009).

<sup>82</sup> Stairs, “Realists at Work,” 93.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>85</sup> Grant’s attitude was crystallized in a scathing 1964 review of Pearson’s book of published speeches, *The Four Faces of Peace*. Grant bristled at the attempt to present Pearson as a “thoughtful man in politics.” “Review of *The Four Faces of Peace*,” in *Collected Works* 3:246.



task facing anyone who wanted to try to understand the significance of this ideal for our times. “Tyranny and Wisdom” differed from *Lament* in as much as it was not taken up with any of the political figures or controversial events that preoccupied Grant in that book. But there was a way in which the former work represented a more instructive response to those figures and events. “Tyranny and Wisdom,” did not define a clear course of political action, but on the contrary, thrust the reader into a reflection on the difficult task facing anyone who wants to engage in politics with eyes wide open today. It is more likely to encourage a state of philosophical uncertainty than political resolve. But in an age when the central political alternatives seemed to be rushing confidently toward the same fate, Grant perhaps counted on uncertainty having its own practical effect.

## Conclusion

“The great experience for me was the war of 1939,” Grant once said.<sup>1</sup> “The liberalism of my youth simply could not come to terms with it.” Later in his life, he described this “great primal experience”<sup>2</sup> in slightly different language: “The war was astonishing.” To be aware that the “secular liberalism that I grew up in” now somehow “seemed inadequate to me. This was astonishment.”<sup>3</sup> I believe that Grant meant these words quite literally. The war left him feeling deeply disoriented, almost in a state of wonderment. He began to have profound doubts about the direction that his own increasingly liberal, increasingly capitalist, increasingly technological society was traveling in. These doubts, I have argued, only came to full fruition two decades after the war, in writings like “Tyranny and Wisdom,” and *Lament for a Nation*. But the seeds of this more radical uncertainty could already be seen by the early years of the war. It revealed itself, for instance, in the pensive 1941 letter that Grant sent to his mother, describing the war as a terrible flight “toward some incalculable destination. That undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns.” “Certainly the world, if it be the traveler,” Grant continued, “can never return to the destination whence it started. The wheels are set in motion down the hill and the car is gaining velocity and going faster and faster.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Grant, “Conversation: Intellectual Progress,” 62.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>3</sup> Cayley, *George Grant in Conversation*, 54.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Maude Grant, 1941, in *Selected Letters*, 74. See Chapter 1, pp. 38-9.

Grant saw Nazism as a testimony to the evil that lay in man's heart and the darkest potential of European civilization. He became acutely fearful of the West's desire to spread its power around the world, but he had little faith that the Allied countries would see their encounter with fascism as a lesson in the need for humility and restraint. On the contrary, he believed that the war would only feed the utopian desire to impose a universal order on the world that would eliminate the prospect of discord and violence once and for all. In the English-speaking world, this took the form of an even more unquestioning embrace of liberalism as the one system capable of realizing this hope. Liberalism, in turn provided the ideological justification for America's new preeminence in the world. For a brief period after the war, Grant hoped that America's influence in the world—and more particularly its influence on Canada—could be offset somewhat by a reinvigorated, and more ecumenical British Empire or Commonwealth. But as I have argued, it soon became evident to Grant that he had underestimated the part that liberalism had played in shaping Britain's international role in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In a certain sense, America, with its more robust form of liberalism, was the natural-born successor to an empire which had largely exhausted itself over the course of two world wars anyway.<sup>5</sup> Grant also briefly considered the possibility that some form of socialism might provide countries like Canada with a means of countering the influence of American liberalism and capitalism. But his reading of Marx convinced him that socialism had been built upon the same conception of human freedom found in liberalism—a conception which Grant claimed was inextricably bound to the modern desire to dominate the world through technology.

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<sup>5</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 84-85.

Thus Grant came to experience radical doubt about the two major ideological alternatives of the postwar period. This did not amount to an explicit rejection of these alternatives, but rather, an inability to say with certainty whether they should be rejected or accepted. This doubt, while perhaps best described as “philosophical,” was nevertheless also dependent upon something other than philosophy. Grant’s misgivings about the modern political projects being pursued in the name of liberalism and socialism were grounded in a vague sense that there was something important in the older traditions and practices which were being replaced by them. These traditions, which had never been articulated in a particularly clear or philosophically coherent manner in the first place,<sup>6</sup> were further obscured by the powerful teachings of modernity. These teachings issued in a society that made “freedom...the first principle—the freedom to change any order that stands in the way of technological advance.”<sup>7</sup>

The problem for Grant, then, was how to communicate his concerns for traditions that remained largely inchoate or inarticulate. To some extent, Grant obviated this problem by describing Canada as nation that had already “ceased to exist.” By invoking the country’s traditions as an absence, he avoided the necessity of offering a positive description of them. But as many readers of Grant’s work argued, it seemed that the reports of Canada’s death had been somewhat exaggerated. Robert Laxer, a young member of the Waffle, whose involvement in the Vietnam protest movement had brought him into contact with Grant, offered a personal testimony to the paradoxical effects that *Lament for a Nation* had on him and others: “Here was a crazy old

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 84-85.

philosopher of religion at McMaster and he woke up half our generation. He was saying Canada is dead, and by saying it he was creating a country. The book's an epic poem to Canada written with incredible energy and anger."<sup>8</sup> In the 1970 Introduction to the second edition of his book, Grant himself drew back from his more absolute position and admitted to seeing "stirrings of nationalism" within the country,<sup>9</sup> both amongst the political leaders of the country,<sup>10</sup> and more hopefully still, "among the young," where "the desire for independence is greater than for many generations."<sup>11</sup>

Grant was partly referring to the youth protest over the American war in Vietnam, protests which he himself had participated in. Grant thought that there was something to commend in these acts of protest—"who can tell how much further this country would have been directly implicated in the war if politicians were not aware that there was deep suspicion of the American government's motives right across this country?"<sup>12</sup>—but at the same time, he warned against an exaggerated sense of self-righteousness. He remarked that it did "not take much intelligence or patriotism to be

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Stephen Azzi, *Walter Gordon and the Rise of Canadian Nationalism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 127. Azzi offers a similar quote from the journalist Charles Taylor: "Grant had indeed woken us up. Soon I became aware that his book had become a Bible for younger nationalists, whether we called ourselves conservatives, socialists or even liberals. Somehow he had shaken us out of our lethargy and made us determined to prove him wrong" (ibid.). Shortly after Grant's death Robert Fulford wrote that "*Lament for a Nation* turned out to be one of the most influential Canadian books of the 1960s, but in the end it appeared to disprove its thesis...Paradoxically, the referee's announcement that the game was over spurred the players on the Canadian side to unprecedented efforts. The next two decades brought a more intense awareness of Canadian culture than any previous period in our history." "Grant's Passing is Nationalism's Loss," in *The Financial Times (of Canada)*, (1988) 60.

<sup>9</sup> *Lament for a Nation*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> "Nationalism has a clearer place, even in the present Liberal administration [of Pierre Trudeau], than it ever had in the King, St. Laurent or Pearson eras of that party" (Ibid., 10). Grant would later repudiate this view, writing that "as for Trudeau, he incites me to rage. It is very good that now all the provinces, except Ontario, know that he is trying to destroy their autonomy as societies," excerpt from a letter to Gaston Laurion, March 19, 1981 in Christian and Grant, *The George Grant Reader*, 103.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>12</sup> Grant, "The Value of Protest," 429.

glad that one's children are not drafted for that war,"<sup>13</sup> and pointed out that even as Canada protested Washington's actions in the international realm, "below the surface" we welcomed a deepening economic integration with our rich neighbour.<sup>14</sup>

These remarks, I would argue, provide some indication of the limited nature of Grant's political intentions in *Lament for a Nation*. Grant recognized that the country's formal existence was bound to linger on much longer than its traditions.<sup>15</sup> By invoking those traditions largely as an absence, as I have argued, Grant recognized that he was offering little positive direction for how Canadians might resist America's influence at the level of their day-to-day lives where those traditions were lived out. "Nationalist stirrings," when awakened, were instead bound to be articulated in reaction to the more blatant thrusts of American imperialism—that is, in opposition to its more obvious attacks on the formal political sovereignty of nations.

The argument can be made that, for Grant, the one place where Canadians were still likely to engage in meaningful political action, however limited, was in the realm of foreign policy. While the nation's economic integration with the United States has greatly accelerated since Grant's death,<sup>16</sup> Canadians still express suspicion when American foreign policy pushes out into the world, heedless of national boundaries. This was shown most clearly in 2003 when Jean Chretien's Liberal government, supported by a large majority of Canadians, rejected Washington's call to join in the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>14</sup> Grant, *Lament for a Nation*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>16</sup> A week after Grant's death in September of 1988, the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement was signed into existence. It was followed by the North American Free Trade Agreement, which was formalized in January of 1994.

military invasion of Iraq.<sup>17</sup> Michael Byers, who believes that Grant's central influence has been to breed political indifference in Canada, points to the refusal to participate in Iraq as evidence that the country is capable of throwing off the legacy of *Lament for a Nation*.<sup>18</sup> He is amongst many who cheer Canada on to a more confident role in the world, where it may chart a unique course for itself and jettison the tiresome burden of self-doubt that it has too long carried around. But I would suggest that Byers has misjudged both the political effects of Grant's writings, and also the possible scope for Canadian nationalism today. It may well be that in moments when our allies are lurching confidently into the unknown, the sort of doubt that Grant encouraged has been our saving grace. It may also be in these same moments of doubt that the nation has its most distinctive role to play.

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<sup>17</sup> An EKOS Research poll in March of 2003 found that "71 per cent of those polled backed the decision by the Liberal government," while "a clear majority of 60 per cent say they object to the military move by U.S President George W. Bush." Tim Harper, "Canadians Back Chrétien on War, Poll Finds," *Toronto Star* (March 22, 2003). Accessed 10/09/09 on-line at <http://25461.vws.magma.ca/admin/articles/torstar-24-03-2003>.

<sup>18</sup> Byers, *Intent for a Nation*, 12.

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