

The New Criterion

Notes & Comments October 2003

O Canada?

On Paul Lewis in The Globe and Mail.

“H umor” is not a word that leaps to mind when we think of the Canadian newspaper *The Globe and Mail*. “Ponderous,” perhaps; “instinct with liberal clichés,” undoubtedly; but *funny*? We didn’t think it was possible, either. But we were wrong. The venerable Canadian paper has just introduced an hilarious new column. Although written by an American, it reads like the genuine Yukon product that it is. The first—possibly the only—installment appeared on September 22 under the title “Can We Democrats Be Your Next Province?” Written by Paul Lewis, a professor of English at Boston College, this verbal bijou is one of the most spectacular examples of parody we have read in—well, in a very long time.

W hen it comes to the rhetorical strains of smarmy, self-righteous liberalism, Professor Lewis has perfect pitch. Even his governing conceit is perfect. Like Pope in “The Rape of the Lock,” he dilates on an absurdity in order to cast a clarifying light on moral pomposity. For Pope it was a lock of hair. For Professor Lewis it is the proposition that the “blue states”—those bits of America that, home to universities, Hollywood, and other engines of political deformation, voted for Al Gore in 2000—should secede and become part of Canada. It is a delicious thought, and Professor Lewis handles the spoof with consummate skill. “Having endured the outrages of the 2000 presidential ‘election’ and the 9/11-empowered Republicans’ reactionary policies,” he writes with comical dudgeon, “progressive Democrats, Greens and Independents across the United States are smouldering.”

In stunned disbelief, we have signed petitions, given money to progressive causes, and joined street protests. But arghhh! and aarghhh! again, many of us have had it. We’re fed up and need to move on—or out. But where to go?

A map of the state-by-state voting in 2000 suggests the obvious answer... . In the most peaceful and democratic

way, without invoking images of Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee, these states need to secede from the Union, reform into provinces and join Canada.

As soon as one considers the idea, the advantages become obvious. Citizens of the new Canadian provinces would enjoy basic entitlements and benefits unheard of in the U.S., including: universal health care; good and affordable colleges and universities; good mass transit in major cities; lower rates of violent crime and pollution; affordable prescription drugs; and enhanced respect for the civil rights of all people, including gays and lesbians.

What a sassy wit is Professor Lewis! Notice how cleverly he aims his barbs, how skillfully he has tailored his parody.

In the United States, there are people who might think that Professor Lewis was in earnest—that he actually meant what he said about “universal health care” in Canada and so on. But Professor Lewis was writing in a Canadian newspaper for denizens of that vast U.S. protectorate to the north, and he of course knew that *they* could be counted on to see the cruel irony of his words. “Universal health care,” forsooth! A universal gurney on the hospital ward is more like it—unless you are lucky enough to hobble to the United States to get your appendix out, your hip replaced, your cataracts removed.

As for the rest of Professor Lewis’s list, just think of how happy most Canadians are to be able to go to Dalhousie instead of Harvard, to McGill instead of Yale, to the University of Toronto instead of the University of California: what lucky creatures they are! And those entitlements! Professor Lewis must have known how it would sting when his readers absorbed his words and then looked at their tax bill and pondered the depredations of their nanny-state government. What about violence? Professor Lewis of course knows that violent crime is way down in American cities. Out on the great plains or the Pacific Northwest or the Vermont woods it’s the same or lower than in Canada, and for the same reason: there is, statistically, nobody there. (Notice how coyly Professor Lewis keeps silent about Canada’s status as a haven for terrorists: now there’s a source of real violence.)

We suspect that Professor Lewis will soon be snapped up by some canny Republican politician as a speech writer. His talent for exposing the preposterousness of left-wing causes exceeds even that of *The New York Times*'s Paul Krugman, another master of the genre. What a potent weapon of ridicule he would be on the staff of some aspiring right-winger. Someone has suggested to us that we have Professor Lewis all wrong, that he actually *endorses* what he wrote in *The Globe and Mail*. We don't believe it for a minute. After all Professor Lewis is an adult. He teaches English in a well-regarded American college. Yet he writes with scabrous glee that

We new Canadians will (shortly) acquire a national leader capable of producing coherent sentences in at least two languages. We will leave behind a U.S. composed of increasingly polluted semi-tropical and desert states inhabited by citizens hell-bent on posting the Ten Commandments in public washrooms, installing a Star Wars defence system around fast-food restaurants, and generally doing what they can to bring on the Apocalypse.

Only a moron, you say, could believe such tripe. We don't deny it. Which is why we are so sure that Professor will soon be embraced as a clever Republican strategist. We are grateful to *The Globe and Mail* for catapulting this prodigious talent to public notice.

This article originally appeared in The New Criterion, Volume 22 Number 2 , on page 1

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