

Western Separatism, Sovereignty, or Solipsism?

May 2, 2025

Trevor Bearance

I live in small-town Saskatchewan nevertheless in the shadow of multinational potash corporations. I substitute teach in rural schools. I enumerated the last census. I say I will always have summerfallow dirt in my ears, grease under my fingernails, and grain dust in my lungs from all the farm work I have done.

I worked polls for the last federal election. I even ran as an Independent in the 2016 provincial one. I think I have some in-depth idea of how people think, feel, and vote here.

The blast I got from the aggrieved public during the 2021 Census in the midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic was ferocious. Many enumerators quit after the first round so I did the follow-up with the most reluctant/resistant/angry people in some “delicate” circumstances. Statistics Canada, so willfully obtuse, ended up incensing me as much as anyone. When I described the experience to Mr. Donald Savoie—our Acadian most astute observer of the Canadian federation,—he replied the sorry saga left him feeling “Rocanville might be 3000 miles from Ottawa, but Ottawa is 10 000 miles from Rocanville.” After helping wrap up the mess that was Census 2021, I vowed I would never do that to my people, my country, and myself again. I did my best with an impassioned letter to blister paint on Ottawa office walls, but of course, nothing came of it.

Despite being somewhat of a progressive—does anyone remember what a Red Tory was?—I once had a Reform Party membership. I then watched Stephen Harper and the social conservative pack remove “Progressive” from the party name—even if “Progressive” came from an honourable movement earlier that century foreshadowing the very initiative Reform purported to serve—turning the party into the Barbarism Hotline gang.

The Conservative Party that Reform produced did little, if anything, to improve the Canadian federation for the better proving to be nothing more than a stage for social conservative and illiberal cranks pandering to human unhappiness, feeding off it, one more deflection of focus from the vested interests that (with different degrees of culpability) manage and manipulate ordinary Canadian people. This doesn't change.

I voted for Erin O'Toole in the previous federal election. I voted for Mark Carney in this one.

If Justin ever really had a plausible way, he lost it long ago, and Mr. Carney is about as far from Justin in every way as you can get and still be a Liberal. (It is

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more telling perhaps why he cannot be a Conservative.) My conclusion is that the country needs an experienced financial manager at the federal level to *begin* to get the federal government back on track.

Mr. Carney as a central banker has watched a variety of governments do stupid and disingenuous—if not outright dishonest—things; surely he will “know better.” Mark Carney is not entirely without political experience; being a central banker is to participate in political, not necessarily partisan, arenas. It is a pleasure to have someone as Prime Minister who, at least for now, is less of a politician. Maybe he will be politically “naïve” enough to not listen to party politicians and instead look at grievances in Confederation in a fresh light.

The federal civil service needs a major overhaul—would you like to answer the phones at Revenue Canada?—so I hope he will bring in the likes of Donald Savoie (“Speaking Truth to Canadians About Their Public Service”) to figure out how and where to start.

So I think I know something about Western Alienation; it has been ingrained in my bones. But do I support Western Separatism? No. I lived in Alberta for seven years, and have witnessed since then the escalating hypocritical bombast coming out of that province whipped up by Jason Kenney and Danielle Smith. I will have nothing to do with “leadership” like that. (Or even the dance Scott Moe does; I would not want to be one required to dance with him.)

It is curious how Westerners cannot give legitimacy to the *Bloc Québécois* yet a sizeable cohort demands Western/Alberta “sovereignty.” Is it that they see the Canadian nation as really nothing more than zero-sum competing interests claiming all they can from the federation whatever the cost to others? If so, as with Trump, they are showing what kind of people they are, where they are coming from. We may rightly question whether we can trust them to fashion our world. There are legitimate, better principles than these.

It dawned on me eventually how in all of the interminable debate about Quebec’s place in Confederation, centrifugal forces there keep being reflexively categorized (and dismissed) as “separatist.”

But what really does “sovereignty” mean? Could it mean very different things, and something that, if we considered nuances of the term, would make Quebec’s place in Confederation better? If we exposed and rooted out the

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hardline poseurs who keep *Québécois* grievances simmering for the sake of present sustenance and hope of future hegemony?

Does the same apply to Western “sovereignty”? Do we risk opening up another can of worms with so many unscrupulous or wayward operators, and sticky matters and confusions, to contend with? But, can we, do we dare avoid doing so properly and honestly?

I will never vote for the likes of Pierre Poilievre or his kind. He can trot out his adoring lovely wife all he likes, but it is not narrow-minded, mean-spirited, angry people who mostly know only how to fan and pander to voter grievances who will make this country better.

Teaching Elementary school, I have come to feel everyone should teach Grade One once a month and have those trusting little still-innocent faces look back at them; we would live differently and better. We would realize the spirit in which we must seriously—desperately, resolutely—strive to give them a better world and future than the one looming ahead of—crumbling around?—us.

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