

Lament for a Nation

by SHERALYN ROMAN

With apologies to George Grant, author of what many consider a seminal essay on Canadian nationalism, today's lament is perhaps fittingly, more focussed upon our American neighbours on the 247th celebration of their autonomy from Britain. Specifically, their escape from the rule of the monarch King George III whom many considered 'mad,' and unfit to rule. In Lament, Grant deplored our potential slide toward embracing 'all things American.' Proud Canadians would deny there was ever a risk, but I hope now more than ever, such a slide would prove impossible. That's because ironically, America might soon be in the hands of someone that many consider equally as unstable as old King George, now that SCOTUS has handed the 'keys to the kingdom' to the office of the presidency. I really hope my assumptions are correct because as America's closest neighbour, we should be very, very concerned. It might be time to re-read Grant's Lament.

On July 4, 1776 the founding fathers of America declared the thirteen colonies would no longer be subject, and subordinate to, the rule of a Monarch, and that the concept of a monarchy was, of course, undemocratic. America, on July 4, specifically celebrates the founding fathers' declaration that America be 'united, free and independent.' A recent Supreme Court ruling however, would seem to be trying to turn back time, by granting a sitting President, for all intents and purposes, similar powers to those of that long ago mad monarch. For lack of a better analogy it seems the pendulum has swung so far over to the other side that not even a Swiss timepiece engineering could fix the clock and time is running out for democracy.

If all of this seems an exaggeration to you, consider these facts: while it is too soon to declare victory, in France the nationalist, anti-immigration and economically protectionist party led by Marine Le Pen are currently leading in the first of their two-round parliamentary elections.

Across Europe, 'far-right parties produced strong or record results' in the 2024 European Union parliamentary elections. While the EU parliament's influence is indirect, it's a strong indication of a shift in thinking and not for the better. Italy (as just one example) is now in the hands of far-right Prime Minister Georgia Meloni who appears to have softened her stance on certain policies but, per the Washington Post, 'leads the Brothers of Italy party, which has roots in post-war fascism,' and which it should be noted, 'still bears the same three-coloured flame logo adopted by neo-fascist groupings after the war.' In Hungary, Viktor Orban has sought 'to align the executive, legislative and judicial powers of the state,' which, in a traditional democracy, would be used as a check and balance against one another. Sound familiar?

This rudimentary run-down only scratches the surface of what appears to be a significant shift towards insular, protectionist, anti-immigrant leanings; all sentiments, it appears, are shared not just by Donald Trump, but also by the Supreme Court of the United States. Where do these sentiments begin to take root? Is it too far of a stretch to suggest provincial governments granting 'strong mayoral powers' to local governments is an example of the first instances of frustration that a tax-paying citizen might experience? When even grassroots, municipal level democracy is circumvented, perhaps it's easy to see how even those who believe passionately in democracy feel concern about whether it is actually working well.

But for now, back to America. As for Trump himself, the facts are he is a convicted felon. He's a misogynist, overseeing a supreme court decision to strike down Roe vs. Wade, and who was caught on tape actually exclaiming that when you're a star (one assumes he thinks of himself as such) 'you can do anything (to women) even grab 'em by the p**y.'

Trump has previously referred to immigrants as 'vermin,' who are 'poisoning the blood of our country.' He has promised 'to use totalitarian tactics to carry out the largest mass detention and deportation program in the nation's history.' At least one poll 'found that 38 percent of Americans, including nearly half of Republicans, agree that the U.S. needs a leader who 'is willing to break some rules if that is what it takes to set things right.' These are scary statistics. If they indeed reflect the sentiment of the people, it appears the Supreme Court of the United States has just found a way to give Trump permission to do exactly that; break rules whenever he wants and without any fear of repercussions during, or after, his term as president. Almost sounds like those monarchy days of old

when kings also did whatever they wanted. So, what exactly is America celebrating today? George Grant wrote Lament for Nation in 1965 decrying "an emerging Americanization of Canadians and Canadian culture." I firmly believe the average Canadian would vehemently deny an affection for "all things American." Let's hope that is especially true now more than ever before.