



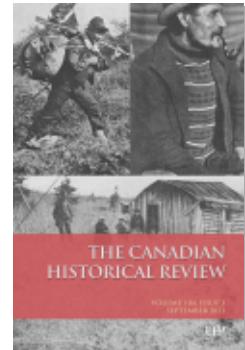
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Canadian Multiculturalism and the Far Right: Walter J. Bossy and the Origins of the “Third Force,” 1930s-1970s by Bàrbara Molas (review)

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complex system of economic reciprocity and communal responsibility but also how rural people imbued them with cultural, ideological, and even spiritual meanings. Her work is a blueprint for scholars to investigate the importance of work bees elsewhere in Canada, and how they may have differed by region, ethnicity, and sectarianism. Beyond her scholarly accomplishment, Wilson has produced a delightful read. The prose leaps off the page and is sprinkled with humour, plus the volume is handsomely illustrated, all of which will hopefully extend its appeal beyond academia.

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Canadian Multiculturalism and the Far Right: Walter J. Bossy and the Origins of the "Third Force," 1930s–1970s. Bárbara Molas. London: Routledge, 2023. Pp. viii + 179, \$170.00 cloth, \$47.65 e-book

Canadian Multiculturalism and the Far Right follows “the life and thought” of Walter J. Bossy from 1931 through 1972, though its focus “is not a person as much as an idea: the ‘third force’” (1, 9). According to the author, this refers to the conceptualization of a “trichotomic” Canada, “a united nation composed of three elements: the French-speaking group, the English-speaking group, and the *third force*” (1; emphasis in original). Influenced by Mark Bevir’s approach to hermeneutics, the author does not “try to find out the truth about the third force or an objective and stable definition of it” but, rather, seeks “to reveal how a very particular individual [Bossy] understood it” in order to understand his “subjective intentionality” (9). This begs the question: why?

After all, Bossy (1899–1979) was admittedly a marginal figure. A polyglot Ukrainian immigrant to Canada, he worked for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, spying on Ukrainian Canadian communities in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Quebec. After moving to Montreal in 1931, he also worked on and off for the Catholic School Commission in various roles. However, his real passions were promoting Christian corporatism and, later, as part of this project but also inspired by anti-Communism, trying to mobilize support for “new Canadians” in Montreal. Both intertwined pursuits ultimately ended in failure.

In the introduction, Bárbara Molas confesses that she has often been asked why she devoted years to studying an “ultra-conservative, a white supremacist, quite unstable, and seemingly rather irrelevant individual” (1). Her answer is that Bossy invented the concept of a trichotomic Canada. More broadly, “the conceptual origins of the ‘third force,’ and therefore the beginning of a multicultural understanding of Canada … are rooted in Bossy and his ultraconservative entourage’s assessment of diversity in the 1930s” (156). This piece of overlooked history, Molas suggests, challenges what she sees as a historiographical consensus that multiculturalism emerged from “liberal secularism” (5).

To address the relationship between Bossy’s thought and official multiculturalism, Molas uses philosopher Jouni-Matti Kuukinen’s theorization of historical concepts, which conceives of them as having two components: a core and a margin. The core can remain unchanged through time, allowing for

continuity, though changes can occur at the margins, where new ideas can become attached. The idea of a trichotomic nation is the core idea, Molas suggests, while Bossy's illiberal notion of the third force was situated at the margins (11). However, she also suggests that Bossy created the core concept, which was then more effectively mobilized by others at the margins and eventually transformed into official multiculturalism. Bossy's creation of the core concept "allowed for an unprecedented conversation [about national identity] to take place" (155).

But assigning this historical significance and causality to Bossy's invention of the core concept is seemingly at odds with the earlier contention that there is no core concept, no "third force" with an objective or stable definition. Furthermore, the basic premise of the book – that Bossy was the first to conceive of Canada as being composed of three groups – is debatable. For instance, Watson Kirkconnell developed similar ideas in the same period and saw them spread nation-wide through the government publication *Canadians All* (1941), which Molas cites. But even if Bossy was among the first to describe Canada in this way, his impact was extremely limited, as the book shows. In short, insufficient evidence is marshalled to conclude a causal link between Bossy's conception of Canada and subsequent national debates about Canadian identity.

Despite its unconvincing central thesis, this book is a valuable contribution to the literature on the development of cultural pluralism in Canada. Existing works, my own included, have neglected to examine adequately how this philosophy developed in Quebec. In this well-researched study, based on a close reading of Bossy's papers, Molas offers a corrective by documenting his many attempts to promote cultural pluralism in the province. Unlike in other provinces, where cultural pluralism was primarily tied to the goals of railway corporations, for instance, Molas has uncovered how in Quebec a primary motivation was the desire to defend Catholicism and combat Communism among so-called new Canadians. Greater engagement with the historiography, however, would have demonstrated that Bossy was not all that unlike other early cultural pluralists in his racially exclusive vision of a "third force," his anti-Communism, and his anti-Semitism or, for that matter, his later masking of it. More historiographical engagement would also have complicated Molas' suggestion that racially exclusive cultural pluralism was the invention or even the preserve of the "far right."

In the end, the one strong tie between Bossy and official multiculturalism made the book possible. Shortly after Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau announced a new policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework in 1971, the Public Archives of Canada (now Library and Archives Canada) was instructed to begin acquiring the records of ethnic organizations. In 1972, Bossy brought his papers to the archives and sat for an interview. Without this policy, Bossy might not have thought the preservation of his papers would be possible, or the archivists might not have been interested. For those who wish to understand the development of cultural pluralism, in all its complexity, this was a fortuitous turn of events.

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