

common SENSE

A very unfortunate coup

with
Quentin Langley



IT WAS NOT SURPRISING that the first democratic elections in Egypt produced a victory for an Islamist candidate. That was former President Mubarak's plan. Secular dictators in the Middle East always suppress secular liberal opposition and license limited opposition by Islamists so that they can threaten liberals—at home and in the West—with the thought that things will get worse if they ever fall. While this misled some in the West to overestimate Islamist support, the Muslim Brotherhood was the only organized party in Egypt, so its eventual victory was to be expected. As the only party with any heritage or infrastructure, securing 52 percent of the vote was hardly a ringing endorsement, but it remains more than the mandate won by Barack Obama.

For this government to be brought down by a military coup and a few demonstrations does not bode well for the future of democracy in the Middle East. While it does seem as though the administration is unpopular at the moment, elected governments do not fall because they are temporarily unpopular. If they did then neither Ronald Reagan nor Margaret Thatcher

would be recalled with reverence, but as brief and temporary leaders who ran into early storms of unpopularity. Governments can only take difficult decisions if they know that the next election is some years away and there is time for their policies to start working.

If Mohammed Morsi had been allowed to complete his term, then there is every chance he would have been defeated when seeking re-election. First leaders often raise unmatchable expectations. This is especially true when their objectives are tied up with mysticism and mumbo-jumbo. If people believe that poverty and suffering in Egypt are judgments from God on the impiety of their rulers they are likely to be disappointed by the impact of electing pious replacements.

One path for democratization, then, could be failing dictatorship followed by Islamists who fail to bring the Kingdom of God to the world, then secular liberals with modest but realistic objectives.

The problem is that this process has now been interrupted in the Arab world's most populous country by a military coup. Morsi will probably be

remembered as a martyr: the lost leader who tried to reform Egypt but was brought down by a corrupt military. Better, probably, that he should have been given a fair chance so that everyone could see his policies fail.

Egypt is not just one country. It is a symbol of the whole Arab and Islamic world. If democracy can be made to work in Egypt then this will spread to other countries. If democracy in Egypt is seen to fail then dictators across the region will breathe more easily. This was, very probably, the military's plan. It was probably Mubarak's plan. No government in the Middle East from the brutal military rulers of Syria to the absolute monarchies of the Gulf or the theocratic dictatorship of Iran wants to see democracy succeeding in Egypt. It seems as though, for the moment at least, this horrible coalition has got its way.

This is another, not so positive, step in the Arab Awakening. Yes, an Islamist government has failed, and that is a good thing. But it was not allowed to fail unambiguously and on its own. Instead of a humbled failure of an ex-president, Morsi is now a martyr to Islam.

Food for Thought

with Robert Pelletier

Birth of Two Nations

IN A CORNER OF THE CEMETERY of St. Thomas' Anglican Church in Noyan, Quebec (a few miles north of Alburgh, Vermont) stands a solitary marble headstone. It is inscribed "John Kane. Was found drowned on Ash Island, March 16, 1866. Enrolled in the US Army, Nov. 26, 1864. Discharged Nov. 30, 1865. This soldier was a member of Company D, 68th regiment, NY Volunteers. Native of Canada." On this 170th year since the epic Battle of Gettysburg in the American Civil War, this simple memorial is a reminder of the roughly 40,000 Canadians who chose to fight in the "War Between the States" and of the lasting impacts of that conflict on the destinies of both America and Canada.

Why would Canadians (then known as British North America) chose to fight for a foreign country with which it had uneasy peace ever since the stalemate of the War of 1812? Tensions between America and Britain had been escalating before the Civil War began in 1861. American talk of "manifest destiny" to control all of North America fostered fears of US expansionism, a fear that was aggravated by proposals in Congress to annex certain provinces of Canada. Tensions increased in 1861 with the "Trent Affair" when the US Navy forcibly removed two Confederate diplomats from the HMS Trent, prompting the British press and public to clamor for a military response. Before the war, Secretary of State William Seward urged Lincoln to invade Canada to unify his fractious nation against a common foe.

Like it or not, as the terminus for the Underground Railroad that ferried fugitive slaves to freedom over the border, Canada was already embroiled in the Civil War before the onset of hostilities. Doubtless several Canadians joined the fray for their aversion to slavery: in his recent book *Blood and Daring*, John Boyko asserts that for every Canadian who joined the Confederates, fifty fought for the Union. Others probably joined to fight alongside their close American relatives, other young men were likely attracted by adventure.

Canada was also a hotbed of Confederate sympathies, especially among the Catholic French Canadians who saw parallels with the Southerners against between an overbearing central government. John Wilkes Booth planned the kidnapping-turned-assassination of Lincoln from Montreal, while Confederate commissioners sent terrorists such as the St. Albans Raiders into the northern "safe" states to draw Union troops away from the south. While in prison, the captured Raiders were wined, dined and treated to nocturnal female "solace," including from the daughter of the presiding judge, who was later mayor of Montreal.

Boyko argues that while the Civil War was responsible for a rebirth of America, dedicated to what Lincoln say as a "new birth of freedom," it was also responsible for the birth of the Canadian Confederation in 1867. The push for Canadian autonomy was partly prompted by the Fenian Raids of 1866-7, when Irish Civil War veterans tried to take Canada hostage to force Britain out of Ireland. Another accelerator was the proposal for Britain to give Canada to the US as reparations for damages inflicted by British-built Confederate battleships. American expansionism could only be countered by a transcontinental Canadian state, which was partly accomplished by defusing French-English tensions by dividing the then single province of Canada into Ontario and Quebec. To avoid the squabbles over "states' rights" that eventually lead to the war, Canada purposefully enshrined strong federal power in its form of Parliamentary democracy.

And so John Kane lies in peace in Noyan, an unwitting forger of two nations and testament to our intertwined destinies.

GUEST EDITORIAL

WHEN IS LAND in the Adirondack Park classified as "Forever Wild"—collectively known as the Forest Preserve — not forever wild? When corporate interests in the North Country decide they want a piece of it.

That is the concern some environmentalists have over the proposed land swap between New York State and the Willsboro-based mining company, NYCO Minerals, described by one area newspaper as the world's biggest producer and supplier of wollastonite, a rare mineral used in such products as ceramics, paints, and plastics.

Because the swap involves land that, according to the NYS Constitution, is deemed forever wild, a majority of voters in the state must approve a constitutional amendment specifically allowing the exchange — something that both houses of the state legislature just agreed to put on the ballot this November.

If approved, the amendment will enable NYCO to undertake exploratory drilling on approximately 200 acres of old-growth Forest Preserve land adjacent to one of the company's existing mines. In exchange, NYCO would donate about 1,500 acres of land to be added to the Preserve and,

once done mining the acquired parcel, return it to be "conveyed" back to the Forest Preserve — a temporary "time-out" from being Forever Wild.

Proponents of the trade maintain it will strengthen the region's economy while being sensitive to environmental needs. According to NYCO officials, access to the protected land could preserve up to 100 jobs by extending, for a decade or more, the life of a mine that otherwise would dry up.

Betty Little, who sponsored the amendment in the NYS Senate, called the swap a "balanced" approach that will stave off job losses — a concern echoed by her Assembly counterpart, Dan Stec, who helped shepherd the legislation through the lower chamber.

But Peter Bauer, Executive Director of Protect the Adirondacks, termed such arguments "overheated rhetoric," adding that any suggestion NYCO will leave New York if the amendment fails is false. "NYCO isn't going anywhere," he recently wrote. "In 1998, NYCO received its first permit for a new mine [at Oakhill]. It has built that mine. NYCO's own 25-Year plan submitted to the APA in 2006 called for a gradual transition to Oakhill where NYCO estimates there is enough wollastonite for at least 16-21 years."

The True Meaning of "Forever"

By Fred Balzac

Mr. Bauer faulted the legislation for being "riddled with inaccuracies, outright falsehoods, and misstatements," including omission of any reference to the Oakhill mine. The land swap would set a "terrible precedent" by being the first Forest Preserve amendment approved for private commercial gain rather than a public purpose. If it is approved by the voters, he wrote, "it means that there is no place in New York beyond the reach of commerce....beyond the grasp of various corporations and their political bidders."

Article XIV of the NYS Constitution states: "The lands of the state, now owned or hereafter acquired, constituting the forest preserve as now fixed by law, shall be FOREVER kept as wild forest lands. They SHALL NOT be leased, sold or EXCHANGED, or be taken by ANY CORPORATION, public or private, nor shall the timber thereon be sold, removed or destroyed." [emphasis added]

Now what part of "forever" do Ms. Little, Mr. Stec, and company not understand?

Fred Balzac, a regular LCW contributor, is a full-time resident of the Adirondack Park.