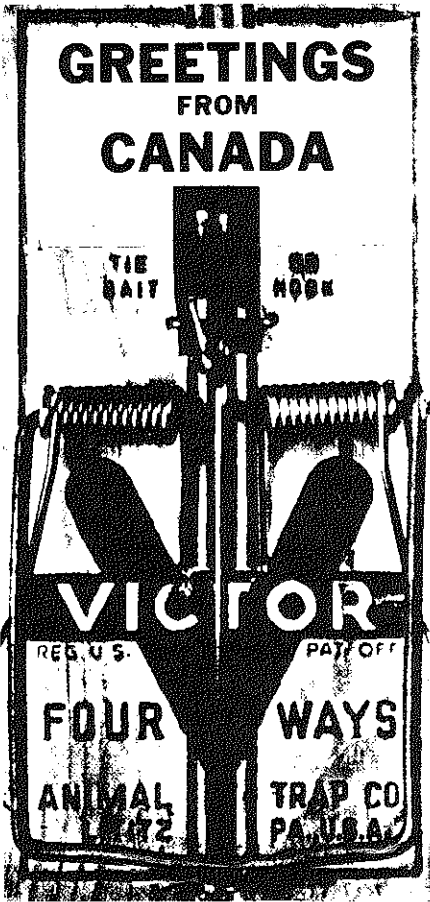


# Reviews



mousetrap by Bernard R.J. Michaleski

**For whatever the crises and contradictions in the US economy, the American information monopoly has rapidly come to be recognized in the last decade as an even greater threat—because far more insidious—than American (nuclear) imperialism**

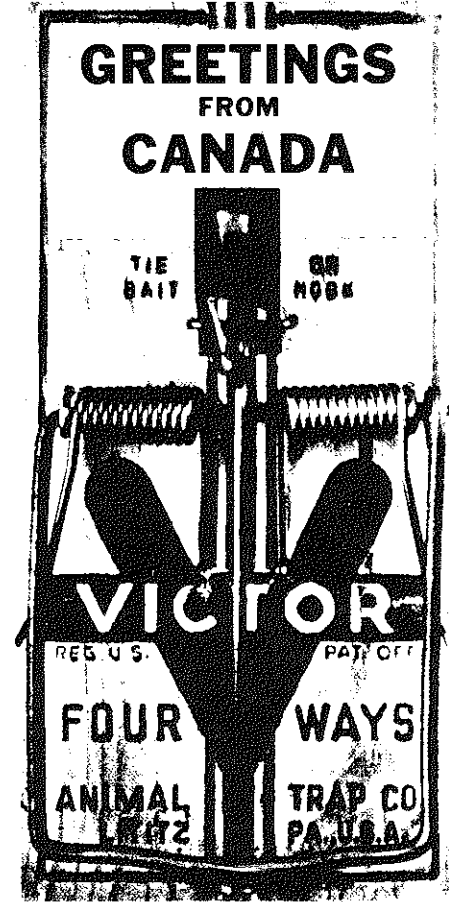
**Two Nations** by Susan Crean and Marcel Rioux  
(Toronto, James Lorimer, 1983)

**This** fine and stimulating short book has the originality of being a collaboration between a Quebec nationalist and a Canadian one, both of whom here jointly defend what I suppose must be called a "sovereignty-association" relationship between the "two nations". Marcel Rioux is of course one of the most eminent Quebec sociologists and the author of many important studies on Quebec, while Susan Crean, an editor of *This Magazine*, represents that "English" Canadian nationalism (our language problem here is obviously a significant symptom) which emerged only after Quebec nationalism and in response to (although not against) this last. Among the many asymmetries in this relationship is the fact that while Quebec nationalism emerged in opposition to anglophone Canada, "Canadian" nationalism emerged in opposition to the United States. The book has much less to say about the next and latest turn of the screw, namely the revolt of the Western provinces against Ontario; yet the authors sum up this whole exceedingly complex situation as follows: "The Quebec-Canada, two-nations, two languages tension represents a cultural contradiction; the regions versus Ottawa a political one; and Canada-US relations primarily an economic one" (140). This volume focuses essentially on culture, and indeed expresses an interesting and original New World variant on what has now come to be called British "culturalism" (Raymond Williams, E.P. Thomson, Stuart Hall). The culturalism eloquently expressed here surely originates in Quebec and owes much to Rioux's earlier work: if it is more convincing than its UK analogue (which stressed the autonomy of working class and youth cultures), perhaps that is because the Quebec experience is one of cultural imperialism and domination, a situation in which the function of an embattled culture is far more visible and dramatic.

I am not sure how appropriate it is for this book to be reviewed by an American, even an anti-establishment one, with some personal experience of and much warm sympathy for both of these nations. A few years ago I interviewed a number of political leaders of all tendencies in Quebec, and was astounded to discover that, with a single exception (Pierre Vallieres), none of them (including PQ government officials) was seriously worried about what would happen to an independent Quebec if released into the force field of its enormous neighbour to the South. It is therefore encouraging to see that in the Quebec chapters of the present work this alarming indifference has been corrected; the stress here is not merely on cultural imperialism (following the pioneering White Papers on that subject prepared by the PQ government), but on US cultural imperialism, very specifically including the whole area of media control and the American monopoly on the new information technology. With this section, therefore, a study of what might otherwise have seemed to outsiders an exceptional and historically unique situation (Canada) at once becomes a central exhibit in a world-wide drama of crucial concern to every other country in the world (not excluding Europe). For

whatever the crises and contradictions of the US economy, the American information monopoly has rapidly come to be recognized in the last decade as an even greater threat - because far more insidious - than American (nuclear) militarism. While the authors also carefully document American economic penetration of the older kind in Canada, it is perhaps somewhat oversimplified of them to describe this particular menace (in the passage quoted above) as a merely "economic" one: here, indeed, cultural and economic domination are united in a new and historically original form of imperialism.

All of which leads us to yet another form of that omnipresent contemporary dilemma: what effective forms of political resistance can be invented in the multinational era? The author of *Two Nations* underscores the much more universal paradox that, as with Gaullism, the first form of recent Canadian resistance to US preponderance came from the Right and was inspired by an older kind of nationalism (or patriotism): the ill-fated Diefenbaker attempt, followed by the ignominious Arrow cancellation. They also emphasize the essentially business ideology of the Liberal Party, both in and outside of Quebec, and that party's complacent commitment to "integration" with US financial and business interests. I mess, however, any really adequate discussion of the achievements and failures (or ideological ambiguities) of the Parti Quebecois itself, an analysis that would certainly seem to impose itself centrally in this context. Whatever the reasons for this omission, I suspect that one of them has to do with the conflation of culture and politics that underpins the book's positions. I am myself very sympathetic to the notion of a cultural politics as that form of political activity historically suited to the uniqueness of this latest moment of multinational capitalism. On the other hand, I must confess that the conclusions of this valuable volume seem weak and disappointing to me: a call for a respect for autonomous cultures from which any consideration of concrete political strategies (and tactics) seems to have evaporated. In one sense, of course, the realignment of the cultural politics of both nations - Canada and Quebec - against the United States would seem to be a productive one, which could overcome many of the older differences and tensions between them. But that could happen, surely, only under special circumstances - that is to say, in



the framework of a general transformation of the Canadian socio-economic system. We are talking, in other words, about socialism; yet the authors' discussion of *autogestion* and other popular New Left visions of democratic socialism scarcely reflects any of the confusions and disappointments of the current French experiment (while gratuitous references to the "state capitalism" of the Soviet Union betoken an "even-handed" nod to American anti-communist prejudices which seems singularly inappropriate in a work which seeks to identify the principal adversary). I don't mean to suggest that any of the rest of us have gone much further than Crean and Rioux in attempting to reinvent the most effective left politics for our own time; indeed, even this final disappointment is a stimulating and salutary one, and does not detract from the great interest of this valuable and readable book.

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