

# The Expulsion of TS in Canada

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Universal brotherhood, the first Object of the Theosophical Society, is the one H.P. Blavatsky specifies as the prime objective and the only concept each member of the Society must accept. In spite of high aspirations, universal brotherhood has not always been well exemplified within the ranks of the Movement. Unfortunately, human nature tends to revert to isolationist predispositions rather than an affinity to all-encompassing brotherliness. This in turn generally leads to political interest versus principle.

The General Council of the Theosophical Society met in Adyar on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1992 and expelled The Theosophical Society in Canada from its ranks. TS in Canada was informed in February that it was “disassociated . . . from the Parent Society” because of updates to TS in Canada’s By-Laws. The news was greeted with various reactions among the membership. What led Adyar to take this action? A brief history of TS in Canada may help set the scene.

Albert E.S. Smythe met fellow Irishman W.Q. Judge in November 1884 on board ship while sailing from Liverpool to New York. Smythe stayed in the USA for a few years and then in Edinburgh from 1887-1889 where he began his theosophical studies. In 1889 he moved to Toronto, Ontario and immediately set to work to establish a lodge there. One was formed in 1891 — one of the last charters Blavatsky issued under the old autonomous constitution prior to her death in May that year. Smythe was elected President. At this time Canadian lodges fell under the jurisdiction of the American Section of the Theosophical Society whose headquarters were in New York, part of the Theosophical Society (Adyar).

In the aftermath of the “Judge Case” in 1895 the majority of Canadian Theosophists transferred their allegiance to the newly formed Theosophical Society in America, with W.Q. Judge as President. Following Judge’s death in 1896 some Canadian members continued to support his successors, first Ernest T. Hargrove then Katherine Tingley.

Tingley surprised everyone by calling a convention of TS in America to be held in Chicago in February 1898. She formed a new organization called Universal Brotherhood and it was *Resolved* that the administration of the affairs of TS in America would fall under the constitution of Universal Brotherhood. This led to a split within their ranks. In 1899 Smythe was expelled by Tingley from the Point Loma organization and by the early 1900s most of the theosophical activity in Canada was once again under Adyar. Interest seemed to wane, partly due to the lack of leadership. Smythe rejoined the Society in 1909 and activity in Canada became more dynamic. Canadian lodges were then part of the American (Adyar) organization administered from headquarters in Chicago, IL and then after 1912 from Hollywood, CA for a number of years.<sup>1</sup>

The theosophical movement in Canada became vibrant enough to warrant the formation of an independent Canadian Section. On November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1919 TS in Canada was officially chartered as a national Section of the International body. Seventeen lodges and approximately eight hundred members were transferred from the American Section. Albert E.S. Smythe became the first General Secretary. Canadian Section, later the Theosophical Society in Canada, remained affiliated with Adyar until it was excommunicated in 1992.

Over the years Canadian Section was occasionally at odds with the general direction of the Adyar Society and tended to be looked upon as an aberration within the ranks. The original teachings of the Masters as given out by H.P. Blavatsky were the underlying focus of Canadian Section. Ted G. Davy, General Secretary of TS in Canada from 1968 to 1986 summarizes:

Theosophy in Canada has for the most part been characterized for its loyalty to the founders, including W.Q. Judge who is not as widely recognized as such within the main body of the Theosophical Society.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For more details see “Birth of T.S. in Canada” by Ted G. Davy, *The Canadian Theosophist*, 75:5 Nov.-Dec. 1994, pp.97-103. See also <http://www.theosophycanada.com/history.htm>

<sup>2</sup> From an article submitted by Ted G. Davy in June 1995 to *Theosophical Encyclopedia*, edited by Phil S. Harris, Vicente Hao Chin Jr. and Richard Brooks, Quezon City, Philippines: Theosophical Publishing House, 2006, 738 pages. His submission was edited, some paragraphs added and others deleted. Among the details omitted is the sentence quoted above.

Canadian Section voiced its objections to proclamations originating from Adyar such as the supposed coming of the World Teacher in the person of Krishnamurti and the satellite organizations spawned from this phenomenon that were “crowding out Theosophy proper.”<sup>3</sup> In addition, the initiations to Arhatship for those with the right connections were also questioned. The introduction of religion (Liberal Catholic Church) shortly following the death of Col. Olcott was also grounds for contention. Supposedly separate from the Society, its activities are nonetheless conducted on theosophical property and involve TS members. Dissent by Canadian Section eventually led to a split within Canada itself between those who supported the neo-theosophy of the Adyar leadership and those who did not. A separate organization, Canadian Federation, was organized in the 1920s for those individuals who preferred to affiliate directly with Adyar.

Canadian Section, through its publication *The Canadian Theosophist* (which Smythe established in March 1920), always strived to keep the presidents at Adyar accountable for their actions. Following the internal split, few members of Canadian Section became involved with the Esoteric Section and were, therefore, not bound to obey directives without question. Canadian Section was a thorn in the side of Adyar. That was not reason enough to oust it, but new developments within the Canadian organization eventually led Adyar to grasp at the perceived opportunity to take action and rid itself of a nuisance.

The Theosophical Society in Canada, Edmonton Lodge (which had existed since 1911) was the recipient of a bequest in 1973. A lengthy legal procedure to secure the legacy ensued when the University of Alberta challenged it through the offices of the Attorney General of Alberta.<sup>4</sup> Edmonton Lodge was not incorporated at the time but was required to do so at this point. It incorporated under the Societies Act of the Province of Alberta; its Certificate of Incorporation is dated October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1974. (The name was legally changed to Edmonton Theosophical Society in 1989.) Canadian Section also incorporated as a result and became The Theosophical Society in Canada in 1976. By-Laws were written and registered with the Government of Canada, Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs as required for all incorporated not-for-profit organizations.

Amendments were filed with and received Ministerial approval from Consumer and Corporate Affairs Canada in 1983 and 1985. The Minutes of the tenth annual meeting of the Board of Directors of The

Theosophical Society in Canada, September 28<sup>th</sup>, 1985 include the following under heading “Amendments to the Corporation By-Laws”:

The General Secretary stated that certain amendments to the By-Laws of The Theosophical Society had been proposed and circulated to the members. The amendments were necessary in part to conform to the International Rules of The Theosophical Society; in part to reflect current practice; and one in particular to democratize an existing procedure.

This does not present as an organization intent on deleting affiliation with Adyar from its By-Laws.

By 1990 some clauses required modification to clarify various points and to update others to reflect the current requirements of the Corporations Act of Canada. Amendments were once again proposed. The Canada Corporations Act supersedes anything implying subservience to a jurisdiction outside the country and one of the clauses mentioned “parent or affiliated Society. . . .” It was proposed to amend this to read “associated” instead of “parent” to streamline to requirements of the Act. The changes were approved at the Annual Meeting of members of TS in Canada on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1991. The amendments received Ministerial approval as of January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1992 and the letter acknowledging this was received by the General Secretary on February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1992. Ironically, the letter dated January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1992 informing TS in Canada that it had been excommunicated, was received from Adyar the same day. Signed by “Hugh Gray, Secretary” it states:

The amended by-laws of the Theosophical Society in Canada were brought to the attention of the General Council by the Vice-President who has been reviewing the by-laws of all Sections. The Council took note of the fact that the Theosophical Society in Canada, by eliminating all references to the International Society, has dissociated itself from the Parent Society.

Adyar did not have a copy of the amended By-Laws, only the proposed changes which, at that point, may or may not have been approved by Consumer and Corporate Affairs Canada. In fact modifications were required and the By-Laws were not fully approved until March 1993.

Adyar’s own Rules do not require “parent society” to be included in any By-Laws, but this minor change raised alarm bells among members of the Esoteric Section within TS in Canada, whose primary allegiance is to the Outer Head of the Esoteric Section. They supplied Adyar with a copy of the proposed changes. It was on the basis of this proposed amend-

<sup>3</sup> “Birth of T.S. in Canada” by Ted G. Davy (quoting Albert E.S. Smythe), *The Canadian Theosophist*, 75:5 Nov.-Dec. 1994, p. 102.

<sup>4</sup> The case was finally settled in 1982 in favour of Edmonton TS. The Lizzie Arthur Russell Theosophical Memorial Trust was established and registered as a Canadian Charity. The Trust financed the republishing program of Edmonton TS, among other initiatives.

ment that TS in Canada was “dissociated” at the General Council meeting held January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1992 at Adyar. There was no opportunity to formally submit a copy of the By-laws to Adyar, nor did Adyar make any attempt to communicate with TS in Canada officials to discuss their concerns or questions regarding any proposed amendments. The wording of the By-Laws was amended to reflect requirements of the Canada Corporations Act, and Adyar’s misinterpretation led them to an erroneous conclusion. There was no intent on the part of TS in Canada to “dissociate”. But it was a convenient excuse for Adyar. A letter of explanation was sent by Stan Treloar, President/General Secretary of TS in Canada at the time (1986-1992), to Hugh Gray. There was no response. However, letters were circulated, including one from President Radha Burnier, encouraging growth in Canadian Federation.

In her Presidential Address December 26<sup>th</sup>, 1992 Radha Burnier repeats Adyar’s storyline:

Registered in 1976 as a corporation under the laws governing business corporations in Canada, some changes were made in its by-laws which were incompatible with the Rules and Regulations of the International Society. Though the then President Mr John Coats objected, the situation did not change.<sup>5</sup>

Ted G. Davy explained the 1976 controversy in a letter dated April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1992 addressed to a member of TS in Canada:

The objection of John Coats (the then International President) to the original by-laws of the incorporated T.S. in Canada were fully dealt with at the time. In retrospect I regret the amount of time we wasted on it, but at least it shows we acted responsibly. . . . The objection was referred to our legal counsel, who obtained a ruling from the federal Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs. This was to the effect that the wording changes demanded by Adyar would be unacceptable to the Canadian Government. All this was conveyed to Adyar, and both John and Jean Raymond — Recording Secretary at the time — were certainly informed of our position. . . . As a Canadian organization we are rightly subject to Canadian law, and our obligations to it supersede any form of relationship to Adyar.

Mr Davy, who was living and working in Calgary, Alberta at the time, goes on to explain that Mr Coats kept insisting on meeting with him.

How well I remember the summer of 1976 . . . . At great inconvenience and at my personal expense, I finally agreed to fly to Vancouver [British Columbia] one evening and meet with him at the airport there (he at that time being in Orcas [an island, part of the State of Washington].) Four and a half hours later I flew home, having by then reiterated

our legal position umpteen times. It was obvious that he was not interested in the facts — just wanted Canada to come “into line”. I mention this incident only to again indicate that Canada went out of its way to “pay heed” to Adyar.

He also mentions in his letter:

Although the T.S. in Canada has always acted openly, honestly, and democratically, it has long been subject to various pressures from Adyar, as in the most recent situation. The history of our organization reveals a seventy-year saga of harassment. . . .

Some of the members of the General Council of the Theosophical Society who met on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1992 held a number of proxies for various national Societies. Following the expulsion of TS in Canada, individuals across the country were contacted by international friends who expressed their regret at having granted a proxy on their behalf which thereby allowed a handful of Council members to vote to “dissociate” Canada. Bill Johnstone, then General Secretary in New Zealand, was one of the first to telephone and express his distress regarding the situation.

Adyar seemed to have developed a tradition of ousting those Sections that displeased them. Some years earlier (1984) Adyar literally destroyed the vibrant Yugoslav section by cancelling charters of Lodges and turning the Section over to a minority of strong supporters of all things Adyar. In the end the Yugoslav Section declared itself independent and carried on as The Yugoslav Theosophical Society. They questioned whether it was a philosophical difference that led to the actions on the part of Adyar.

In 1989 The Theosophical Society in Denmark ended up in a court battle with Adyar over the anticipated transfer of assets to the International Society following a split in the Danish organization. There is a clause in Adyar’s Rules (no. 44) which states that in countries where the vesting of assets to the International Society is prohibited, “the property shall vest in a local Trustee or Trustees appointed by the President” and also that “it shall be lawful for the President to appoint an agent or nominee for the purpose of executing any necessary document or documents, or for taking any steps necessary effectually to transfer the said property to the Society.” TS in Canada has never had a permanent headquarters building or assets; the head office is wherever the President happens to reside. There was no financial incentive to put up with us.

Events do indicate a pattern of interference originating in Adyar over local affairs and control over local officials. Despite the rhetoric about brotherliness within the Movement, Adyar nonetheless rules via a

<sup>5</sup> *The Theosophist* 114:4, January 1993.

**Excerpts from the Minutes of the General Council.**

Page 1:

**MINUTES**

*Of the Meeting of the General Council of the Theosophical Society held on 25 December 1991 at Adyar*

**PRESENT**

Mrs Radha Burnier	<i>President (in the chair) and proxy for Spain, Indonesia, Argentina, the Philippines and Brazil</i>
Mr Surendra Narayan	<i>Vice-President and proxy for England, Sweden, Mexico, Curt Berg and Walter Ballesteros</i>
Dr Hugh Gray	<i>Secretary</i>
Mr A. Sabry	<i>Treasurer</i>
Dr C. V. Agarwal	<i>General Secretary, India</i>
Mr Paul B. Kwakyi	<i>General Secretary, West Africa</i>
Mr Kiran H. Shah	<i>General Secretary, East and Central Africa</i>
Mrs Françoise Caracostea	<i>General Secretary, France</i>
Mrs Patricia Witts	<i>General Secretary, Australia</i>
Mrs Kirsti Elo	<i>General Secretary, Finland</i>
Miss Joy Mills	<i>Additional Member and proxy for Holland, Uruguay, New Zealand, U.S.A. and Germany</i>
Mrs Norma Y. Sastry	<i>Additional Member and proxy for Cuba, Italy and Yugoslavia</i>
Mr S. S. Varma	<i>Additional Member and proxy for Portugal, South Africa and Belgium</i>
Mrs Gool K. Minwalla	<i>Additional Member</i>

*Present by invitation as Observers*

Mrs Ali Ritsema, Holland
Mr Ricardo Lindemann, Brazil
Mr Pedro R. M. Oliveira
Miss Tran Thi Kim Dieu

The President warmly welcomed the members of the General Council and others present, especially Mr Paul B. Kwakyi, representing for the first time the West African Section, which was chartered on 23 January 1991.

**1. Confirmation of Minutes.**

The minutes of the meetings of the General Council held at Varanasi on 25 and 31 December 1990, having been previously circulated, were confirmed and signed.

Page 6:

**MINUTES**

*Of the Adjourned Meeting of the General Council of the Theosophical Society held at Adyar on 1 January 1992*

**PRESENT**

*All the Council members present at the meeting held on 25 December 1991 with the exception of Mrs Kirsti Elo and the addition of Mr Pedro R. M. Oliveira and Miss Tran Thi Kim Dieu, who took their places as members, and not as observers.*

## 11. Discussion on the Work around the World

### (a) Sections without Minimum Requirements

There was a discussion about membership in various Sections, particularly those in which the total number of members and lodges is below the minimum required under Rule 36(d). This includes Chile, Myanmar (Burma), Wales and Yugoslavia. The political conditions in Myanmar are such that there is little possibility of contact. It is reported by the Vice-President of the Inter-American Federation that in Chile there is some improvement.

In Wales the position has remained the same for many years. The General Council decided that Wales should be offered the alternative of joining the English Section or becoming a Presidential Agency.

In Yugoslavia there are three lodges, all in Slovenia, and one group in Zagreb. The group in Zagreb had to stop work as conflict spread. It is to be seen whether the State will survive in its present form, before taking a decision.

In other countries like Czechoslovakia also, racial tensions are surfacing, and the TS work in these countries could be affected by political changes.

### (b) Greece

It was reported that there was still no contact with the Greek Section. They have not sent an annual report or any particulars of their activities, membership, etc. The Chairman of the European Federation, Mr Curt Berg, had intended to send someone to the country to find out what was happening but he had not been able to do so. More recently, Mr Guido Haas, Treasurer of the European Federation, had agreed to investigate and report.

### (c) Canada

The Council took cognisance of the recent amendments to the by-laws of the TS in Canada, which had become a Corporation in 1976 under the laws governing Canadian business corporations. By virtue of the amendments made in 1991 by consent of the

required majority, all references to the International Society have been eliminated. However, the Section is advertising in *Quest* magazine, published by the TS in America, in such a way as to suggest that the TS in Canada still functions within the framework of the Rules and Regulations of the International Society.

After discussion of the different aspects of the question, the General Council unanimously decided that inasmuch as all references to the Parent Society have been removed from the by-laws of the TS in Canada, it can no longer be considered a part of the International Society, and a letter to that effect is to be sent to Mr Stan Treloar. Efforts may be made to encourage the growth of the Canadian Federation.

### (d) Russia

Several members asked for clarification about the 'TS in Russia'. The President replied that it was established by persons who had not become members of the Society, and its 'lodges' had not been chartered by the President. The 'TS in Russia' was registered with some authorities in Moscow without the knowledge of the International Society. It is reported that they adopted the rules of the TS in Russia before the revolution, but no copy of the document registered has been supplied to the International Headquarters.

The officers of the 'TS in Russia' do not seem to understand the character of the TS. For example, its President, Mr Popov, had sent a letter in June 1991 to Adyar, which indicates a mixing of the Roerich Foundation with the TS. He had also given 'life membership' to persons of his choice. One of the members of the Council mentioned that Mr Popov seems to be in contact with the U.L.T. in New York, since the U.L.T. in that city has extensive contact with the Roerich Museum. There also appear to be contacts in Russia through the Theosophical Society with its headquarters at Pasadena, California. All this can create confusion.

Therefore it was the view of the Council that we must proceed prudently and cautiously as it will be very difficult to remedy the situation later on. Most important of all is to make authentic theosophical literature available in the Russian language. Besides *The Secret Doctrine* there should be some smaller books in circulation.

pyramidal organizational structure with absolute authority ultimately resting with the President/Outer Head of the Esoteric Section. The President is kept informed of events on the ground by members of the ES — an international intelligence-gathering network. This group of spies is beholden personally to the Outer Head — in a way that is disturbingly analogous to the Jesuits' sworn loyalty to the Father General. Annie Besant amalgamated these two offices when she assumed the Presidency following the death of Col. H.S. Olcott and, while this has not always been the case, it seems both offices have rested with one individual in the majority of leadership tenures. Ernest Wood describes the attitude of C.W. Leadbeater, which persists in the International Society to the present day. Leadbeater, who was very influential in TS affairs, "detested argument and criticism" and asserted that consolidating power in the hands of the like-minded would prevent "a waste of time . . . a dissipation of energy." Wood quotes him as saying "we must try to get our own people in as General Secretaries in as many countries as possible." Wood goes on to add that it was quite illogical to have things both ways at once.


The Society must be quite without dogma, and yet its councils must be governed and its platforms occupied by those who were eager to promote certain beliefs, leaderships and objectives, and members who opposed these must be kept in the background.<sup>6</sup>

TS in Canada was the anomaly needing to be kept in the background, and disowned if possible.

Members of Edmonton Theosophical Society (ETS) have always strived to associate with any and all theosophical organizations. We always got along well with the members of Mercury Lodge of the Canadian Federation, also active in Edmonton at the time. One member of ETS regularly attended meetings of both organizations and was also a member of the ES in the capacity of recording secretary. He encouraged my wife and me to arrange to spend time at Camp Indralaya on Orcas Island to get acquainted with Canadian and American theosophists in the west who meet there in the summer. During our second sojourn (1984) we were invited to visit Joan and Hank van Busekom at their residence. Hank was a bishop in the Liberal Catholic Church. Dorothy Abbenhouse, who resided on the Island with husband John; Virginia Hanson and Joy Mills, guest lecturers at Indralaya (from Ojai, CA); and other ES members were also present. It became clear that this was a recruitment effort where we were encouraged to join the LCC and ES. It was explained to us how being an ES'er brought one closer to the Masters and that it

was from among the ES ranks that someone would be chosen as a vehicle should a Master require one in the outside world. The invitation was declined. The writer holds that as my wife and I were active members of ETS, my direct involvement with the national organization, TS in Canada, was perhaps anticipated.<sup>7</sup> An ES member in such a capacity could potentially provide a source of influence for Adyar in the affairs of TS in Canada as all ES members take an oath of allegiance to the Outer Head to whom they owe their primary obedience. Rejection of this overture extended by prominent officials of the Liberal Catholic Church and the Esoteric Section was likely disappointing.

Then in 1985 ETS initiated its republishing program. Rare articles, pamphlets and books that Adyar had sought to destroy over the years were copied and distributed around the globe. This caught the attention of the International Society. Further, in 1987 it was arranged for Rex Dutta, an ex-member of both Adyar and the ES, to lecture in various cities across western Canada.<sup>8</sup> Joy Mills, who had previously turned down a number of invitations, quite unexpectedly offered to tour western Canada slightly in advance of Dutta's scheduled visit. Dutta was not overly well received in one center in particular as a result of the negativity instilled just a few weeks prior to his arrival. While in Edmonton she also stressed the futility of rekindling the fires of old historical controversies and recommended the republishing program be shut down. ETS has the impression that its various undertakings were part of, if not one of the main reasons behind Adyar's expulsion of TS in Canada.

Arguments for and against affiliation with Adyar had been ongoing for years and years. There were few who perceived any benefits to such affiliation. There were others who felt that a questioning voice was better heard within the organization than outside it. Some were concerned that Adyar is more political than need be and seems more intent on preserving the organization than promoting Universal Brotherhood — that original teachings have been relegated to secondary status. In the end it seems the members of TS in Canada were too independent. Canada was of the opinion that the international theosophical organization was not unlike the British Commonwealth: an association of independent entities. Adyar apparently does not hold this view and expects (it could be argued, it demands) a degree of subservience Canadian law does not permit, but which should be neither expected nor required in a society adhering to the ideals Theosophy promulgates. 

<sup>6</sup> *Is This Theosophy . . . ?* by Ernest Egerton Wood, London: Rider & Co, 1936, p.301. See also "Liberating Theosophy from Jesuitism" by Carlos Cardoso Aveline, *Fohat* XII:1 Spring 2008, pp.7-8 for H.P. Blavatsky's words regarding criticism.

<sup>7</sup> The writer was in fact on the Board of Directors of TS in Canada from 1989 to 1995.

<sup>8</sup> See *Fohat* XI:1 Spring 2007 and XI:4 Winter 2007 for further information about Reginald "Rex" Dutta.