



## TOUJOURS AMDUR

*A view from Val des Monts*

### *Gatineau Monde Series*

# Mourning the loss of soul

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I thought I had a reasonably good understanding of French, but when Mathieu Bock-Côté took the stage at a Gatineau Monde lecture at the Maison du Citoyen on January 21, I felt lost. He rattled on for 45 minutes at the speed of a machine gun, hardly taking time to breathe. I thought it necessary to get hold of one of his books to put my notes into some kind of sense. His *Fin de Cycle* (Boréal, 2012) served the purpose.

His address was entitled "Political engagement, does it still make any sense?" This question is raised because there is a sense of loss in politics. Here I operate from my notes on the lecture. Things were better before. Now there is a sense of cynicism. There is corruption. Temptation is the order of the day where public involvement is for private interests. There are no great projects. There has been a progressive loss of the ideal of public morality.

The fall of the Berlin Wall was the victory of democracy over Communism. At the moment of success, we were witnessing the end of history, as Francis Fukuyama expressed it. It was the final victory of liberal democracy

and capitalism as against all other ideologies. Marx saw the final revolution and the victory of the proletariat as the end of history, at which point humanity would experience a management of things rather than a rule over people. Fukuyama's utopia is more modest, but the liberal democratic victory also depoliticizes politics, eliminating ideological battles and reducing everything to management of things. For Bock-Côté, these utopias are in reality dystopias. He yearns for ideological struggles defending the ideal of the Quebec soul.

Now, he argues, we have lost the collective. Politics has lost its substance. Democratic choices are all now just about management. Individualism is rampant. People are uprooted from their common heritage of history and culture. Ours is a time of mass distraction but at the same time a resort to pills. While there is no interest in our commonality, there is a proliferation of groups.

Our definition of democracy is now empty of sense. Elections are around secondary issues. We are experiencing a grand malaise.

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The solution is to reconstruct community and recover our roots and our history to give us an anchor.

That is what I was able to get from the lecture itself. The book served to fill out his meaning.

In the past, things were not so bad. There has been a progressive loss of public morality. Now we are simply tourists and consumers in a perpetual present. The decline of the sovereignty movement has created a sense of despair. Our culture is faced with the threat of rejection, in part through Americanization.

But we can't get out of our skin. There is no *tabula rasa*. It is a matter of Quebec identity against the false promise of multiculturalism. There is a precariousness of the collective lodged in the heart of the Quebec con-

dition.

The official public space is unable to represent collective preferences. Therefore people express their malaise, their discontent by turning to populist movements like the NDP or to programmatic movements like CAQ, Coalition Avenir Québec. (Incidentally, François Legault, CAQ leader, brought federalists and separatists together on the basis of putting the sovereignty issue on the back burner.)

In the name of openness to the other, we have looked to empty the nature of Quebec culture and history, making the francophone majority just one community among others in a society re-formulated on the proposition that all identities are equal.