

NOTES FOR REMARKS

BY

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JOE CLARK P.C., C.C.

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(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

I AM HONOURED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS SERIES OF CANADIAN CLUB CENTENNIAL LUNCHEON SPEECHES, AND CONGRATULATE THE CLUB ON ITS CENTURY OF SERVICE TO OUR COUNTRY AND THIS CITY. LET ME BEGIN BY REFERENCE TO THE PHRASE AND THE CONCEPT OF A FAMOUS TORONTONIAN, DR. MARSHALL MCLUHAN.

SOME OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE "GLOBAL VILLAGE" ARE MORE TROUBLING NOW THAN THEY WERE WHEN DR. MCCLUHAN COINED THE PHRASE. MANY PEOPLE WORRY THAT THE MODERN FORCES OF GLOBALIZATION BREAK DOWN COMMUNITY, TRIVIALIZE VALUES, HELP THE POWERFUL DOMINATE THE WEAK. THERE IS A FEAR THAT THE WORLD IS BECOMING MORE THE SAME, THAT NATIONAL DIFFERENCES AND PERSPECTIVES ARE DISAPPEARING.

THAT IS PART OF THE STORY. THERE NO DOUBT THAT THE SOVEREIGNTY OF NATIONS HAS BEEN CHANGED, AND THE TRADITIONAL INSTRUMENTS OF NATIONHOOD HAVE BEEN DIMINISHED.

BUT I AM COMING TO THE VIEW THAT WE EXAGGERATE THE DEGREE TO WHICH DIFFERENCES HAVE BEEN ERODED BY GLOBALIZING TRENDS. THOSE OF US IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES -- THE SO-CALLED WEST -- MAY BE VICTIMS OF OUR OWN PROPAGANDA. WE BELIEVE TOO EASILY THAT THE WORLD IS MOVING TO OUR MODEL, THAT CNN REALLY DOES REFLECT REALITY.

MAUREEN AND I WERE IN SOUTH AFRICA ON THE DAY AFTER THE ELECTION IN THE UNITED STATES, IN MEETINGS THAT, TOGETHER, INVOLVED HUNDREDS OF SOUTH AFRICANS. NOT ONCE DID THE SUBJECT OF THE AMERICAN ELECTION COME UP IN CONVERSATION.

NOW, WE CANADIANS ARE ACCUSTOMED TO BEING IGNORED. FOR ALL MOST OF THE WORLD THINKS ABOUT IT, MACKENZIE KING MIGHT STILL BE OUR PRIME MINISTER. OR HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN. BUT THE USA IS THE WORLD'S SUPERPOWER, CONFIDENT OF THE SHADOW IT CASTS OVER THE REST OF HUMANKIND. I DOUBT THERE WERE MANY PLACES IN CANADA WHERE MR. CLINTON'S RE-ELECTION WAS NOT EVEN MENTIONED THAT DAY. BUT NOT ONCE IN SOUTH AFRICA. AND MAUREEN AND I ARE PEOPLE WITH WHOM OTHERS RAISE POLITICAL QUESTIONS.

I MENTION THIS TO SUGGEST THAT THE ERA OF THE EASY DOMINION OF WESTERN VALUES, WESTERN THOUGHT, WESTERN INSTITUTIONS IS WINDING DOWN. IN THIS OPEN, COMPETITIVE WORLD, OTHER TRADITIONS, OTHER SYSTEMS, ARE ASSERTING THEMSELVES.

MOST OF THE INSTITUTIONS WHICH DEFINE OUR MODERN WORLD HAVE THEIR ROOTS IN WESTERN CULTURES AND CONCEPTS -- THE OLD GATT, THE GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE; THE NEW WTO, THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION; THE WORLD BANK AND IMF; THE INTERNATIONAL DECLARATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS.

THAT HELPS EXPLAIN WHY MUCH OF THE WORLD CHAFED AT THOSE INSTITUTIONS WHEN THEY WERE DOMINANT -- WHY BRAZIL AND INDIA FOUGHT THE GATT, AND MEXICO SO LONG DECLINED TO JOIN; WHY CHINA AND MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE OBJECT TO "ACCEPTED" DEFINITIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS; WHY SOUTH AFRICA RESISTS THE IMF, NOT BECAUSE OF ITS DISCIPLINE, BUT BECAUSE OF ITS ORIGIN, AS THE INSTRUMENT OF POWERS THAT WERE COLONIAL OR IMPERIAL.

AND WHAT THOSE COUNTRIES ONCE CHAFED AT, THEY NOW CAN CHANGE, IF NOT DRAMATICALLY, AT LEAST GRADUALLY. THE SPREAD OF WHAT WE CALL MARKET FORCES HAS HELPED GENERATE WEALTH, AND POWER, IN PARTS OF THE WORLD THAT WERE RECENTLY DEPENDENT ON THE WEST. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LAST DECADE'S ECONOMIC GROWTH IN ASIA IS NOT SO MUCH IN THE NUMBERS OF PAIRS OF BLUE JEANS THAT CAN BE SOLD, BUT IN THE CAPACITY OF THOSE SOCIETIES TO INFLUENCE WORLD EVENTS.

OF COURSE, I SHOULD SAY: "TO INFLUENCE WORLD EVENTS AGAIN." BECAUSE SOME OF THESE ARE ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS, WHICH HAVE EXERCISED POWER BEFORE, AND HAVE NEVER CONSIDERED THEMSELVES INFERIOR TO THE WORLD'S MORE RECENT POWERS.

SOME PEOPLE SEE THESE DEVELOPMENTS AS LEADING INEVITABLY TO A DRAMATIC "CLASH OF CIVILISATIONS". BUT I HAVE SPENT MUCH OF MY LIFE ARGUING THAT DIFFERENCES NEED NOT LEAD TO CLASHES OR TO CONFLICT. PEOPLE WHO HOLD DIFFERENT VIEWS, CULTURES WHICH HOLD DIFFERENT VALUES, CAN FIND WAYS TO WORK TOGETHER CREATIVELY.

FROM THAT PERSPECTIVE, THESE DEFINING CHANGES OF OUR MODERN WORLD HOLD A SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR CANADA. THEY MARK A CHANGE IN THE CURRENCY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS. I AM NOT SPEAKING ABOUT THE DOLLAR, OR THE YEN, BUT LESS FORMALLY, OF THE ATTRIBUTES AND ASSETS WHOSE VALUE WILL INCREASE IN THE NEW WORLD THAT IS TAKING SHAPE.

THE GREAT CHALLENGE IN THIS MODERN COMPLEX WORLD IS TO MANAGE THAT DIVERSITY, PEACEFULLY.

IN MEETING THAT CHALLENGE, THE ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTE IS TO RESPECT THE DIVERSE ELEMENTS ONE WOULD BRING TOGETHER. THAT IS WHAT CANADA DOES. IT IS BOTH AN ACCOMPLISHMENT AND A REPUTATION, VIRTUALLY THE CANADIAN SIGNATURE.

WE RESPECT AND MANAGE DIVERSITY BETTER THAN ANY OTHER NATION, AND IT IS HARD TO THINK OF QUALITIES THAT ARE MORE RELEVANT TO THE WORLD THAT IS EMERGING. THIS CAN BE CANADA'S CENTURY, UNLESS WE LOSE THE WILL AT HOME TO STAY TOGETHER.

I HAVE BEEN A CONSPICUOUS OPTIMIST ABOUT THE FUTURE OF A UNITED CANADA -- INDEED, SOMETIMES I HAVE FELT MYSELF ALMOST A CHEERLEADER. I BELIEVE PROFOUNDLY IN THE VALUE OF CANADA, AS A SOCIETY, NOT JUST A GEOGRAPHY OR AN ECONOMY. AND EVERYTHING I KNOW ABOUT THE MODERN WORLD, TAKING SHAPE AROUND THIS GLOBE, CONFIRMS MY VIEW THAT THE CANADIAN MODEL OF RESPECTING AND MANAGING DIVERSITY IS MORE RELEVANT NOW THAN EVER.

SO MY BELIEF THAT CANADA SHOULD FLOURISH HAS UNDER-PINNED MY FAITH THAT WE WOULD KEEP OUR REMARKABLE COUNTRY TOGETHER. I SUSPECT MANY CANADIANS SHARED THAT INSTINCT: CANADA SHOULD CONTINUE, SO IT WILL. BUT THINGS ARE NOT THAT SIMPLE. HISTORY IS FULL OF NOBLE EXPERIMENTS THAT FAILED.

THE PUBLIC ATMOSPHERE IS MORE DIFFICULT NOW THAN IT WAS THIRTY YEARS AGO, IN THE ERA OF THE "CO-OPERATIVE FEDERALISM" PROPOSED BY MR. PEARSON, SUPPORTED BY MR. STANFIELD. NO DOUBT THAT NOTION WOULD HAVE BECOME MORE CONTROVERSIAL IN ITS DETAILS, BUT I BELIEVE THERE WAS A BROAD WILLINGNESS THEN, IN QUEBEC AND ELSEWHERE, TO RESPOND GENEROUSLY TO THE FORCES IN QUEBEC THAT HAD BEEN EXPRESSED AS THE "QUIET REVOLUTION". THAT INITIATIVE WAS LOST, REPLACED BY HARDER LINES.

THAT PUBLIC ATMOSPHERE HAS CHANGED MATERIALLY. IN PART, THAT IS BECAUSE CANADIANS ARE, TO USE THE ELEGANT PHRASE, "FED UP" WITH CONSTITUTIONAL TALK. THAT IS MORE THAN ORDINARY FRUSTRATION. IT REFLECTS A DOUBT THAT ANYTHING WILL REALLY CHANGE -- OR, IN SOME MORE SUSPICIOUS CORNERS OF THE COUNTRY, A SENSE THAT THE WHOLE PROCESS OF CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE WAS DESIGNED TO AGGRANDIZE QUEBEC. IN QUEBEC ITSELF, THE LACK OF PROGRESS IS SEEN AS PROOF THAT CANADA WILL NOT RESPECT THE QUEBEC REALITY, AND THE TOUGH TALK OF OTHER CANADIANS IS SEEN AS PROOF THAT QUEBEC IS NOT WELCOME.

THERE IS ALSO A BROADER ISSUE, WHICH AFFECTS PUBLIC POLICY GENERALLY. THAT IS THE STEADY EROSION OF THE LEGITIMACY OF THE POLITICAL PROCESS. NOT LONG AGO, IN CANADA AND MOST DEMOCRACIES, THE PUBLIC'S NATURAL INSTINCT WAS TO TRUST ITS LEADERS, AND SUPPORT THEIR INITIATIVES. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN INCONCEIVABLE FOR THE FRONT PAGE OF THE ECONOMIST TO FEATURE A PICTURE OF A FRESHLY-ELECTED US PRESIDENT AND THE INJUNCTION: "NOW TELL THE TRUTH".

THERE WILL BE OTHER OCCASIONS TO TRACE THE ROOTS OF THAT POPULAR CYNICISM AND DISSENT, BUT IT HAS HAD TWO EFFECTS ON CANADA'S ABILITY TO RESOLVE OUR OWN NATIONAL PROBLEMS. FIRST, IT REMOVED, INDEED REVERSED, THE CANADIAN TRADITION OF HAVING GOVERNMENTS INITIATE CHANGE; IN THIS NEW ATMOSPHERE, A GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE IS PRESUMED GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT. SECOND, IT INSPIRED A COMBATIVE AND ACCUSATORY STANDARD OF PUBLIC DIALOGUE, WHICH HAS GENERATED MUCH MORE HEAT THAN LIGHT. THAT HAS DEEPEINED THE SENSE OF DIFFERENCES AMONG CANADIANS AND, I BELIEVE, CAUSED MORE PEOPLE TO QUESTION THE WORTH OF OUR COUNTRY.

ALL OF THAT IS BY WAY OF ACKNOWLEDGING THAT IT IS NOT EASY TO PROPOSE EFFECTIVE INITIATIVES IN THE PRESENT CANADIAN CLIMATE. IT HAS NEVER BEEN EASY, BUT ONE MIGHT BE FORGIVEN FOR BELIEVING IT IS MORE DIFFICULT NOW. GOVERNMENT, OF COURSE, IS NOT ABOUT DOING THE EASY THINGS.

THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT MR. CHRETIEN WAS RIGHT, IN THE LAST ELECTION CAMPAIGN, WHEN HE SAID THAT CANADIANS DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM. FOR A LONG TIME, AS I HAVE PARTICULAR REASON TO REMEMBER, CANADIANS DID NOT WANT TO TALK ABOUT DEFICIT REDUCTION, JUST AS, TODAY, MANY PEOPLE DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT THE SOCIAL AND INTERNATIONAL AND OTHER CONSEQUENCES OF DEFICIT REDUCTION. MR. CHRETIEN ENJOYS A HIGH LEVEL OF POPULARITY TODAY, BUT I WOULD NOT LIKE TO BELIEVE THAT HIS POSITION ON THE UNITY OF OUR COUNTRY IS DETERMINED SIMPLY BY WHAT PEOPLE WANT TO TALK ABOUT. SO I ASSUME THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S ARGUMENT AGAINST CONSTITUTIONAL INITIATIVES IS NOT THAT THEY ARE UNPOPULAR, BUT THAT THEY ARE UNWISE, THAT THEY ARE THE WRONG WAY TO PROCEED. I CHALLENGE THAT VIEW.

THE MOST THREATENING ISSUES CONCERN QUEBEC. THAT IS WHERE THE COUNTRY NEARLY CAME APART LAST YEAR. YOU CAN MAKE LAWYERLY ARGUMENTS, IF YOU WISH, ABOUT THE RIGHT TO INDEPENDENCE, AND YOU CAN THREATEN HARD TERMS, OR TAKE COMFORT IN THE EBB AND FLOW OF THE HIGH TIDE OF SUPPORT FOR SOVEREIGNTY. BUT IT IS IDLE TO DENY THE POWER OR THE POPULARITY OF THE SENTIMENT FOR INDEPENDENCE.

IRONICALLY, ON SOME OF THE STRICTLY CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES, RELATING TO JURISDICTIONS, THE CHALLENGE HAS BECOME MORE MANAGEABLE. FISCAL REALITIES HAVE ACCOMPLISHED A FLEXIBILITY WHICH CONSTITUTIONAL NEGOTIATORS COULD NOT. AT THE SAME TIME, THE IMPACT OF THE GLOBAL ECONOMY HAS MADE IT CLEAR TO QUEBEC CITY THAT ECONOMIC TIES TO CANADA ARE WORTH PRESERVING. THOSE ARE SHIFTS AWAY FROM THE RIGIDITY OF SOME OF THE MORE TRADITIONAL DEFENDERS OF WHAT THEY CALLED "A STRONG CENTRAL GOVERNMENT", AND SOME OF THE MORE ZEALOUS PROPONENTS OF SEPARATION. IT IS CERTAINLY NOT IMPOSSIBLE THAT, IN ANY SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF CANADA, MORE PRAGMATIC ARRANGEMENTS COULD BE MADE.

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THE REAL ISSUE IS ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE QUEBEC COMMUNITY, AND THE FORMAL PLACE OF THAT COMMUNITY IN ANY RENEWED CONFEDERATION. THAT IS THE CONCEPT REFERRED TO IN THE MEECH LAKE AND CHARLOTTETOWN ACCORDS AS THE "DISTINCT SOCIETY." DURING RECENT DISCUSSIONS SPONSORED BY THE BUSINESS COUNCIL ON NATIONAL ISSUES, CLAUDE RYAN PERSUADED PARTICIPANTS TO FOCUS ON THE WORD "SOCIETY", RATHER THAN "DISTINCT", AND TO UNDERSTAND THAT, THROUGH CENTURIES, THE QUEBEC COMMUNITY HAS EVOLVED IN A WAY THAT WAS BOTH DIFFERENT FROM THE REST OF CANADA, AND CONSISTENT WITH THE HISTORIC TRADITIONS OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE. THIS IS NOT SOMETHING NEW, NOR MERELY DIFFERENT. IT RUNS DEEP IN THE HISTORY OF THE CULTURE. IT IS A QUESTION OF IDENTITY, NOT POWER.

GIVEN ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED, I DOUBT THAT A SIMPLE REFERENCE IN THE CONSTITUTION TO THE "DISTINCT SOCIETY" WILL SUFFICE. THAT WAS SIGNIFICANT IN THE MEECH LAKE ACCORD, AND WOULD BE LESS SO NOW. BUT THIS SENSE OF BEING A COMMUNITY THAT IS HISTORIC, DIFFERENT, AND ABLE TO REACH INTO THE FUTURE IS AT THE HEART OF WHAT QUEBEC WANTS TO SECURE, WITHIN CANADA, OR OUTSIDE. IT IS, IN THE BEST SENSE OF THAT WORD -- THE MARTIN LUTHER KING SENSE -- A "DREAM".

THAT IS NOT A THREAT TO OTHER CANADIANS. IT SHOULD BE AN INSPIRATION TO DRAW OUT OF CANADIAN HISTORY AND EXPERIENCE THE QUALITIES THAT DISTINGUISH CANADA IN THE WORLD. THOSE QUALITIES INCLUDE A RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY WHICH, AMONG OTHER ACCOMPLISHMENTS, HAS HELPED THE QUEBEC COMMUNITY EXPRESS AND PROTECT ITS DISTINCT IDENTITY. BUT CANADIANS, AS A WHOLE, ARE UNEASY ABOUT DREAMS. WE REGARD OURSELVES AS PRAGMATISTS, WHO FIX THINGS THAT DON'T WORK. IN RETROSPECT, ONE OF THE WEAKNESSES OF THE CHARLOTTETOWN ACCORD IS THAT IT SEEMED TOO PRAGMATIC -- A DEAL, WHICH DIDN'T CONVEY A SENSE OF THE SOCIETY IT SOUGHT TO SERVE.

I HAVE ARGUED BEFORE THAT, IN A CONTEST BETWEEN A DREAM AND A DEAL, THE DREAM WILL WIN. FACED WITH THAT REALITY, AND WITH THE EXISTENCE OF AN ARTICULATE DREAM EVOKED BY THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT IN QUEBEC, THE REST OF US HAVE TWO ALTERNATIVES. WE CAN SEEK TO CREATE A SENSE OF PURPOSE AND VITALITY ABOUT CANADA THAT GIVES QUEBECERS SOMETHING TO STAY FOR; OR WE CAN DENIGRATE THE DREAM THEY HAVE, SAY THEY WILL SUFFER IN THEIR POCKETBOOKS, DEMONIZE THEIR LEADERS, OFFER A "TOUGH LOVE" BASED UNEQUIVOCALLY ON THE PREMISE THAT WE KNOW THEIR INTERESTS BETTER THAN THEY DO.

YET THE PEOPLE WE NEED TO PERSUADE ARE THE THOUSANDS OF QUEBECERS WHO SUPPORTED SOVEREIGNTY, AND SURELY OUR PURPOSE MUST BE LARGER THAN TO SIMPLY NUDGE THE SOVEREIGNIST VOTE DOWN A FEW POINTS, SO WE WOULD HAVE, SAY, ONLY 45 PER CENT OF THE POPULATION OF OUR SECOND LARGEST PROVINCE WHO FIND THE COUNTRY SO UNSATISFACTORY THEY WANT TO LEAVE.

MR. CHRETIEN'S GOVERNMENT TAKES AN ADVERSARIAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS QUEBEC NATIONALISTS THAT MAKES IT VERY DIFFICULT TO WIN THAT POPULATION TO CANADA'S CAUSE. THAT IS COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE. YOU CAN'T FORCE A PEOPLE TO STAY WHERE THEY DON'T WANT TO BE. THIS TALK ABOUT "TOUGH LOVE" AND "PLAN B" WILL OFFEND MORE QUEBECERS THAN IT WILL PERSUADE, AND SIMPLY CONFIRM THEIR VIEW THAT THEY ARE NEITHER WANTED NOR UNDERSTOOD. IT IS ALSO THE ANTITHESIS OF CANADA: WE DON'T THREATEN OUR CITIZENS TO WIN THEIR LOYALTY.

THE STARK REALITY TODAY IS THAT NO GOVERNMENT HAS DEMONSTRATED A WILLINGNESS TO LEAD THE RENEWAL OF CANADA. THAT MAY BE BECAUSE OF OTHER COMPELLING PRIORITIES, OR A SENSE THAT THERE IS NO CONSENSUS WHICH COULD BE FORMED, OR EVEN A BELIEF THAT THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT WILL WEAR DOWN. BUT WHATEVER THE REASON, A LITTLE MORE THAN A YEAR AFTER A REFERENDUM THAT WAS NEARLY A DISASTER, THE OTHER PROVINCES ARE STEPPING ASIDE, AND THE ONLY EVIDENT STRATEGY FROM MR. CHRETIEN'S GOVERNMENT IS TO TALK TOUGH TO QUEBEC, AND ARGUE THAT ACTION ON OTHER ISSUES WILL CARRY THE DAY.

WHAT IS AS UNSETTLING IS THE CLEAR DISINTEREST SHOWN BY THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT IN THE SERIOUS AND COMPREHENSIVE EFFORT AT RENEWAL ORGANIZED BY THE BUSINESS COUNCIL ON NATIONAL ISSUES. LET ME STATE A SMALL CONFLICT OF INTEREST: I WAS PART OF THAT BCNI PROCESS, ALONG WITH OTHER CAPTAINS OF INDUSTRY LIKE BOB RAE AND CLAUDE RYAN. I THOUGHT THAT INITIATIVE OPENED IMPORTANT AVENUES, BUT WHAT IT PROPOSED MATTERS LESS NOW THAN THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE. ITS POSITION APPEARS TO BE THAT IT WILL NEITHER TAKE INITIATIVES, NOR WELCOME THEM, ON THE SO-CALLED CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES. AT THE LEAST, THAT IS ANOTHER HIGH-RISK STRATEGY FROM A FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WHOSE MIS-READING OF QUEBEC PROVED SO DANGEROUS A YEAR AGO.

THERE IS AN ARGUMENT THAT CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN OPENED IN THE FIRST PLACE, EITHER BECAUSE THEY ARE INHERENTLY IMPOSSIBLE TO RESOLVE, OR BECAUSE SUCCESSIVE QUEBEC GOVERNMENTS HAVE NOT WANTED TO RESOLVE THEM. TWO ASSUMPTIONS DRIVE THAT ARGUMENT: ONE IS A SUSPICION OF QUEBEC NATIONALISM, EVEN A CONTEMPT FOR IT; THE OTHER IS THE BELIEF THAT, LEFT ALONE, THE ISSUES WOULD HAVE SIMPLY GONE AWAY. I HAVE NEVER SHARED THAT VIEW, BUT, WHATEVER THE MERIT OF THAT ARGUMENT BEFORE, IT IS SURELY UNTENABLE NOW, IN THE AFTERSHOCK OF A REFERENDUM WHICH CANADA WON BY ITS FINGERNAILS.

WE HAVE BEEN TOO LEGALISTIC ABOUT THIS DEBATE, TREATING THE CONSTITUTION AS THOUGH IT WERE ONLY A LEGAL DOCUMENT. IN FACT, IT IS ONLY INCIDENTALLY A LEGAL DOCUMENT. LAW IS THE FORM IN WHICH WE EXPRESS THE PRAGMATIC AND POLITICAL AGREEMENTS WHICH MAKE THIS

UNIQUE AND COMPLEX COUNTRY WORK. OF COURSE WE MUST CAREFUL IN DRAFTING OUR LAWS, AND SCRUPULOUS IN RESPECTING THEM. BUT, AT LEAST IN OUR SYSTEM, THE DOCUMENT IS NOT AS IMPORTANT AS THE SOCIETY IT SERVES.

THAT IS WORTH BEARING IN MIND, BECAUSE IT PUTS IN CONTEXT SOME OF THE LESS SUCCESSFUL DEBATES OF OUR RECENT EXPERIENCE. TAKE TWO CONTROVERSIAL PHRASES, FOR EXAMPLE: THE "DISTINCT SOCIETY" AND THE IDEA OF THE EQUALITY OF THE PROVINCES. OBVIOUSLY, IN BOTH CASES, THE FINAL LEGAL LANGUAGE IS IMPORTANT, BUT THE REAL ISSUE IS: WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO SAY? WHAT INTEREST ARE WE SEEKING TO EXPRESS?

I HAVE TRIED, EARLIER TODAY, TO GIVE MY UNDERSTANDING OF THE SENSE OF HISTORY AND COMMUNITY WHICH QUEBEC SEEKS TO PROTECT AND EXPRESS INTO THE FUTURE. WHETHER OR NOT MY DESCRIPTION IS PRECISE, THE CONCEPT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE LANGUAGE, AND WE SHOULD START THERE.

THE CONCEPT OF EQUALITY IS NOTORIOUSLY DIFFICULT TO TRANSLATE INTO LAW AND PRACTICE. WE SEE THAT IN THE DEBATE ABOUT AFFIRMATIVE ACTION, WHERE THE ISSUE IS WHETHER WE TREAT PEOPLE WITH ADVANTAGES AND PEOPLE WITH DISADVANTAGES AS THOUGH THEY WERE THE SAME. WE HAVE ALWAYS ALLOWED OURSELVES A LOT OF LATITUDE IN CANADA IN THE WAY WE TREAT DIFFERENT REALITIES. FOR EXAMPLE, PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND IS A PROVINCE, AND TORONTO IS NOT. THAT MIGHT NOT SEEM LOGICAL; IT MAY EVEN ANNOY SOME TORONTONIANS; BUT IT MAKES SENSE IN THE CANADIAN CIRCUMSTANCES. IN MY OWN PROVINCE TODAY, THERE IS A DEBATE ABOUT WHETHER RURAL ELECTORAL DISTRICTS SHOULD HAVE SMALLER POPULATIONS THAN URBAN CONSTITUENCIES. FOR 21 YEARS, I REPRESENTED A SEAT WITH A FAR SMALLER POPULATION THAN A DOWNTOWN TORONTO CONSTITUENCY, BUT MY FIRST RIDING OF ROCKY MOUNTAIN ALSO STRETCHED FROM THE UNITED STATES BORDER TO THE PEACE RIVER COUNTRY. IN CASES LIKE THAT, YOU HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THE STRICT PRINCIPLE AND COMMON SENSE.

TO OUR CREDIT, CANADA HAS TYPICALLY CHOSEN COMMON SENSE. IF THE FATHERS OF CONFEDERATION HAD BEEN TOLD THEY COULD NOT TREAT DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES DIFFERENTLY, THERE WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN A COUNTRY. OUR GENIUS SINCE HAS BEEN TO DEVISE PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS WHICH WORK, WHETHER THAT IS TO RESPECT THE INTERESTS OF LARGE LINGUISTIC MINORITIES IN ONTARIO AND QUEBEC AND NEW BRUNSWICK, OR TO INTRODUCE EQUALIZATION TO SMOOTH OUT THE SHARP DIFFERENCES OF INCOME OF DIFFERENT PROVINCES, OR TO ACCOMMODATE A QUEBEC PENSION PLAN, OR MOVE THE NATIONAL ENERGY BOARD TO CALGARY.

PERHAPS THE APPROACH IS TO AVOID CREATING ARTIFICIAL DIFFERENCES WHILE RECOGNIZING REAL INTERESTS, THAT WON'T BE EASY, BUT THE EMPHASIS ON REAL INTERESTS IS WORTH PURSUING.

I HAVE HEARD THE CHARLOTTETOWN ACCORD DESCRIBED ROUTINELY AS A "MONSTROSITY". THERE WAS SOME SMALL COMFORT IN KNOWING THAT DESCRIPTION USUALLY CAME FROM COMMENTATORS WHO, THE NEXT DAY, WERE SIMILARLY EMPHATIC AND DISMISSIVE ABOUT SOME ENTIRELY DIFFERENT ISSUE. I HAVE A MORE POSITIVE VIEW OF THE CHARLOTTETOWN INITIATIVE, BUT AM NOT SUGGESTING THAT WE LAUNCH SUCH A COMPREHENSIVE INITIATIVE AGAIN, AT LEAST NOT NOW.

NEITHER, HOWEVER, IS IT ENOUGH TO DRIFT ALONG, AND DENIGRATE THE SOVEREIGNISTS, AND WAVE THE FLAG. CANADA DID THAT LAST YEAR. I HOPE THE GOVERNMENTS, FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL, WILL TAKE SERIOUSLY THE CONSIDERED PROPOSALS PUT FORWARD BY THE BUSINESS COUNCIL, AND BY OTHER GROUPS WHOSE GOAL IS TO RENEW THIS LARGE COUNTRY. MORE THAN THAT, THEY MIGHT LOOK TO OTHER METHODS OF NEGOTIATION, WHICH HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN OTHER FIELDS. IT WOULD BE USEFUL FOR A REPRESENTATIVE GROUP OF GOVERNMENTS -- IDEALLY, ALL OF THEM -- TO LOOK BEYOND THE TRADITIONAL ISSUES OF JURISDICTION, AND THE PHRASES THAT RECENTLY FAILED, TO IDENTIFY THE REAL INTERESTS THAT MUST BE ADDRESSED, IF WE ARE TO RENEW THIS COUNTRY. THAT MAY REVEAL MORE COMMON GROUND, INCLUDING IN QUEBEC, THAN WE FOUND IN THE MORE DIRECT CONSTITUTIONAL ROUNDS, OR THAN WILL EMERGE FROM THE ADVERSARIAL ATMOSPHERE TODAY.

I HAVE ARGUED BEFORE THAT WE NEED TO PROMOTE A PROMINENT DISCUSSION OF CANADIAN GOALS AND PURPOSES, AND THAT NEED IS MORE URGENT NOW THAN EVER. THE LANGUAGE OF CONSTITUTIONS DIVIDES, YET THERE IS EVERY EVIDENCE THAT CANADIANS AGREE ON BASIC VALUES AND GOALS. THAT IS TRUE ACROSS SOVEREIGNISTS AND FEDERALISTS, AND IN EVERY REGION. THERE IS, FOR EXAMPLE, A COMMON PRIDE IN THE ROLE CANADA HAS BEEN ABLE TO PLAY INTERNATIONALLY, AND A FOCUSED DISCUSSION ON HOW THAT CANADIAN TALENT APPLIES TO THE MODERN WORLD WOULD PROBABLY YIELD BOTH AGREEMENT AND SOME SENSE OF COMMON PURPOSE. THE QUESTION OF THE EDUCATION OF OUR CHILDREN, WHILE FRAUGHT WITH JURISDICTIONAL DIFFICULTIES, MAY NONETHELESS PRODUCE A BROAD AGREEMENT ON WHAT WE SHOULD BE TRYING TO DO. FOR ANOTHER EXAMPLE, ONE OF THE CRITICAL ISSUES OF THESE MODERN TIMES IS TO DRAW THE APPROPRIATE BALANCE BETWEEN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR, AND THAT IS AN ISSUE WHERE CANADA HAS ALWAYS BEEN CREATIVE, AND DISTINCTIVE. THE IRONY OF THIS COUNTRY, AS WE DRIFT APART, IS THAT WE SHARE SO MANY GOALS, YET HAVE NEITHER THE MEANS NOR THE ENCOURAGEMENT TO ARTICULATE THEM.

WHEN I WAS A PRESUMPTUOUS YOUNG CANDIDATE FOR THE LEADERSHIP OF MY PARTY, TWO DECADES AGO, THE THEME I CHOSE FOR MY CAMPAIGN WAS A PHRASE OF THE FOUNDER OF MY PARTY, THE FOUNDER OF MY COUNTRY, SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD. WHEN HE WAS WORKING SO SUCCESSFULLY TO BUILD A LARGE NATION, HE REGULARLY URGED HIS ASSOCIATES TO "LOOK A LITTLE AHEAD, MY FRIENDS." TYPICALLY, WE CANADIANS REMEMBER SIR JOHN'S WEAKNESSES MORE VIVIDLY THAN WE DO HIS WISDOM. CERTAINLY THAT ADVICE -- TO LOOK A LITTLE AHEAD, TO DETERMINE WHAT OUR LONG TERM INTERESTS ARE, AND THEN PURSUE THEM -- IS WORTH HEEDING TODAY.