

Canadian Club Speech
John N. Turner
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It is our good fortune as Canadians to occupy the most beautiful land on earth.

It is our good sense which has made this country one of the most free and open democracies in the world.

I have had the opportunity, given only to a few, to know our great and beautiful country from coast to coast to coast.

A salmon barbecue with the Haida people at Hotspring Island in the Queen Charlottes; sailing off the Gulf Islands; the glorious celebration that was the Winter Olympics, in Calgary; canoeing down the Burnside to Bathurst Inlet on the Arctic Ocean; a sunset at Lake of the Woods or at Go Home Bay on Georgian Bay; cross-country skiing in the Gatineau; cheering for the Maple Leafs at the Gardens or the Montreal Canadiens at the old Forum; hearing Mass at Notre Dame Church on Place d'Armes, Montreal; visiting the ateliers d'arts in Baie Ste Paul in the Charlevoix; walking the fishing ports of Atlantic Canada; eating lobster on the shores of Passamaquoddy Bay; sharing a bean supper at harvest time in southern Saskatchewan. It was there I remembered these short lines

God comes down in the rain,
And the crop grows tall
This is the country faith,
And the best of all.

Geography and history. Two determining factors of our nationhood. One physical, immutable. One human, generational -- England, France, the American Revolution, the arrival of people from everywhere. And all were made welcome. But geography and climate still hold sway: limitless, vast, rough, cruel, relentless. The human condition exposed to the ruthlessness of nature. But the benign seasons as well, the languid summer and the glorious autumn. The Group of Seven caught this on canvass in breathtaking fashion.

And with this vastness, the gift of solitude -- being alone, or with family at the cottage or summer camp. The long evenings over the bar-b-q. The quiet evening paddle. Watching the sun go down. Watching the moon come up. No where else in the world can one really be as alone or at one with nature.

That side of Canada we cannot take for granted. We continue to pollute our great outdoors. We debate the encroachment of mining and forestry on our vast, untouched northern paradise.

Our identity as Canadians is facing three simultaneous challenges:

- (a) the prolongation of the debate over Quebec's place in Confederation;
- (b) the continuing erosion of sovereignty and Canadian ownership and jobs under the so-called free trade agreement (FTA) with the U.S.;
- (c) the fad called "globalism" that dissolves borders under the banner of big business and trade.

Let me deal with each:

We are proud to live in a country that is bilingual and multicultural where our diversity presents a constant and ever-present challenge.

Can we English-speaking Canadians not understand Quebec sufficiently well to have our fellow citizens comfortable within our Confederation? Yet can Québécois not recognize the real pluses of being and remaining Canadian?

We must continue to pursue a dialogue and reach a new consensus, responding to the traditional and historic claims of Quebec, bearing in mind other legitimate claims, including those of our aboriginal peoples. A dialogue -- not a legalistic confrontation. The courts will not solve this issue.

We must work to heal the wounds which this endless debate and the referendum have opened up, and rekindle that great spirit which brought us together as a country almost 130 years ago. The flame of Canadianism must be relit. The mood of tolerance regained. The confidence in ourselves restored.

I have always felt that Quebec was something special, different. It never bothered me. Jill and I lived and worked there for 15 years. I represented Montreal in Parliament, as did Stanley Hart's father, Morris Hart. We felt at home there. But Québécois are different: a different system of law, a different language, a different history, a different sense of humour. Distinct Society - no problem - they are a distinct society. Alone on a continent of 300 million English-speaking people, which reinforces this distinction.

That's why I supported Meech Lake which proposed to include the distinct society in our constitution. I did so, much to my political cost. That's why David Peterson supported Meech Lake -- much to his political cost. Of the five former Prime Ministers and the current Prime Minister who may appear in this club's centennial series, four of us supported Meech Lake, Clarke, Mulroney, Turner and Campbell. Two opposed it - Trudeau and Chretien, although Chretien since just before the referendum is now a recent fervent convert.

Perhaps the solution has now gone beyond mere recognition of a distinct society. Since the referendum, the options have escalated. Perhaps in order to satisfy an aroused Quebec nationalism, we will have to design an asymmetrical style of federalism with distinct powers, for Quebec. If that is not palatable to western Canada and Ontario, we will have reached a dangerous plateau in the debate.

Ottawa appears to be idling in neutral on the question. Perhaps the unofficial policy is to hope that Lucien Bouchard will run out of gas. Maybe he will. Maybe they are right. I feel they are taking a big chance.

I would get on with it. Let's solve it and bind them to us. Then our future is limitless. Sir Wilfred Laurier was perhaps a little premature when he said that the 20th century would belong to Canada - but if we can solve the identity of Quebec within Canada we can be more confident that the 21st century will!

But only by remaining a free and sovereign nation can we be in a position to make future choices for ourselves. To surrender our sovereignty is to surrender control over our own destiny.

I am referring, of course, to the FTA with U.S. Many of you in this room will have disagreed with me -- and still do. I remain a Free Trader - on a multilateral scale. But this is not a Free Trade deal.

True, our exports to the U.S. are high - but more due to a 75cent dollar than the trade agreement. The exchange rate has always been more important than the tariff which was low anyway in 1988. During the past seven years under the FTA, in real dollar terms Canada's merchandise trade balance fell by a huge \$61 billion, GDP growth was less than half the level of the seven previous years, employment growth was but a third and full-time employment growth but a sixth of previous levels. At the same time, the new U.S. ownership in Canada recorded an all - time increase in 1995.

Anyone who took the time to read the text of the treaty with the U.S., knew it was a bad deal for Canada. I suspect that most of the media and most of our business leaders did not read the text. The leaders of the forestry industry did. And so did the leaders of our steel industry. The treaty did not secure guaranteed access for our products to the American market. The so called dispute mechanisms - the binational tribunals -- are bound to apply U.S. law as it "may be amended from time to time". (Section 1904.1) In other words, the U.S. congress can change American law and we are still bound. That's not free trade.

And there was a price we paid for the limited access we did obtain. And that price is a reduction of our sovereignty -- cultural and economic.

I opposed the trade deal because we were dramatically reducing our ability to make our own choices for our own future.

The underlying philosophy of the trade deal was that Canada should yield to the north-south pull of market forces, and that our present system be replaced by the free market model of the United States.

I believe in free market forces. I always have. I believe in competition. But let's not forget our history. Canada would not exist if we had relied solely on free market forces.

We built this country east, west and north in order to resist the overwhelming continental market forces dominated by the United States. We built a national railway, a national highway, a national broadcasting system, a national airline, a national system of social security. And all of this infrastructure is now under siege.

Pure market forces would not ensure regional equality.

Pure market forces would not have given us public housing or public transportation or the best health care system in the world.

Nor let us allow global forces cloud our vision of Canada as a strong, independent, sovereign, and above all, a united country.

Marshall McLuhan's "global village" has taken on a life of its own. Down come the borders in the name of trade and business. The nation - state is labelled obsolete. The transnational corporation moves anywhere at will, less and less patrolled by regulation or law. And people move across borders too - in massive numbers.

Because of our fragmented, decentralised federalism and our muted patriotism, we Canadians are more vulnerable than most.

What happens to our sense of community and history called nationhood. Are we Canadians being swept along aimlessly in a current that erodes loyalty to custom, tradition, identity. Are we surrendering those features of our lives that made it worthwhile being or becoming Canadian?

It's inevitable you say? Not unless we continue to allow it to happen. That was the feature of the trade deal with the U.S. that disturbed me most. The erosion of our sovereignty, our identity, our sense of community. Globalization without some strengthening of our national fibre could dilute our sense of country even more.

But if we are to meet this national challenge in a global world, we need to call on the best and the brightest of the next generation to take an active role in the political life of this country. We need more young people who are willing to set aside their own personal goals for a time and put the country first.

I believe that the highest calling in life next to the Ministry of God is public office. It gave me the opportunity to return a little of what our country has given to me.

You are part of the system too. We cannot take our public process for granted. We cannot always leave it to others. We have a great country that is worth preserving. That won't happen unless more people care and do something about it.

My dream has always been that we live up one day to our potential as a country. That was Sir Wilfred Laurier's dream. And Sir John A's too. And they still remain our greatest Prime Ministers.

We have such a great heritage and such a great opportunity -- with our limitless land, water, resources. Our northern frontier. The space to be alone when we want to. Our two languages and many

cultures. Our spirit of freedom and tolerance. Our respect for law. Our faith in Parliamentary democracy.

We want this nation to endure because millions of Canadians share my dream for our country - for a Canada that is strong, sovereign and united.