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# Canada in the 21st Century<sup>1</sup>

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**david j. elkins**

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'May you live in interesting times' is not just a Chinese curse. It is also a Canadian curse, because of our preoccupation with prolonged constitutional debate.

For a very long time, many Canadians asked 'What does Quebec want?' As a result of the Mont St. Gabriel conference in 1985 and the Meech Lake Accord in 1987, Canadians know the answer. Although these Quebec demands were by far the most moderate and least strident in 30 years, they were still too much for many Canadians to accept.

If the minimum is too much, where do we go from here? What happens next? The future is not something unique, discrete, and simple which we can predict. The future is not like a train which arrives at 5:43pm. The future is something we create piece by piece, and destroy piece by piece, and re-create over and over again. It is thus unwise to speak of predictions in the strict sense. Instead, I will try to spell out several scenarios and the likelihood or probability of their occurrence.

At the outset, let me dismiss two extreme predictions or forecasts. Many Canadians hope that the death of the Meech Lake Accord means that we can return to the status quo, that it is now 'business as usual', that we can focus on more important issues like the budgetary deficit, global warming, or free trade with the United States. It will become clear as I discuss other topics that this scenario is unrealistic, and I think it is also undesirable.

The second scenario which is almost certainly ruled out by Canadian history is an immediate transformation of Canada in a dramatic way. Whether one calls such a scenario revolution, *coup d'etat*, civil war, disintegration, or secession, I doubt it will occur. Canada has been called 'The Peaceable Kingdom' and proudly views itself as a place of 'peace, order, and good government'. While one may occasionally question the 'good government' part, peace and order will prevail for the foreseeable future. The country has evolved in important ways over the 123 years since Confederation - so much so that Sir John A. Macdonald would hardly recognise it today - and evolution and incremental change will continue to be its hallmarks.

## **Historical Background**

One could write a long book while endeavouring to provide the historical background necessary to appreciate this critical juncture in Canada's evolution. I

must focus on only a few key events and then turn to my analysis and scenarios for the future.

One could begin in 1760 with the military conquest of Quebec. Certainly, this defeat motivates much of the anger felt by some Quebecois. It also lives in the memories of some English-Canadians who even today say things like 'Don't they remember that they lost?'

One could also begin by pointing to the historic *Quebec Act* of 1774. This Act permitted the continuation of French laws and edicts, and thus the divergence between the civil code and the common law. It was, in essence, the first legitimization of Quebec as a distinct society.

One may equally well begin the narrative with the Quiet Revolution. The election of the Lesage Government in June 1960 was not only the cause but the culmination of many changes. These included the weakening of the Church in everyday life; urbanisation of the French-speaking population; rapid economic development; and the growth of the state apparatus. Not least of the important concomitants of the Quiet Revolution was the rise to prominence of a new generation of political figures including Rene Levesque, Andre Laurendeau, Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Robert Bourassa.

Crucial as these events were, brevity requires that I focus on recent episodes. Thus, I must skip over the election of the Parti Quebecois in November 1976, the searching re-examination of Canadian federalism in the ensuing years, and the defeat of the *indépendantiste* referendum of May 1980. During the campaign over the referendum, Prime Minister Trudeau's most impassioned speech promised Quebecois that if they voted 'no' to independence, he would work for 'renewed federalism'. This promise, I believe, lies at the heart of Canada's current anguish because it raised expectations that Quebec would gain powers within Confederation, could thus feel secure as part of Canada, and would therefore put aside its aspirations for sovereignty or sovereignty-association.

In summer 1980, Trudeau announced a new round of constitutional meetings to forge that arrangement which had eluded all previous governments - the patriation of the *BNA Act* - so that Canada's Constitution could be amended by Canadians rather than by the Parliament of Great Britain. The Government of Canada, after fruitless negotiations, decided in September 1980 to patriate and amend the Constitution unilaterally, that is, without the full agreement of the provinces. After months of lobbying in London and after a Supreme Court reference case in September 1981, it became clear that provincial participation, if not unanimous consent, was necessary. The Prime Minister called the First Ministers together in Ottawa in November 1981, and several days later, an agreement was reached which, in the event, patriated the Constitution, added a *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, included an indigenous amending formula, and made a few other less noteworthy changes. It was this agreement of November 1981, now known as the *Canada Act 1982*, which many believe was the 'poisoned fruit' which resulted in the birth and death of Meech Lake. Why?

To understand the nearly nine years since then, one must recognise two

fundamental and often overlooked facts about the 1981 agreement. One concerns the reduction of Quebec's powers inherent in the *Canada Act 1982*, and the other concerns the absence of Quebec consent to the agreement. The diminution of Quebec powers occurred most notably in the amending formula which required only seven provinces with more than 50% of the population, and thereby marked the end of unanimity. This meant that Quebec no longer had a veto over major constitutional changes.

The absence of Quebec's consent has been dismissed by many observers as no more than the obvious consequence of a separatist government. While it may be true that the Parti Quebecois Government would have found it difficult to agree to the amendments consented to by the other governments, the fundamental point is that they were not given the opportunity to consent.

The outline of the agreement was negotiated by three men: Jean Chretien (a Minister in the Trudeau Liberal Government), Roy McMurtry (a Minister in the Conservative Ontario Government), and Roy Romanow (a Minister in the NDP Government of Saskatchewan). Representing different parties and different regions, they believed they had a consensus. When they discussed the matters with their First Ministers, that belief was strengthened. Thus, in the late evening of November 4, 1981, they contacted the other government delegations - except Quebec - and found that all would accept the deal.

At a pre-arranged breakfast meeting a few hours later, an astonished and humiliated Rene Levesque was given a *fait accompli*. Here, they told him, is the proposal we will send to Her Majesty for approval by the British Parliament. Although consent was theoretically possible at that moment, it was not realistically feasible for Quebec to accept an arrangement in which they had played no consultative role.

Quebec's absence from the negotiating table from that moment until the Meech Lake meetings explains why I assert that the *Canada Act 1982* led to Meech Lake. Brian Mulroney pledged his Government - elected in 1984 - to negotiate constitutional amendments which would allow Quebec to accept at last the new framework established in 1982.

Negotiations behind the scenes culminated in the Meech Lake Accord in April 1987 which was then modified and confirmed during an all-night session in June 1987 in the Langevin Building. It contained the five provisions which the Quebec Government put forward as the minimum which they required. So Quebec hastened to be the first government to ratify the Accord on June 23, 1987, thereby starting the clock on the three-year time limit for ratification.

### Provisions of the Accord

What, then, was the price Quebec expected in order to heal the wounds caused by their exclusion from the 1981 deal? There were five topics which Quebec representatives made clear from the beginning were minimum demands and not just a bargaining stance.

First, there should be recognition that Quebec constituted, within Canada, a distinct society.

Second, the Cullen-Couture agreement on immigration services would be entrenched in the Constitution so that it could not be abrogated by a future policy shift in the federal government.

Third, the so-called 'spending power' of the federal government in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction would be changed so that provinces could 'opt out' of shared-costs programmes with compensation if they set up parallel programmes.

Fourth, Quebec wanted the right to nominate Justices to its three seats on the Supreme Court. Previously, the federal government nominated and appointed all Justices and consultation was not required.

Fifth, certain matters requiring less than unanimous consent would in future require Quebec's consent before entrenchment in the Constitution. These included Senate reform and the creation of new provinces.

In the bargaining in April and June 1987, there was general agreement on several of these points, but some Premiers insisted that their provinces receive the additional powers granted to Quebec. In particular, they wanted to nominate Supreme Court Justices; they wanted similar powers over nominations to the Senate; and they demanded unanimity - and not just a Quebec veto - on Senate reform and the creation of new provinces.

Because Meech Lake resulted in unanimous agreement, there was a contradiction at the heart of the Accord. If each power or veto granted to Quebec must be matched by an equivalent power or veto to each other province, what is left of the concept that Quebec is a distinct society? The purpose of recognising Quebec's distinctiveness was to provide justification for the additional powers it needed to preserve and promote the French language in the North American sea of English. One might disagree with that purpose, but that was clearly the motive behind this provision.

This unspoken contradiction proved to be the Achilles heel of Meech. Although many groups opposed one or another provision of the Accord, native leaders were able to arouse the most sympathy among the general public. And of course, it was the opposition of Elijah Harper - a Cree Indian from Manitoba - who delayed the proceedings of the Manitoba Legislature so long that the time ran out on the Accord. There is great irony in the fact that the requirement of unanimous consent to accelerate Manitoba's normal legislative process should be the undoing of an Accord whose most objectionable feature was that it required unanimous agreement among provinces for several types of amendment to the Constitution.

### Conflicting Demands and Understandings

Of course, many groups opposed the Meech Lake Accord, each for its own reasons. Women's groups in English Canada feared that a Quebec government

empowered to promote its distinct society might harm the position of women in Quebec. Likewise, other groups were concerned that the provision for a distinct society would be another way of overriding the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Residents of the Yukon and Northwest Territories were outraged that any province could veto provincial status for them whereas they could not participate in constitutional meetings prior to becoming provinces. As just noted, Elijah Harper and many other native Indian and Inuit leaders feared that their rights would be threatened by not recognising that they were distinct societies within Canada.

All of these concerns grow out of what Alan Cairns has christened 'constitutional minoritarianism'. By this, he means that the explicit mention of many groups in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* lent legitimacy to their causes. Even more significant, perhaps, inclusion in the Charter stimulated these groups to greater activity and organisational strength, aided by the federal government's decision to set up a Charter challenge fund to pay for private challenges under the provisions of the Charter.

I hasten to add that each of these groups had legitimate grievances. Precisely because those demands were legitimate, to ignore them in order to further the demands of Quebec and other provinces was to risk the ire of public opinion. This is exactly what happened. People repeatedly asked, in one form or another, how politicians could look after the interests of provinces while failing to respond to the heartfelt demands of a host of citizen groups. In addition, of course, there were groups who opposed Meech Lake on less noble grounds including that Quebec was the spoiled child of Confederation. In all of these instances, the claim was made that Meech was flawed by the nature of the process by which it was generated. Greater democratic openness, it was asserted, would have resulted in a better Accord.

The allowance of three years for ratification was another area of weakness in the Meech process. The longer the time frame, the greater chance of a change of government. As it happens, Manitoba, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland saw the governing party in each replaced by people less committed to Meech. Beyond the change of governments, however, the leaders of these three provinces claimed that they had recent mandates from the people and that 'they could thereby legitimately ask that their constituents' concerns be met. This was especially compelling in Manitoba where public opinion polls showed anywhere from 60-80% of the population opposed to the ratification of Meech Lake during early 1990.

Opposition to the Accord was not always based on knowledge of the Accord. Many people admitted in polls that they did not understand its provisions but were opposed because they felt left out. Where people claimed knowledge, they were deeply divided.

Another area of profound disagreement should be noted. This concerned whether or not the Accord would weaken the Federal Government and 'Balkanise' the country. Part of this concern focused on appointments to the

Senate and Supreme Court because the Accord would have required provincial nominations. The greatest concern, however, was expressed about changes to the spending power.

One view argued that the ability of provinces (especially Quebec) to opt out of national shared cost programmes would mean that there would never in the future be major national programmes. Day care was usually cited in this regard. At the other extreme, some people alleged that, after all, there were no really national programmes in many areas in the past. For example, health care exhibits variations in extent and means of funding in different provinces. Likewise, Quebec had opted out of the Canada Pension Plan from the beginning. Beyond that, some pointed out correctly that these new provisions about opting out only applied in areas of *exclusive provincial jurisdiction*. Hence, one could hardly quibble with the right of a province to set up its own unique programme.

With the death of Meech Lake on June 23, 1990, we will never be able to test out the truth of these predictions or points of view. The value in mentioning them, however, lies in noting how radically different were the interpretations of the same black-letter provisions by groups with contrary interests. Indeed, even the experts were divided. Political scientists, lawyers, bureaucrats, and leaders of interest groups all split down the middle over these predictions. This is not the place to debate who was right. Instead, I note that defence of the Accord was made more difficult by public disagreement among the experts and opinion leaders.

### Immediate Consequences

So Meech is dead. What can we foresee as the likely consequences? I will first outline a few immediate and obvious consequences, and then turn to a couple of long-term scenarios. I lack the time to do more than mention most of them, reserving the more detailed exposition for the long-range forecasts.

The most obvious consequence is that Quebec will not, in the future, participate in First Ministers conferences or in constitutional negotiations. Thus, Senate reform, clarification of aboriginal rights, and other pressing matters have been postponed indefinitely. The second consequence is also obvious. The Mulroney Government has been weakened. Representing a Quebec constituency, the Prime Minister himself has lost credibility in English Canada and may be in danger of lacking the ability to deliver policies in other areas. In particular, if Quebec eventually votes for some form of independence or sovereignty-association, can the Prime Minister speak on behalf of the rest of Canada? The usual answer is 'no', but a third consequence makes that answer problematic.

That third area concerns the deep divisions within the major political parties over Meech Lake and over how one responds to its demise. The leaders of all three major parties were strongly in favour of Meech in 1987. John Turner as Liberal leader and Ed Broadbent as New Democratic Party leader encountered virulent opposition within their caucuses, and even resignations, because of their

open defence of the Accord. Ed Broadbent's successor, Audrey McLaughlin, was a severe critic of Meech. She represents the Yukon Territory and shares all of the concerns expressed by aboriginals and other residents of the Territories.

On the very day that the Meech deadline expired, Jean Chretien was elected leader of the Liberal Party. As a former Minister in several Trudeau governments, he is seen by many as 'yesterday's man'. He was never a supporter of Meech, and his chief rivals for the leadership were openly contemptuous of him on this score. The media in Quebec allege that he is out of touch with his own province and the changing moods and aspirations of Quebecers. Whatever the truth, the Liberal Party is divided as never before. Thus, it is not certain that a Quebec-based Conservative Party must inevitably yield power to the Liberals in the next election.

The advantage which the Liberals and Conservatives have enjoyed over the New Democratic Party was their claim to be able to 'broker' the two communities of French and English. This ability is now seriously in doubt. Beyond the credibility of the leaders, questions must be asked about the social and political bases of the party system. It is too soon to tell whether there will be a major realignment, whether a new party will rise to prominence to fill the gap now growing, or whether one of the existing parties can position itself to reintegrate public and provincial sentiments.

A fourth consequence may be played out in answer to the question many people are asking: Who speaks for Canada? There are two queries implicit in the question. First, can the leaders of the parties at the federal or provincial level jointly speak for all interests? The deeper significance of the question, however, concerns what we have learned from Meech Lake about the need for democratic participation in constitutional renewal.

Even people who believed that the provisions of the Meech Lake Accord were beneficial are troubled by the process. As many have stated it, how can eleven middle-aged white males meeting behind closed doors legitimately negotiate the future of the country without public input or even legislative amendments? The next few years will see attempts to fashion a process which is more open, more democratic, and thus more complicated and even more uncertain than that which we have just witnessed. Referenda have been discussed as one avenue: if so, we will see whether they are any more helpful in Canada than they have been in Australia.

### Long-term: Convergence and Distinctiveness

In my earlier research, I have demonstrated that the increasingly strident assertions of provincial and regional interests have gone hand in hand with the actual reduction of the political distinctiveness of the provinces and regions, including Quebec. This will, I believe, continue. What is the basis of this conjuncture, and what is its significance?

Specifically, Richard Simeon and I, in our book, *Small Worlds*, found that in

the last three decades there has been a great deal of convergence on common political and economic patterns. What citizens expect of their governments has become very similar. All now expect that certain basic services should be provided wherever one lives in Canada, whether in a rich or a poor region. Likewise, regardless of the party in power, there are powerful forces in the electorates which severely constrain what governments must or can do in order to have a chance of gaining or retaining power. These changes have been most notable in Quebec and especially among French Quebecers. But all parts of Canada have changed, and they now resemble each other in ways undreamed of 50 or 100 years ago.

Governments have responded to these pressures, usually willingly. How money is raised in taxes and fees exhibits less variation than formerly. Budget priorities now follow very similar lines. The proportion of a provincial budget spent on health, education, or welfare is remarkably similar across the country.

These broad and deep convergences occurred during the period when the self-importance of provinces became most strident. Is that accidental? What meaning does it have?

First of all, when settlements are isolated and distinct, they are generally not aware of distant neighbours. Travel, migration, and communication make people conscious of both similarities and differences.

Second, as one becomes aware of other political actors, one learns from them. This can stimulate cooperation and thus lead to similarities. As one competes for similar goods and for payments from the federal treasury, a mutual process of conflict and convergence leads to a heightened awareness of being less distinct, less unique. This has been occurring on a world scale as well as within Canada.

Third, as one becomes aware that one is not so distinctive, one may reasonably become apprehensive about retaining a separate existence and about maintaining one's identity. This apprehension often in turn leads to strident assertions of autonomy, of heritage, and of uniqueness, and to the fostering of defensive measures, whether in trade, cultural areas, or language.

Finally, these trends may be local - as between provinces or towns - or they may be global. Particularly when convergence is the result of pressures such as American economic and cultural dominance or free trade and open markets, these usually foster a sense of coercion, of being pushed or bullied. To the extent that the mass media allow people to become aware of the continental or global nature of these changes, they become conscious that everyone is being homogenised in some respects. The enormous geographic reach of these influences emphasises the strength of the forces at work and leads to even greater concern and apprehension about one's ability to act autonomously.

Although one may pursue this line of analysis in many directions, let us consider its direct relevance to Quebec and Canada in present circumstances. As Quebec has become more like the rest of Canada, it has become anxious to emphasise the French language and the few cultural features which remain of its

former distinctiveness. The control of policy instruments to preserve and promote the French fact looms ever larger in popular and elite calculations.

The converging patterns lead to different interpretations in Quebec and elsewhere. English Canadians, to the extent they have become aware of these similarities, welcome them as evidence of growing unity and national maturity. Quebecois, on the hand, see these trends as threatening their existence as a special place. This fundamental and long-standing asymmetry of perceptions found its most recent expression in evaluations of Meech Lake.

Just at the time that Quebec and the other parts of Canada were converging, English Canada felt itself under intense pressures from the American giant next door. The 4,000-mile undefended border became a liability in the eyes of many Canadians. Television, radio, movies, and trade weakened the sense of Canadianness, while arousing fears of assimilation.

Thus, Quebec and the rest of Canada both saw themselves in the same situation for different reasons. Each felt threatened by the blandishments of a wider association, whether the neighbour was English Canada or the United States. Under these conditions, openness, tolerance, accommodation, and cooperation become less viable alternatives just when they are most needed. When these forces, trends, and fears are joined by the activation of other identities and loyalties - such as aboriginals, women, gays, and immigrants - one has created a potent mixture in which cleavages and demands multiply faster than they can be satisfied.

Meech Lake was an attempt to deal with one set of fears and concerns - namely, those of Quebec. This was appropriate and reasonable, but the process moved too slowly to satisfy other groups whose fears and concerns were also growing. Again, we come up against the asymmetric perceptions mentioned above: Quebec asserting that it is time to deal with its urgent needs, and other groups saying that there is no reason to neglect them for the sake of Quebec.

There are many ways in which such conflicting demands can be played out. I have already ruled out two of them - muddling along as we have been and revolution. I turn, therefore, to an interrelated set of changes which seem to me more plausible and more typically Canadian. Indeed, they are likely to be part of a global pattern of change, and that is part of the reason I have referred to 'Canada in the 21st Century'. It is not possible to be isolated, self-sufficient, and sovereign in the way we think we used to be.

### Long Term: The Unbundling of Canada

The long term scenario I propose for your consideration has many names. I prefer to describe it as 'the unbundling of Canada'. We must be cautious that words do not become our masters. Other terms could also be used as a summary description; these include renewed federalism, superfederalism, or sovereignty-association. Each has its appeal, but each already carries connotations which make it less suitable for my purposes. As you will see, an 'unbundled Canada' is

a looser kind of federalism, perhaps equally well described as 'asymmetric federalism' because Quebec will be treated differently in some respects from the other provinces.

Meech Lake, like the *Canada Act 1982*, was an attempt to deal in an orderly, coordinated, multilateral, and systematic way with constitutional change. With the death of Meech, we will see changes which are not orderly or systematic. Instead, we can be certain to see piecemeal, fragmented, bilateral, and largely uncoordinated changes. And these changes will take the form of policy instruments and federal or provincial legislation rather than constitutional amendments.

Quebec made it plain several years ago that unless the minimum demands embodied in the Meech Accord were met, it would not participate in any future constitutional changes or negotiations. In the period after the demise of Meech, Premier Bourassa has outlined clearly how Quebec will react: no First Ministers conferences, no constitutional discussions, bilateral discussions with the federal government, and province-to-province negotiations only where it is in Quebec's interests to do so.

We have seen the beginnings of this process already. Quebec and the federal government are now on the verge of an understanding about new arrangements for transferring additional powers to Quebec over certain aspects of immigration. These powers have their base in the Cullen-Couture agreement which was signed nearly two decades ago, and were to have been entrenched in the Constitution as part of the Meech Lake amendments. Quebec has also announced that it will seek greater autonomy in telecommunications policy and in job retraining and manpower. All three policy domains bear on Quebec's concerns about a declining population, threats to the French language in Quebec, and the distinctive features of Quebec society.

Of course, Quebec will not be the only province or group to proceed in this piecemeal fashion. The central concern at this moment, however, is how Quebec will relate to the rest of Canada. By focusing on this part of the puzzle, I do not mean to slight other parts or to suggest that other changes may not be significant. In the immediate future, Quebec will likely be more successful in this endeavour, because the Mulroney Government wants to make amends for the death of Meech. Federalism will be more asymmetric to the extent that different provisions will characterise different provinces or sets of provinces.

The unbundling will occur in the psychological realm as well as in these policy areas. I have argued for many years that Canada - like most countries - is characterised by multiple identities and multiple loyalties. Prime Minister Trudeau used to ask whether people were Albertans or Quebecers first or Canadians first. This is not the place to explicate why such a question is misleading - because nearly everyone is unable to choose unequivocally which is first - but I must emphasise that the question at least takes cognizance of the fact that there is no uniform answer, because there are powerful provincial and national loyalties and identities.

With the advent of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in 1982, new and muscular identities have been voiced and defended. These include aboriginal rights, women's rights, and a host of other identities and loyalties including those of the disabled, gays and lesbians, and multicultural groups other than French and English. Hence, the question Trudeau asked is no longer so simple, if it ever was.

In short, the psychological space of Canadians has become conditional as it has expanded and contracted. It has expanded by witnessing the legitimization of many identities which were once very private - family, sexual identity or preference, and physical disability. These are now 'public' identities fostered by the language of rights and freedoms. The psychological space has, however, contracted to the degree that most people now view these once-private identities as more central to their well-being. The privatisation of identities parallels their more public display. As identities and loyalties become more varied and distinct, the concept of Canadian citizenship becomes 'unbundled'. What a person is depends on circumstances and on what aspect of identity is threatened by public events.

With or without Meech Lake, we must accept the *conditional* nature of identities. As the bonds of nationalism are complicated by other pressing concerns in the piece by piece negotiations between political units, so is space created for more varied identities. Indeed, the stress on Quebec as a distinct society and on Canada as distinct from the United States grows out of an awareness that our nationalities are conditioned by dimensions of our life styles and values which have become increasingly salient to many residents of Canada and Quebec. Not only is one's environmental or feminist perspective influenced by one's nationalism, but one's nationalism is conditioned by many other identities. The asymmetry noted above emerges here as well: the greater homogeneity of Quebec society compared to the rest of Canada assists its ability to think and act collectively to a degree envied but not equalled by English Canada.

The third aspect of unbundling goes to the heart of nationalism and is, I believe, part of a worldwide trend. A few hundred years ago, there were no nation-states and no nationalism as we know these phenomena today. They were creations of the 18th century, and especially of the American and French revolutions. These concepts are increasingly less relevant and will in a century or so be seen for what they have always been - namely, a passing stage in the evolution of human society.

There is irony and, for some, sadness in the imminent accomplishment of Quebec nationalism - and that of Lithuania, Armenia, and Catalan - just at the historic moment when nation-states are less sovereign and autonomous and when other identities vie with nationalism for the hearts of men and women everywhere.

I do not suggest that nations will cease to exist as territorially bounded political units. They may do so, but not in the near future. Instead, I hypothesise that nations - and their associated expressions as nationalism - will share the stage



with other organisational forms and with other expressions of identity. Nations, in short, will become 'unbundled' by serving narrower and more specific purposes than in the past two centuries. And the world may well be better for that.

Nationalism's great strength historically has been its ability to focus several kinds of loyalties and identities simultaneously. These have included a sense of place, ethnicity, religion, and history. Canada as a nation has never felt fully a nation because its nationalism was never unconditional. 'Two nations warring in the bosom of a single state' was how Lord Durham expressed the issue at the beginning of this century. Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* conveyed much the same perspective in the form of a novel.

If it turns out that Canada can fashion a new relationship among its constituent elements, perhaps it will show the way for other nation-states divided by nationalism. If so, the prediction that the 20th century would be Canada's century may finally come true in the 21st century.

At the heart of nationalism of the traditional sort lies the concept of sovereignty. The unbundling to which I make reference touches the core of sovereignty as it touches policies and identities. The opposite of sovereignty has usually been described as subservience, colonialism, or satellite status. In the century to come, no nation will be sovereign if that means complete autonomy. The opposite or new meaning of sovereignty will require new ways of thinking of our place in the world. Instead of hierarchy, exclusivity, boundedness, and bilaterality, we must come to accept the national status of cooperation, functional relations, openness, and multilaterality. Instead of many strands of our lives twisted together in a binding rope, we face a world in which the strands criss-cross each other, in which the bundle comes unbundled.

Nations in this sense will still exist as geographic entities, but the nation-state will serve only a few specific purposes rather than being all-encompassing and all-serving. It will seem natural in such circumstances to characterise each group or individual by a multitude of aspects besides nation of residence.

Analogies for future possibilities are generally suspect, but let me offer one from our imperial past. When Europeans colonised what we now call the third world, they brought a notion of ownership of land which was alien to native cultures almost everywhere. The concept of ownership in fee simple meant that you got the whole bundle. If you owned it, no one else did, with a very few exceptions mainly concerned with statist rights like eminent domain. Exclusivity was fundamental.

This definition of ownership gradually eclipsed earlier notions of ownership of a non-exclusive sort. For example, in pre-British India, one person or group might have the right to pick fruit, another to use the well, another to build a hut, and another to collect tolls on the road. None owned the land singularly or in an exclusive sense. This ancient concept still exists and has become more common as environmentalists, for example, emphasise that we must not exploit the land for our own unique purposes but learn to share it and to differentiate its uses.

The European concept of the nation-state carried the same assumptions as did

ownership, assumptions about unitary interest, exclusivity, and boundedness. Beyond the nation-state in Canada and elsewhere lies a non-exclusive, overlapping concept of identity in which the rope of nationality gives way to a multi-stranded interweaving of identities, loyalties, and animosity. Instead of an all-purpose political organisation, we will create many specific-purpose relationships. This has, as I indicated, already begun with the death of Meech Lake. The fragmentary, piecemeal unbundling will almost certainly lead, if not to the independence of Quebec, then to an asymmetric federalism in which Quebec's special needs are accorded much greater weight. Once one accepts that asymmetry, it should be obvious that between independence as a nation or absolute equality as a province within Canada, there are an infinite number of intermediate points of compromise.

The future I have outlined should not be interpreted as either benign or stable. Politics concerns the art of the impossible. It is always messy, complicated, and unstable. Whenever you try to resolve conflicting values, hopes, and fears, any solution requires something gained, something lost. So in pondering Canada after Meech Lake or Canada in the 21st century, my forecast is for a mixture of sun and cloud, perhaps showers, but not a tornado. This is how it has been for a long time in the Peaceable Kingdom.

Each generation of Canadians has had to reconcile their conflicting visions of the country. Each generation must fashion a compromise in which no one is satisfied. Eventually, a workable arrangement evolves, and eventually, it is challenged as unfair or too costly or too narrow. And so another generation confronts the future again. That is Canada's history, and that is Canada's destiny. And that is why Canada is cursed - once again - with interesting times.

## Notes

1. This paper was delivered as a keynote address for the ACSANZ '90 Conference at the University of New England, July, 1990.