

# Should there be freer trade?

By TONY CARLSON  
King Canute lives, in spirit at least.

The venerable monarch, who occupied the thrones of England, Denmark and Norway 950 years ago, gave new meaning to the word intransigence.

In fact, he may even have invented it when he sat himself down on a beach one day and, in a test of his royal will, ordered the tides to stop. Canute, whose nickname was The Great, did not give up, so the legend goes, until he was thoroughly moist. Score yet another one for Mother Nature.

But today, the great one's philosophical heirs are finding their voices in the debate on freer trade with the United States.

At the head of the parade are Canadian labor leaders. Donning their blinkers and wrapping themselves in the maple leaf, they've been dealing in fear to try to stem a tide of pro-

gress that won't be stopped.

Few take seriously the comments by the Canadian Labor Congress head Shirley Carr that the U.S. wants free trade with Canada so it can realize its long-standing ambition to gain control of the Northwest Passage.

But many people take to heart the horror stories of jobs sacrificed to the power of the economic giant to the south, not to mention the loss of our cultural identity.

Let's leave aside for the time being the fact that all this fuss about our cultural sovereignty is an insult to those of us who are confident in our sense of our "Canadianism" and in our ability to maintain it.

Let's also acknowledge that there will, in a freer trade agreement, be adjustments in the labor market. Many jobs will disappear, and that's why freer trade advocates like

the Canadian Federation of Independent Business are pressuring for transitional arrangements to aid the most vulnerable sectors.

But many jobs will be created, as businesses adapt to the new situation by seeking every opportunity to find a niche in the huge American market.

Just as important, a freer trade agreement will, if properly drawn up, provide solutions to the very problems that our labor leaders are now complaining about. Thus the bitterness caused by the shakes and shingles affair, or the soft-wood lumber issue, would be simply a bad memory if the

proper rules are agreed to by both countries.

If that happens, business would have greater certainty in its attempts to crack the U.S. market and certainty is one thing both management and labor can use to their benefit.

More important in the long run, though, is the fact that by tur-

ning their backs on freer trade, labor leaders are rejecting the future.

If Canadian firms cannot compete with the U.S., how will they ever prepare themselves to face the challenge from

the new economic giants emerging overseas.

Thus labor's intransigence puts us all at risk of being blindsided by the unstoppable force of an international economy which is be-

ing transformed largely on the strength of the microchip.

And unlike Canute, we won't be able to walk away with only wet underwear to worry about.

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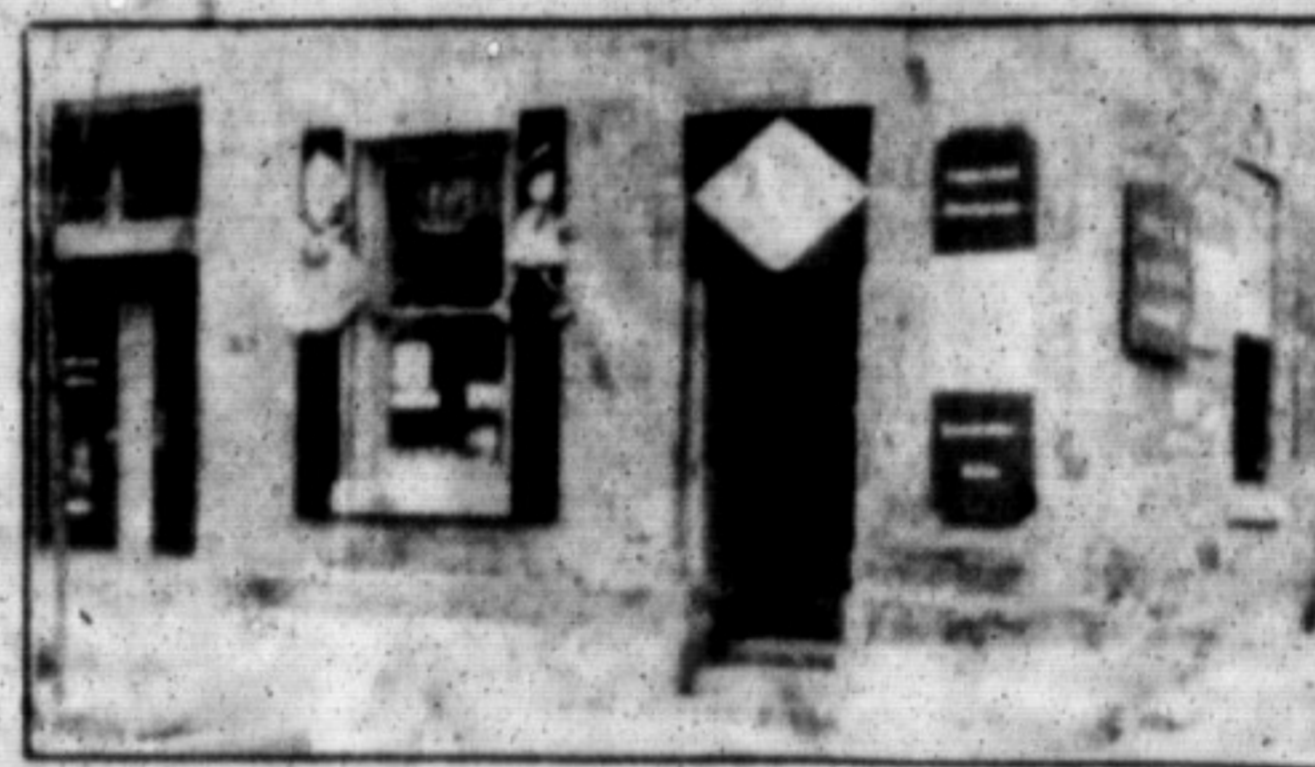
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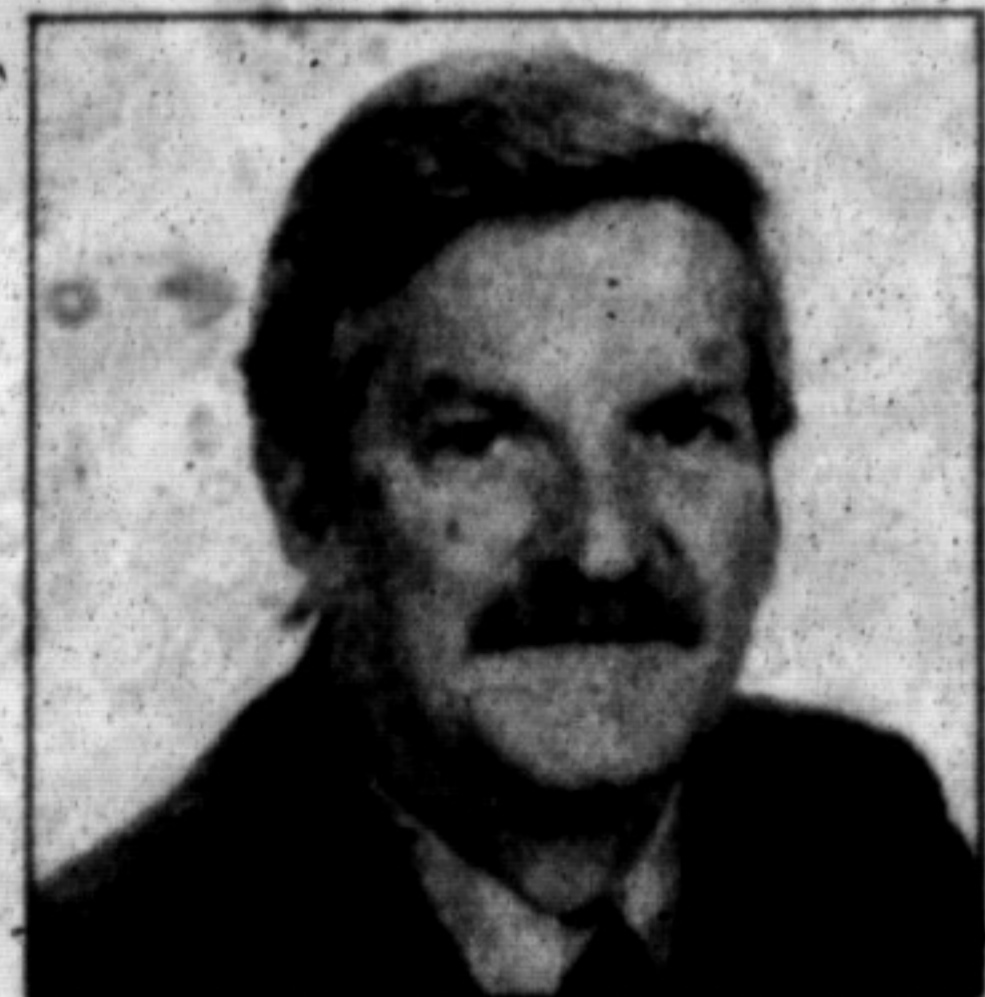


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