

The great northern escape

It's nice to be a Northerner. Relatively isolated. Quiet. Away from the hustle and bustle and problems of the urban south. The best thing about the North, however, in my opinion, is the great "Escape factor". Whenever the absurdity of modern society presses down too hard, we have one of the most beautiful and vast natural settings that we can escape into.

When things get too insane, I can walk out my back door, down the trail into the bush, and if I go far enough to get past the last traces of litter and human vestige, I can easily forget the world of soft drink jingles, serial killers and politicians.

It's when I'm out there, getting in "tune" with nature, so to speak, that I can really appreciate being a Northerner. Even when I return to the reality of our neck of society, I can enjoy low crime and unemployment and the nice rural familiarity. We live in a kind of insulated atmosphere, protected, if you will, from many of the harsh and absurd realities of a modern society.

T.V. and newspapers are, however, the great equalizers. No matter how quiet and "peaceful" things may seem here, the silliness filters in through news reports, T.V. programs and pressure advertising. To illustrate the point, last weekend, I'd spent an enjoyable day hiking to the lake. The air was fresh and the sun was bright. When I

returned, I fired up the ol' BBQ for supper and ate on the balcony in the warm evening air. After a trip to the fridge for a cold beer, I finally settled on the couch and turned on the T.V. to one of those weekend news reports. I was greeted with the following...

On the international scene, a report on CBS news recently showed that 1 of 5 American children will grow up in poverty. Meanwhile, in almost the same breath, a report was released about John Sununu, Bush's chief of staff, who, after being banned from flying on costly air force jets to his ski vacations, hired a White House limo and driver to go to New York to pick up some stamps.

The war on drugs was stepped up. A powerful drug king-pin named Escobar from the Medellin Cartel was sentenced to prison. He must stay in his new million dollar mansion complete with his bodyguard contingent, swimming pool, and soccer team for at least two years (or whenever he decides that he's paid his debt to society). The Americans were obviously upset. You see, another condition of his "imprisonment" was that there be no extradition to the U.S. Apparently, U.S. congressmen seem bent on the idea that the elimination of

one drug lord is going to dry up the 100 billion dollar demand for cocaine by the American users. After all, the users can 'Just Say No'.

On another channel, before a particular newscast switched to the idiocy on the domestic agenda, they broke for the usual series of 10 or 11 commercials. Within that mind numbing series of

detergent tests, and scenes of flying feminine products, the revelations from the soft

drink industry took on a whole new dimension. Apparently, the new Ray Charles Pepsi jingle is describing such an incredible elixir that African bush tribes and Buddhist monks have incorporated the little tune into their daily rituals. If that wasn't enough, it also has the entire United Nations singing side by side practically proclaiming Pepsi to be the official soft drink of the Universe (it makes you wonder whether Pepsi's ad execs had been consuming too much of Escobar's product).

With the resumption of the newscast, it soon became obvious that Joe Clark and the rest of the Tory gang would have us believe that a high-level diplomat from Iraq (a country that we were at war with) was admitted to the country with landed immigrant status based

on the decision of a low-level civil servant who obviously bypassed many of the immigration requirements that he had spent his professional life adhering to. Mr. Clark and his crony politician buddies were not to blame.

It was N.H.L. draft time. The reports were aglow with images of 18 year old kids being signed to contracts that will pay them salaries 10 times the average income of teachers, nurses, social workers, and other "unimportant" professions.

The newscast ended and another Tampax commercial come on. I clicked off the T.V. with my ever handy remote. The picture disappeared into a small white dot that lingered for a few seconds, then flickered into nothingness.

I went to the sliding doors and looked south across the expanse of trees to the great lake. The sun was setting and it cast a brilliant rose hue over the horizon. I looked down and realized that I'd brought the remote out with me so I went back in and laid it down on the coffee table beside the T.V. I grabbed my now warm beer and returned to the balcony.

Twilight had settled in and all was still except for the occasional croak of a frog or bed song of a bird. No traffic, no sirens. The absurdities of the T.V. broadcast faded like the white dot on the picture screen. It's nice to be a Northerner.

Chris Reid

The Treadmill

The road to self government

It's now been one full year since Senator Lowell Murray, our former minister of federal-provincial relations, officially declared the Meech Lake Accord dead. The Newfoundland and Manitoba Legislatures both adjourned before the June 22 1990 deadline, without holding a ratification vote on the Accord.

A year ago, I wrote in this space about Sandy Lake - where the community had just signed an agreement with the Ontario government to establish the province's first officially-recognized aboriginal justice system. I argued at the time that we don't need more conferences and commissions to redefine Canada - we need living, breathing experiments to define our new relationships with each other as a country.

I still feel that way. In the year since Mulroney "rolled the dice" and lost, we have had no end of constitutional papers and forums; the national joke known as the Spicer Commission; the legalistic nightmare of the new amending formula proposed by Beaudoin-Edwards; the deadline-setting ultimatums of the Belanger-Campeau Commission and the Allaire Report in Quebec; and voluminous other reports in the rest of Canada. With so many reports and studies, Canadians have a right to feel confused and frustrated by the details.

We must not forget that one of the reasons Meech Lake died was the exclusion of aboriginal people from the

process. Designating Meech "the Quebec round" of constitution-framing merely sidestepped the long-standing exclusion of aboriginal interests from the process. "Why," argued leaders such as recently-retired national chief George Erasmus of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), "must aboriginal needs be given second place to the interests and demands of one province? We were here first."

One year after the death of Meech, we hear our new constitutional affairs minister, Joe Clark, repeatedly promise that this time, aboriginal people will be included. Exactly how this inclusion will take place has yet to be worked out with the newly-elected national chief of the AFN, Ovide Mercredi. But regardless of how things are worked out at the national level, I still contend that only broad principles of a constitutional deal will be established at the national level. Making new constitutional arrangements real will only happen at the local and regional levels - like right here in northern Ontario, with the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation (NAN).

The details of the negotiation process for self-government in the NAN area are lengthy and at first glance appear confusing. On the provincial government side, the principles being followed are even paradoxical, making the pro-

cess seem even more confusing. To quote from a provincial government background paper issued in November 1990, "Ontario agreed to enter into the negotiations (with NAN) to give its commitment to aboriginal self-government concrete meaning. The province also wants to demonstrate that transferring powers and jurisdiction to aboriginal people over lands and natural resources will not detract from its ability to manage or develop resources for

the benefit of all the people of the province." It remains to be seen whether the Ontario negotiator, Lakehead University President Bob Rosehart, can achieve such a delicate balance; giving real control to aboriginal institutions, while not giving it up entirely.

To commemorate this first anniversary of the death of Meech, I have decided to try to make the positions of all parties in the NAN negotiations over self-government as clear as I can. The complexities should not deter all of us from following this process closely, however long it takes. Our country is being redefined in this process.

What I intend to do is describe the principles, as stated by all sides. If the parties stick to their principles, then we should be able to follow the process.

First, let's examine the position of the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation. The orga-

nization that represents 46 communities across the top third of the province got to first base in February 1986, with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the province and Ottawa. This MOU spells out the intent of all parties to negotiate self-government comprehensively, including such things as:

- fishing, trapping and hunting
- band status
- lands for reserves
- community infrastructure (things like housing, electricity, sewer and water)
- health and social services
- economic development
- powers and institutions of self-government

Some of these items have already been achieved, such as the recent announcement by Ontario that six bands will get their long-promised land.

NAN reached second base in November 1990, with the signing of an "Interim Measures Agreement" (IMA). This agreement recognized that, while the self-government negotiations are continuing, the communities of NAN needed some protection. To quote from the same government background paper, the IMA "is intended to ensure that NAN and its member communities be systematically notified of any plans or activities involving land or natural resources that may have a significant impact on NAN First Nations." Thus

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NORTHERN INSIGHTS
by Larry Sanders

