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Canada 225? What will history books of 2092 say about 1992?

Since the Canada 125 celebrations have reached their climax, and we have taken Canadian patriotism as high as it can go—which really isn't that high, but what the hell, we're Canadian—let's move beyond this year and speculate what historians are going to say about us 100 years from now.

Let's not mince words—Canada has become a hostage to a host of factions, each convinced of the correctness of their point of view, each unwilling to temper their hard-line opinions of how the country should look in the future.

Quebec's demands have been evolving for a number of years. They include a constitutional veto, the transfer of federal powers to Quebec, recognition as a distinct society, and compensation when they opt out of federal programs.

Now some of these positions are more firm than others, but unfortunately Robert Bourassa isn't at the table, so it's hard to say what's what. The premier with the biggest shopping list of demands refuses to negotiate. Only in Canada, you say?

Then of course we have the "triple E" idiots—the premiers of small provinces who are holding up the entire process and are threatening the future of Canada so they can entrench their stubborn attitudes in the constitution. That way, nothing will get done in the future, just like today.

Think about it—these banana republic premiers already have an equal say in federal/provincial discussions. Why would we want to give them another voice for their regional complaints in an equal senate? National institutions should represent national interests. "Why should we be the ones that have to compromise?" say Getty and Wells. "We've already done all the compromising. It's a matter of principle."

No it's not. It's a matter of "I'm afraid of the Reform Party and will do anything to save my skin" and "I'm just a loopy Newfie with no idea about what I'm doing, la-dee-da-dee-da."

So let's speculate what the result of these short-sighted attitudes may be, as seen in a history book written in 2092:

"By the end of 1992, Canada had fallen victim to the ills of regionalism. As with all cataclysmic historical events, an extraordinary combination of events directly led to end of the Canadian nation. Unable to come up with a deal to satisfy all of the disparate provincial interests, burdened by a heavy debt load and a never-ending recession, and deeply unpopular besides, the federal government became a shadow of its former self, completely unable to unite Canadians or forge national policies.

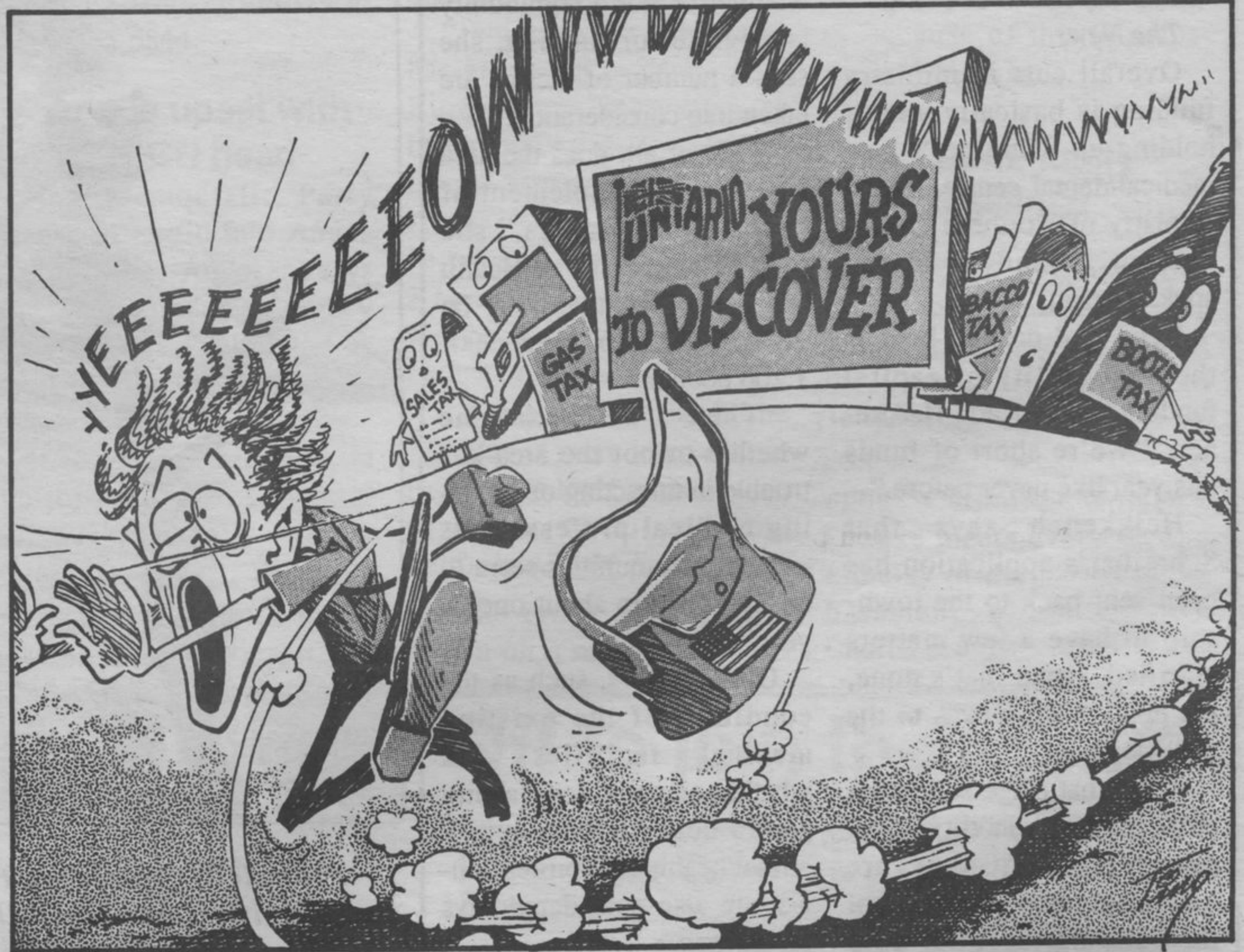
"A disastrous national referendum, held in the wake of the failure of the premiers to agree on a constitutional package, was the most divisive event in Canadian history, polarizing the positions of the already sulking provincial governments.

"Isolated once again, Quebec finally separated, followed by a mass exodus of its 800,000 english-speaking citizens. They became, in effect, refugees in their own country.

"By 2030, the remaining provinces had succumbed to continental drift and joined the United States, a country with fewer but more fundamental problems of its own. Quebec became a weak but sovereign nation for a time, until it too was assimilated into the American monolith in 2056. Ironically, today only senior citizens speak any french at all in Quebec. By comparison, more than 80 per cent spoke french as their first language as recently as 1992.

"The area just north of the east coast states, once known as Newfoundland, is now filled with ghost towns populated only by native peoples, who have been granted autonomy over the region. The end of Canadian transfer payments and the extinction of the northern codfish was the end of Newfoundland.

"All that's left of Canada is the southern-most section of what used to be the Province of Ontario. Premier Bill Davis the III negotiated sovereignty-association with the US in 2025 and it is known today as the Canadian Territory."



Let's hear it for silliness

Here in Canada, the word 'summer' is synonymous with a lot of things—suntans, swimming, no school, two weeks at the lake, mosquitoes, gardens...

In the newspaper business, summer means just one thing...the Silly Season.

We call it that because, come late June or early July, the traditional news sources suddenly evaporate. It's usually too hot to fight wars or stage protest marches. Members of Parliament (always a fertile oasis for stories of graft, duplicity and bedrock stupidity) have closed their Ottawa offices and gone back to their constituencies to answer for their sins.

Each summer you'll notice that the front pages of newspapers which all year were full of solemn articles about the Constitutional Crisis, impending environmental catastrophes and the ongoing threat of nuclear proliferation have been taken over by tales of people frying eggs on sidewalks. Or bungee jumping naked off bridges. Or keeping 14-foot anacondas in their bathrooms. Dopey stories. Goofy stories. Nonsensical stories. Ergo, the Silly Season.

Simply put, each summer finds your average newspaper Scribbler with not too much to scribble about. So, like a trout fisherman in a played-out pool, we start casting about for smaller fry. We enter a period of prolonged navel-gazing, which is how, a few weeks ago I came to find myself writing about err...navels.

Belly buttons, to put it in the vernacular. I mused about what a useless non-appendage the belly button is. I speculated on how long it would take advertisers to make us feel unfulfilled in the belly button department and come up with a product we could lather on to make us feel more secure in our belly buttonhood.

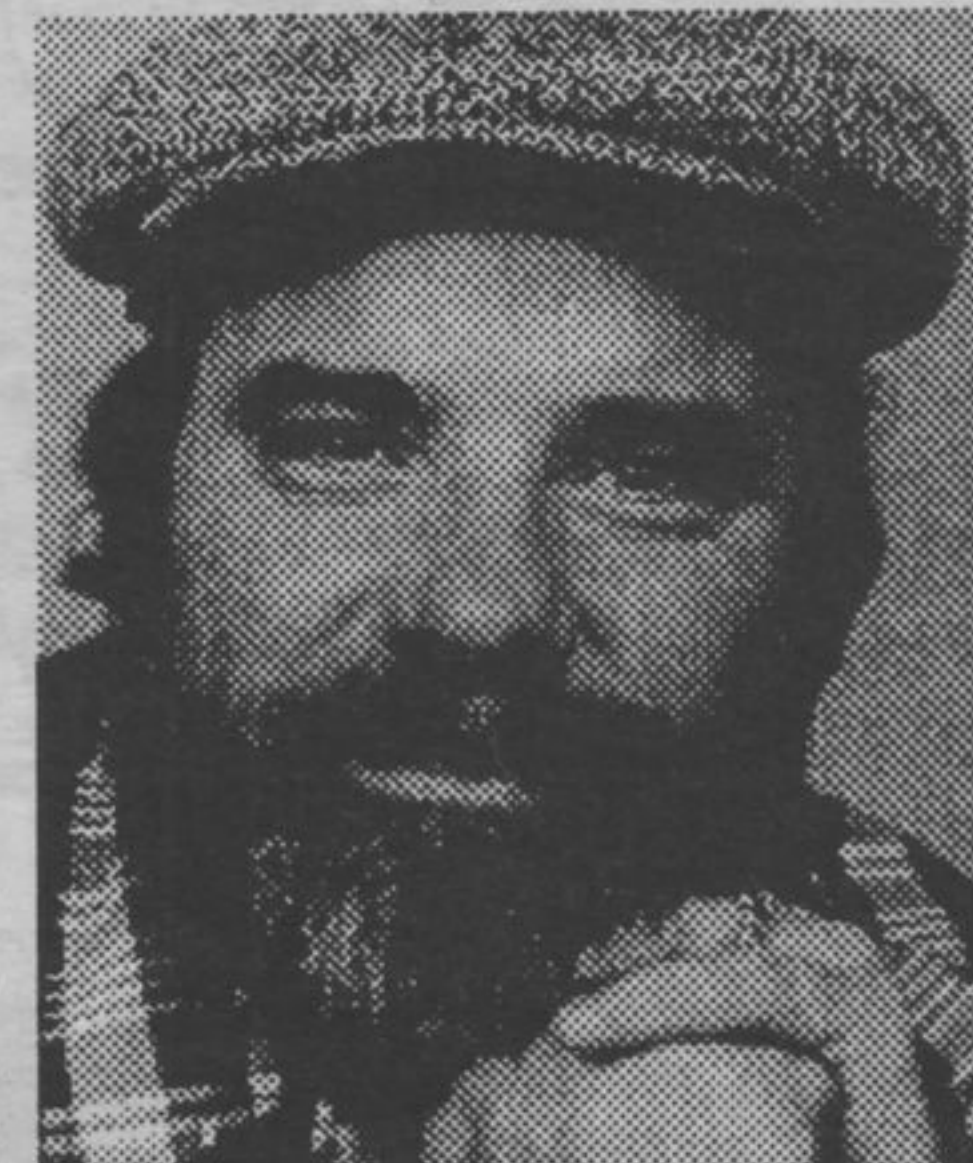
As columns go, it wasn't one I'd submit for a Pulitzer, but it was okay. Amusing. Perfect for

touches to it, I remember thinking 'Well, at least I won't have to answer any letters over this one.'

Wrong, wrong, wrong.

The mail is still coming in. Not hate mail, exactly, but the correspondence does suggest that my knowledge of navels is somewhat inadequate.

Or as one writer put it: "Poor Arthur. What you know about navels wouldn't fill a bat's belly button."



Arthur Black

A Paris, Ontario writer asked: "Did you know that an American armed forces pamphlet was banned because it contained a drawing of Adam and Eve without navels?" The writer says that some American congressmen were offended by the pamphlet, "claiming it impugned the majesty of the Almighty by implying He created something with no earthly (or heavenly)

use, that is, belly buttons." When you think about it—why would Adam and Eve have belly buttons?

Another correspondent wrote: "I'm surprised you haven't heard about one of the most cherished gifts a bride could receive. I speak of the mink belly button warmer (with a rhinestone in the middle). Makes an excellent gift for Christmas or Thanksgiving...or whenever the temperature drops below 5 degrees."

And then there was the letter from a Hamilton umbilicophile. He writes: "Useless? Far from it...Arthur, my wife is possessed of one of the great belly buttons in this world. Not only is it in exactly the right place, it is also deep. Large enough to hold more than a thimbleful of champagne or even cognac. Arthur, you haven't truly lived until you've sampled your favorite spirit from the navel of your loved one."

Let's hear it for the Silly Season