

Alternative North Americas

What Canada and the United States Can Learn from Each Other

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Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1: Open Borders and Closing Threats

The United States and Canada simply must have greater confidence that the border is as impermeable as law, technology, and official effort by trained personnel can make it. This is a movement northward problem, not just a travel southward issue, but it is a real problem often ignored in mass media because it has not become a 9/11 or some comparable disaster. Whether or not Canadians believe that Uncle Sam is psychotic over security when he should just be paranoid, they need to cater to his condition.

We can hope that

Chapter 3: Arctic Sovereignty—Arctic Antics

Arctic sovereignty and the Northwest Passage have been “agree to disagree” for 50 years. However, “global warming” or the perception of such is forcing an issue that the United States politely did not force to conclusion. Now, we need to come to terms bilaterally on a topic that can no longer be evaded, one which Canadian nationalistic chauvinism has exacerbated. To be sure, the results on all border and

Canadian government would be plucking feathers from the eagle. While kvetching at the expense of incarcerating criminals, Canadian chatterers never calculate the costs of crime deferred by incarceration.

Chapter 6: Human Rights and Wrongs

Based on geographic and historical good fortune, Canada has been able to benefit from such circumstances to develop a society and polity that accrues plaudits on many measures of human rights—certainly in comparison to some of the alternatives. Consequently, Canada believes that it leads the world in the humane, liberal application of noble principles to practical realities.

Nevertheless, Canadian restrictions on free speech are becoming invidious. For human rights commissions and tribunals permit injustice collecting specious charges of hate speech, resulting in heavy fines and restrictions as well as crushing legal costs that must be borne by the defendants. Their suppression of free speech will have a chilling effect on vigorous public discourse. Canadian human rights commissions on federal and provincial levels may have had origins in the best of intentions; however, they have become instruments of persecution, prompting self-censorship at vast expense for those charged in tribunals that are characterized by irregular, extrajudicial rules and proceedings.

Chapter 7: Language and Discord

The societal commitment to bilingualism (French and English) is ostensibly a noble effort to generate national unity by accommodating the French fact at every official level throughout the country. It has failed. The effort generates endless expensive artificial effort by individuals to qualify in the language of the “other.” In real terms, Canada is no more bilingual than it was a century ago; however, the policy effectively assures that virtually no unilingual individual can start late in Canadian federal politics and expect to learn the second language well enough to compete against those who were born bilingual or learned the second language in their youth. Moreover, language becomes a constant source of societal division (as well as an irritant for those whose “native” language is neither English nor French). Every political economic issue transmutes into a language issue.

Canada’s pursuit of equity at the national level between English and French continues to generate anger among Anglophones and indifference by Francophones who remain more concerned over restricting English use in Quebec than speaking French in the rest of Canada. While skill in multiple languages is life-enhancing, it should be a personal choice rather than an implicit societal requirement.

Chapter 8: The Canadian Military and Defense of North America

The Canadian Armed Forces spent most of the past 50 years in a steadily, well-documented decline. Although there have been periodic efforts to get the “couch potato” into at least a light exercise routine, skeptics remain skeptical. Canada has implicitly outsourced its defense to the United States and appears willing to accept the bilateral and international consequences associated with maintaining a trivial military capability.

Unfortunately, national defense is not a national commitment; instead, the Liberal Party and New Democratic Party in Canada implicitly campaign against any military commitment beyond light peacekeeping. Consequently, Canadian defense strategy is a deadly yo-yo, with the Conservative Party attempting to stretch the envelope when in power and the Liberal Party assuring the envelope is never mailed.

Moreover, Canadians are loathe to use their new Canadian Armed Forces combat capability, and it is a use-or-lose it reality as trained individuals and units retire without transmitting their expertise.

Chapter 9: The Canadian Military and Defense of North America: Scenarios for a Re-Organized Canadian Forces

For a decade, commentary on the Canadian Armed Forces had passed the "viewing with alarm" stage and has become more equivalent to writing an obituary. The Conservative increases in the defense budget and ostensible commitment to equipment purchases look good on paper and excite observers with the initial equipment implementation, but may prove to be less a societal commitment to national security.

The 10-year Afghan combat commitment created a rare commodity: trained, equipped, combat-experienced, light infantry battalions. The question is how Canada will use these units since they cannot be stored for the next unendorsed, popularly approved crisis.

Consequently, there are real questions whether any significant Canadian Armed Forces will exist a generation hence, particularly when opposition parties are profoundly skeptical

Chapter 11: Regarding the West: The Best of Times and Its Discontents

Somewhere in the Canadian psyche lurks the suspicion the United States is salivating at the thought of rending Canada into pieces and appropriating the nice parts with energy resources. Coincidentally, Canadians fail to appreciate the degree to which they have taken Western commitment to Canada as a “given” rather than a problem that ~~deserve~~ ^{deserve} the level of attention given Quebec. The problem is the obvious one of enormous wealth enjoyed by a small minority. There is a level of envy ~~that~~ ^{that}, under the guise of virtue ~~will~~ ^{will} persuade eastern Canadians to happily exploit the West, believing it has no recourse under the parliamentary system than to acquiesce. Eastern Canadian criticism of Alberta ~~as~~ ^{as} “dirty oil” —which fuels the Canadian economy—has a ~~cut~~ ^{cut}-off-nose-to-spite-face element that would be amusing were it not so dangerous for national unity.

In truth, the political straitjacket that defines parliamentary practice leaves ~~the~~ ^{the} weak provinces to be exploited and dependent on ~~the~~ ^{the} imposed limitations of large provinces such as Ontario.

Chapter 12: The Economics of Inequality

The U.S.-

Annex

Presidents and Prime Ministers: Candid Views

During the past 25 years, we have had a healthy dollop of both the good and the bad in our bilateral relationship. In the early 1990s, an observer could honestly say, with only minor caveats, that the bilateral relationship was “never better.” Subsequently, one had to refer to the statement that Canada and the United States are “best friends, like it or not.” From 2001 to 2008, we were largely in the “not” portion of that cycle. The 2008 election of President Barack Obama (and his 2012 reelection) has been a game changer at least perceptually and his conjunction with a quietly conservative government under Prime Minister Stephen Harper has minimized discord.

Otherwise, while leaders do not have to love, or even like, one another, watching their interactions often reflects underlying national attitudes: Mulrow-Reagan; Mulrow-Bush; Chrétien-Clinton-Bush; Martin-Bush; and now Harper-Obama. With some exceptions, relations have been “workmanlike,” and Canadians can be grateful that U.S. presidents have not taken occasional reflexive animosity personally.