

For a long time, western Canada may have felt we had no choice. The system was weighted against us. From the Boards of Banks, to the benign prejudice of the Public Service, to the simple arithmetic of the way power and people were distributed across this vast country. And we made the most of our grievances, teaching our children on the evils of the tariff and the freight rate; sending CCF and Social Credit and other third parties to Parliament, giving us irrelevance in the name of protest; and, when we had a little power, threatening to "let eastern bastards freeze in the dark." Those are not the characteristics of people serious about reform. That was the frustrated anger of the outsider. And while it made some differences at the margins - while it attracted attention of a kind - it confirmed our image as outsiders, including the way we saw ourselves.

We fought back, often successfully. We forced a change in the Liberal Constitutional package; we ended the National Energy Program. Those campaigns brought many of us together, but they were alliances to stop things, to turn back threats to our resources and our rights. Historically, as a region that thought like a minority, we have looked to national politics more to protect ourselves than to assert ourselves. I think that defensive era is over for Western Canada, and that we now have the opportunity to define this nation as we would like to see it. Our view will not always prevail. We would diminish this extraordinary country if one vision alone could define it. Indeed, our grievance has been that earlier definitions of Canada have left us out. The threat instead is that we will become so blinded by old grievances that we do not see the opportunity to shape this country in our own image. And if we do not see it, we will not seize it.

There are several reasons that opportunity is so striking today. One is that the population and power are shifting to western Canada. And with people has come power; the new Parliament will have thirteen more seats and nine of those are in British Columbia and Alberta. There has been a dramatic shift west of corporate power. Calgary is now third, just behind Montreal, as the home base of major Canadian companies. Energy and aviation and construction and financial decisions are being taken regularly in western Canada that affect the whole country, the whole world.

A second source of that western opportunity is international, in the developing trends of trade and politics. The Free Trade Agreement with the United States bring benefits to the whole of Canada, but it is particularly helpful to the young industries and the entrepreneurial spirit of the West. And beyond the United States, the greatest economic opportunities of the future are in Asia, across our Western Ocean. Sixty per cent of the world's population lives in Asia now;