

also the reasonable assumption that three Alberta MPs - the Deputy Prime Minister, and I, and the Government House Leader, Harvie André have some influence on the Government's priorities. Despite these incontestable realities, Albertans do not feel part of their national government. There is a widespread assumption that the national government serves someone else's interests. That perception is particularly powerful in western Canada - where whole political careers are devoted to propagating it - but it exists, to some degree, everywhere. Our national institutions are not seen as relevant to the problems people think are important.

Fewer and fewer Canadians trust the institutions which used to glue the country together - whether it is Parliament, political parties, businesses or the Church. The sense of national community is giving way to a cacophony of special interests whose extreme agendas are defined by their narrowness, and by an unwillingness to compromise with others.

The point is this. If Canada is to be an identity, and not just an address, we will have to define our country in terms larger than our immediate or personal interests. The fault is not in the interest groups. They quite properly pursue their particular concerns. The fault is in our national institutions which do not lift and hold Canadians to a larger vision.

That is a very serious problem. It affects politics, it affects journalism, it affects government, it affects business, it affects our universities.

And perhaps most importantly, it affects that small group of Canadians who traditionally have sought to define the national identity and the national interest. That is particularly true of writers, artists and intellectuals outside Quebec.

The Meech Lake controversy was unique in the relative absence of these Canadians from that national debate. It has been striking that as Quebec's separation loomed far more seriously than in 1980, the traditional custodians of English-Canadian identity were largely mute. The fight was left to politicians and citizens with fax machines. The traditional custodians of the English-Canadian identity were either silent or opposed to an Accord which would bring Quebec back to the constitutional family. As a symptom of the spiritual atrophy of Canada outside of Quebec, this is a very serious sign.

Why has that happened? Why, in the process of constantly glaring at Quebec, does the rest of Canada seem to have lost its own sense of self? Why does it sometimes seem that it is not Quebec separating from Canada that is the issue, but the rest of Canada separating from each other and from our own past?

Part of the explanation is that we do not realize what we have become. And in not realizing this, we have allowed the nation to drift, holding on to old illusions which no longer apply and neglecting to build upon the new reality which is Canada and the new world in which we survive and prosper.