

FEATURE

Searching for unity pour tout le pays

BY JERRY WEST

Jim Taylor, a trucker from Toronto, grew tired of watching politicians play chicken with the country's future. So he decided to voice his opinion, and thus set the snowball rolling.

Taylor took all the money he could scrape up and rented billboards in eleven cities across Canada. They read: "My Canada includes Québec" in English-speaking cities, or "Mon Canada comprend le Québec" in French. That was all he intended. His message worked better than he had hoped though.

The signs made people curious enough to track him down - no mean feat since there are 4600 Jim Taylors in the Toronto phone book - and then donations started pouring in.

"It was money I didn't want," says Taylor. "I didn't know what to do with it."

So Taylor decided to go with what he knew. He rented billboards outside the Premiers' conference in Whistler, and wrote the names of the 300 people who had donated money on them.

How did that go over?

"I got pneumonia from standing in the rain for three days," says Taylor, but people kept coming out to see me. By the end of the week I had 6200 names and signatures on the billboards."

From there Taylor became an icon. In September of 1991 an association sprang up to support him, and he found once again that his work wasn't finished. Through some cajoling Taylor was persuaded to go on tour, and take his message to more Canadians. Along the way he has been called such things as "Unity Man" or "Captain Canada," but Taylor dismisses the hype.

"People want a hero. I'm not a hero," he says. "I just wanted to show my concern for Canadian unity in a non-political fashion."

Taylor admits the present crisis is serious, but is optimistic about its conclusion. "There's no way I'm going to change Jacques Parizeau,"



One of the 82,000.



DAL PHOTO: MIKE DEVONPORT

We don't need another hero.

says Taylor, "but there is a large waffle group inside Québec that needs to hear our message."

He points out that a transformation is already taking place in the media. Until recently, in the Toronto news there was no mention of Montréal. A community of seven million, scarcely five hours away by car, was virtually ignored.

Now the Globe and Mail prints Editorials from Québec. Papers as far away as the Vancouver Sun are running québécois letters to the editor.

"Canadians are independently realising we need to speak to each other."

Taylor traces the root of the

problem to the development of politics in Canada.

"Unfortunately Canada has developed into a two-party system," says Taylor. He believes the voters don't trust the official opposition to effectively monitor the National Government, so they bring in Provincial Governments to do the job.

"When Pearson left office there was a mishmash of provincial governments," says Taylor, "but by the time Trudeau left, eight of ten were Conservative."

This opposition to any long-standing government had much to do with the present language debate,

according to Taylor. The Trudeau Government's official bilingualism policy made many in the West feel they were having French rammed down their throats.

As a unilingual Anglophone though, Taylor can see the utility of speaking French.

"The reality is that English and French aren't enough," he says, referring to increasing international trade. "With the North American Free Trade deal becoming a reality, we're going to have 60 million Spanish-speaking Mexicans as trading partners. We'd better have some engineers and lawyers who can speak Spanish."

Taylor has seen a lot of good will in the last five months, and as a result is very optimistic. With 82,000 signatures to date he has stopped collecting in order to raise money. He also plans to display the current 29 billboards in Québec before collecting more.

According to Taylor the sacrifice and hard work are more than compensated by the positive feedback he receives daily.

Taylor sees his present actions as a useful way to stave off the possible break-up of Canada, and is hopeful of an eventual lasting solution.

"This is not such a bad place. If we can hang tough for a while maybe soon a visionary will come along."

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