

JUNIOR, I'D LIKE YOU TO MEET YOUR NEW PLAYMATE. I WANT YOU TO SHARE YOUR TOY WITH HIM. MIKE AVAM

In Defense of Canada

There is a new presence on the Canadian political scene. Born at a news conference last March and christened at its founding convention this Thanksgiving, the Council of Canadians (COC) is poised to tackle 'right wing' and 'continentalist' policies of Canadian governments.

The Council of Canadians is the brainchild of Mel Hurtig, Edmonton entrepreneur and publisher of the Canadian Encyclopedia, to promote the growth and independence of Canada's economy, culture, and foreign policy. Already with a membership of about 2000, including the likes of Farley Mowat and David Suzuki, the COC will try to represent the varied people of a complicated country.

"We must create the most open, broad-based coalition-building network of citizens this country has ever seen," said John Trent University of Toronto professor, to his audience at the founding convention.

The Council of Canadians made headlines this summer with an incident high in Canada's arctic. With the temperatures of many Canadians rising over the uninvited passage of an American icebreaker through Canada's Northwest Passage the COC responded dramatically. Two University of Alberta students, Louanne Studer and David Achtem, joined Inuits Eddie Dillon and Roger Gruben in an aerial 'bombing' of the US icebreaker Polar Sea. The four dropped a message in a cyclinder wrapped in a Canadian flag on the deck of the ship. The message was clear. "Canadians consider our Arctic

waters, islands and ice to be Cana-

dian territory under Canadian jurisdiction. Your failure to request advance permission to sail the Northwest Passage is insulting and demeaning to our citizens and a threat to our sovereignty."

Though directed at the American intruders, the protest made an obvious impression on Brian Mulroney's government. The August protest, which received a great deal of public support, was quickly followed by several measures by the federal Tories to protect Canada's northern sovereignty, including the announcement of a new \$700 million icebreaker for that purpose. While best known for the *Polar* Sea incident, the Council of Canadians is fundamentally concerned with economic, cultural, and foreign policies of the government.

The Canadian economy is characterized by three features, according to the COC's background paper on the economy: a high degree of foreign ownership, predominantly American; a high level of international trade in which the United States is by far the largest client; and regional economic inequalities.

The COC's Statement of Purpose calls for "a new national economic policy that will expand Canada's economic sovereignty, a stance which clashes head-on with the federal government's pursuit of free trade with the U.S. 'Such a trade arrangement would inevitably result in a form of economic union and would entail surrender of essential Canadian policy instruments for the development of the Canadian way of life," says the report of the COC's workshop on trade and investment.

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David Crane of the Toronto Star agrees. "A comprehensive free trade treaty with the US is almost certain to lead to even greater US ownership and control of the Canadian economy," Crane says.

Ironically, even Brian Mulroney is on record as comparing Canada-US free trade to sleeping with an elephant. "It's terrific until the elephant twitches, and if it ever rolls over, you're a dead man."

The attraction for Canadians of a bilateral free trade arrangement is the securing of access to traditional American markets for exports such as lumber and fish. These markets are now being threatened by over 300 protectionist bills before the US Congress. The COC argues that although we may save these markets, domestic markets will be overrun by American products and American ownership will increase, as will Canadian dependency on the United States. Former Liberal cabinet minister Walter Gordon said back in 1975. "Canada, during some period of

crisis, may be absorbed by the United States; perhaps without most Canadians fully realizing what it was that was happening." The COC fears the social poli-

cies of the United States could be forced upon Canadians by the allpowerful forces of economics. Minimum wages, for example, would be subject to downward pressure to come into line with those of the US. Says Cliff Pilkey, president of the Ontario Federation of Labor, "workers in southern US industries, working under terrible working conditions, low standards of health and safety and substandard wages way well become the benchmark for Canadian manufacturing wages."

Another example is Canada's system of social security. Medicare, to a large degree supported by corporate taxes, may no longer be feasible. Business can be expected, all things equal, to migrate to areas where taxes are lowest. Since the US doesn't have this expensive system, their taxes could well be lower. If Canada is going to compete "on a level playing field" with the US taxes would have to mirror those of the States and Medicare could become a thing of the past.

The federal government is aware of this problem. Just last week a secret study prepared for the government was acquired by CTV News. The study was on the privitization of the Canadian health care system.

This is not the first time a Canadian government has been poised to open the doors to the Americans. In 1911, the Liberal government of Wilfrid Laurier, which had announced its resolve to enter into free trade with the US, was defeated at the polls by Conservative Robert Borden with a campain challenging Canadians not to become an economic and political appendage of the US. Borden called upon Canadians "to determine not a mere question of markets but the future destiny of Canada."

The Council of Canadians does not intend to challenge free trade without offering viable economic alternatives. "We must be seen as the creative builders of a dynamic Canada," says John Trent. Though specific alternatives have yet to be formulated, the convention's economic workshop called for reducing dependence on the US by expanding our trade with the rest of the world and measures to promote the investment of Canadian capital in Canadian business.

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Another major concern of the COC is the growth and independence of Candian culture. "It is vital to the survival of any nation that it ensure that its own cultural experiences and interpretations are expressed in the cultural industries that help shape modern consciousness. A nation that allows the perceptions and needs of other societies to dominate its cultural industries will eventually cease to exist," says the Statement of Purpose.

Statistics indicate that at least in broadcasting, Canadian expression is meager. Of the prime-time programs available on English language television in Canada, 78 percent are foreign. The vast majority (over 70 percent) of this programming is American. It is statistics such as these which lead author Susan Crean to say, "If there is one thing all Canadians share, it's Ameri-See "Canada", page 4