

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Tracking data illustrate a slight softening of resolve among both supporters and, to a lesser extent, opponents of free trade in the period from April to July, 1986. This pattern is apparent even among those provincial residents from Newfoundland, Alberta and British Columbia most likely to endorse a freer trade agreement. In an interesting departure from the expected, this softening of support does not translate into a hardening of cultural nationalist positions. While there has been a slight increase in the number of Canadians who are not prepared to negotiate an agreement which would include the cultural industries, this has been counterbalanced by a growing belief that the cultural sector may indeed benefit from a free trade agreement.

At the same time, the principal intervening controversy over the American imposition of the tariff on cedar shakes and shingles, has not precipitated any significant movement on overall positions. Forestry and the financial service sectors are widely identified as the principal beneficiaries from a freer trade agreement. The perception that one's own province may benefit slightly more than Canada as a whole persists among most residents outside of Ontario.

Grounds for such confidence appear to lie in the conviction among the majority of Canadians, that despite the high likelihood of short-term economic dislocations, there will be no net loss in jobs.

Where do the major social groups fall on the issue of free trade? Tracking data in July of 1986 confirm the major regional and socio-demographic differences in patterns of support on opposition to free trade. Provincial supporters and opponents remain unchanged, although it appears the case for free trade is marginally gaining ground in Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and in Ontario, with the exception of metropolitan Toronto. Differences in perceptions of the relative importance of trade and benefits from freer trade continue to suggest the need for three distinctive regional subthemes in any national communications strategy. The communications strategy for Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, where there is more tendency to negative assessment of net benefits from freer trade, should stress the reliance of the current talks to the larger