

New High Commissioner stresses importance of trade

Dept. of External Affairs
Min. des Affaires extérieures
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In April, Roy McMurtry — a former Cabinet minister in the Ontario government — became Canada's 18th High Commissioner to the United Kingdom. A graduate of the University of Toronto and of Osgoode Law School, McMurtry was called to the Bar of Ontario in 1958, and from then until 1975 he was a partner in the law firm of Benson, McMurtry, Percival and Brown. In 1970, he was appointed a Queen's Counsel.

In 1975, McMurtry was elected to the Ontario Legislature, and re-elected in 1977 and 1981. In 1975, he was named Attorney General for Ontario, and from 1978 to 1982 he also held the portfolio of Solicitor General for Ontario.

Soon after his arrival in the United Kingdom, McMurtry was interviewed by Canada Today about the future directions he sees for Canada-UK relations.

Canadian High
Commissioner to the United
Kingdom, Roy McMurtry



Mr McMurtry, did you come to the UK with any specific mandate, or with one identifiable goal you were particularly determined to achieve?

I would say that as far as the mandate is concerned, it is to renew — or re-invigorate — our relationship with the UK, in all its very special dimensions. Perhaps as a country, we have not been taking full advantage of the relationship, so I will be looking for ways to enhance it.

A significant part of that relationship — beyond the obvious cultural and historical links — has, of course, to do with trade and investment. I must say how impressed I am with what has been accomplished in the UK by way of steady economic growth over the last four years. But there are problems and challenges that remain, and for both our countries, they are not dissimilar. We in Canada also face the fundamental task of creating the conditions for bringing down high levels of unemployment. Greater trade, investment and technology-flows between our two countries will lead to more job creation on both sides of the Atlantic.

In that context, if I had any message to get across right away, it would be, first of all, to say that Canada is indeed open for business, as others have said before me; and second, that although our trading relationships with the UK are changing, they should not be considered as simply in decline. There are major opportunities for both our countries in further developing our trade and investment links.

Where do you see the main opportunities arising?

Well, you know it is business that does business, and not government. So I have to be cautious about advising business where or where not to put its money. I'm not going to do it.

It's my role — the role of government — to help create the conditions, the framework, the sound stable environment in which business, and international trade and investment, can flourish. And that's what we are doing.

In Canada, both business and the federal and provincial governments share the objective of sustaining and increasing Canadian trade with the UK. We in the High Commission can assist business with market information, marketing advice, business

contacts and promotional events such as trade fairs, trade missions and company presentations. We have been working with Canadian exporters and their UK business partners for many decades. We are committed to supporting Canadian firms here in the UK, in what is Canada's third largest export market. So our job at the Commission is to see that the trade and investment climate remains attractive.

Has the announcement that FIRA is being replaced by a new agency, Investment Canada, been welcome here?

Yes, it has. I would say that the message that FIRA was sending out was a lot more negative than many people realized. Most of the projects that came before FIRA were approved although often with long delays; but the message that was coming out was still poor.

That has changed now. There's a different attitude; the message is positive. We welcome foreign investment. We actively encourage it. I think I can best quote Prime Minister Mulroney when he said that Investment Canada will be governed by two fundamental operating objectives — to facilitate investment in Canada; and to limit government intervention in the investment area.

When Mr Mulroney was in London recently, he met with Prime Minister Thatcher; and since his government came to power last year, about a dozen of his ministers have visited London. Is this part of the effort to renew — or re-invigorate — the Canada-UK relationship?

A decade as a Cabinet minister taught me the importance of the personal relationship between leaders of government. My own visits with Prime Minister Thatcher, both before and during Prime Minister Mulroney's visit, impressed me enormously as to the degree of friendship that has developed between our two leaders.

Mrs Thatcher met Brian Mulroney while he was leader of the Opposition, and it is very apparent that she has taken a great personal interest in his career. She obviously admires his electoral success and the degree of reconciliation that he has created in a very short time between the provinces and the federal