

# CanadaWatch

PRACTICAL AND AUTHORITATIVE ANALYSIS OF KEY NATIONAL ISSUES

SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE—THE CHRÉTIEN ERA: A RED BOOK AUDIT

## Adaptive navigation in the Chrétien era

### CHANGING THE CANADIAN LANDSCAPE

When Jean Chrétien defeated Kim Campbell in the fall of 1993, Canada's economy was emerging from a recession, the country was in serious debt and running annual deficits, and the Canadian dollar was eroding in value. Quebec had joined the majority of Canadians the year before in defeating the Charlottetown Accord and was ramping up for another referendum on its constitutional status.

BY MICHAEL ADAMS

Michael Adams is the president of the Environics group of companies and author of *Fire and Ice: The United States, Canada and the Myth of Converging Values*.

In the fall of 2003, the Canadian economy is strong, the federal government has reduced its debt and no longer runs deficits, and the Canadian dollar is rising in value.

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## Taking care of business: Chrétien and the Americans

### "HARMED" RELATIONS AND THE BAD SINGER

As I write this comment for *Canada Watch* "The Chrétien Era," his successor, Paul Martin, is gathering editorial praise for his promise to restore the US-Canada relationship, supposedly damaged by Jean Chrétien during his decade as prime minister. Today's e-mail included an invitation to a scholarly conference devoted to the question "Did the relationship between President Bush and former Prime Minister Chrétien 'harm' the Canada-US relationship, and how might this change with the recent political leadership shift in Ottawa?"

BY JOHN HERD THOMPSON

John Herd Thompson is director of the North American Studies Program and chair of the Department of History at Duke University.

I'll argue instead that—given the circumstances in which he governed and the massive asymmetry of power between the United States and Canada—Chrétien did a pretty good job with US-Canada relations, by any reasonable measure. Remember that Jean Chrétien won office in 1993 in large part because Canadian voters were fed up to the

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The United States has removed Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq, although Canada and many of its other traditional allies, including France and Germany, refused to join the American-led coalition. The sovereigntist Parti québécois has been replaced by a fiscally conservative Liberal government in Quebec, and the 1999 *Clarity Act* provides a rules-based divorce should Quebec or any other province ever wish to separate from the rest of Canada.

Canada continues to rank among the best countries in the world for its quality of life as measured by the United Nations Development Program. The crime rate, particularly violent crime, is falling. Cities continue to be safer places and the destinations of choice for the two million plus immigrants who have arrived from every corner of the world over the past decade.

While not standing shoulder to shoulder with the United States and the United Kingdom in the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, Canada under Chrétien has supported the establishment of the International Criminal Court, ratified the Kyoto Protocol on global warming, and led an international effort to ban the use of landmines. At home, Chrétien's government has mandated the registration of all firearms, proposed the decriminalization of the possession of small amounts of marijuana, and allowed people of the same sex to marry.

The Chrétien government has not attempted to replace abortion under the jurisdiction of the *Criminal Code* after the Senate rejected the last abortion legislation the House of Commons put before it under then Conservative Justice Minister Kim Campbell. In Canada, abortion, as far as the law is concerned, is now a medical procedure no different from knee surgery. All of these initiatives contrast to the direction of public policy in the United States.

## CHRÉTIEN'S GREATEST CONTRIBUTIONS

Jean Chrétien's greatest contribution to

his country is his assertion of Canadian sovereignty and independent foreign policy in spite of the overwhelming pressures for continental integration, particularly after the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001. His second greatest contribution, I believe, and one he shares with his successor Paul Martin, is the restoration of fiscal balance, at least at the federal level and putting the investment of the country's public pension assets under the management of an independent board. His third major contribution is his bold initiative to provide for a rules-based exit from Confederation by Quebec or any other province.

Ironically, while Chrétien has pursued his activist agenda, the public has been disengaging from politics at least as measured by voter participation. The turnout in the historic 1988 Canada-US free trade election was 75.3 percent of eligible voters. By the third election of the Chrétien era in 2000, the proportion was only 61.2 percent and half that among the young, those born since 1970. Chrétien's success in coalescing the winning plurality when combined with the inability of his political opponents to challenge him or find the common ground among the outgroups has resulted in de facto one-party rule at the federal level.

As a result, Canadians have turned away from news and public affairs as central to their lives, toward business and the serious work of making money with occasional respites in hedonistic escapes to Starbucks for a jolt of caffeine or the sunny beaches of Mexico, and a wide array of artistic and cultural pursuits.

## SATISFIED CITIZENS PRACTISING "ADAPTIVE NAVIGATION"

Jean Chrétien leaves his countrymen and women generally satisfied with their lives and personal prospects, and generally supportive of his leadership and that of the Liberal Party. If the popularity of his party and policies upon exit is the measure, Jean Chrétien is a more successful prime minister than either of his

two great predecessors Brian Mulroney and Pierre Trudeau, both of whom had seriously worn out their welcome well before they left office.

Our most recent 2003 survey of Canadian social values finds Canadians' orientation to life to be that of "adaptive navigation" in the context of an increasingly challenging and dangerous world, one characterized in our research by "apocalyptic anxiety," "social Darwinism," and "global ecological awareness." Canadians know that bad things can and will happen. They see the world descending into survival of the fittest and the earth's ecosystem to be in jeopardy. They also see "everyday ethics" to be in decline: "don't do it because it's wrong" has been replaced by "don't get caught." Witness Enron and a host of other scandals that seem the rule rather than the exception of American capitalism.

In spite of this chaotic context, Canadians tell us they will achieve their goals of personal autonomy, control, and choice. They will do this not by deferring to the leadership of our traditional hierarchies in business, government, or the church, but by exploiting their own personal resources. When it comes to their hard-earned money, they search for trusted intermediaries. When it comes to their health, more look first to themselves rather than the doctor, the pharmacist, or advanced medical technology because they know that personal lifestyle (diet, exercise, not smoking) are the most important health determinants and are within their control.

Canadians assert their autonomy not by relying on secular or religious ideologies, but by being informed. They believe in networking and heterarchical (as opposed to hierarchical) leadership—not who you know, but what and how you know.

Aside from education, Canadians rely on information technology to help them adaptively navigate the unpredictable oceans of everyday life. PCs, laptops,

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cell phones, Blackberries, Global Positioning Systems and Personal Digital Assistants are the advanced weaponry of the information age as Canadians balance work, family, social responsibilities, and leisure.


## THE PURSUIT OF AUTONOMY AND BALANCE

Canadians' pursuit of autonomy and balance in everyday life has emerged in this decade as being just as important as work. Duty to others has returned after several decades' absence to be balanced with personal pleasure. Money is important, but it is the medium for personal control of destiny now and in one's fu-

ture. In the United States, money is virtue and is used for conspicuous consumption; work is paramount and fealty to employer expected; imagine Canadians pledging allegiance to their employer as do Wal-Mart's 1.4 million employees. As consumers, Canadians wish to be discriminating and ethical as they remember the harm being done to the environment.

Like all moderns who feel the stress of hectic lives, Canadians express the need to escape, to enjoy the simple pleasures in life, and to be exposed to and even create physical beauty. Escape can be to another culture or another time, especially a time when time stood still.

Chrétien leaves Canadians less angry and more inured to social change than his predecessors. He leaves a people tolerant of, even celebrating, the religious and ethno-cultural diversity of this country. That so many people of such diverse backgrounds and value systems can live together in such relative harmony in today's world seems nothing less than miraculous.

Hendrick Hertzberg, the editor of *The New Yorker* magazine, wrote in July that Canada is the kind of country that makes you proud to be a North American. I know it is hard for Canadians to admit it, but that is Jean Chrétien's Canada to which he is referring. 

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teeth with the Mulroney Conservatives' effusive enthusiasm for America. Chrétien excoriated the Tories at every opportunity for their alleged America-philia. His favourite gambit was to remind audiences of the maudlin Mulroney-Reagan performance of "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling" at the 1985 "Shamrock Summit." There would be no more such duets, Chrétien promised; "besides," he quipped, "I am not a good singer."

## THE CHRÉTIEN DOCTRINE ON AMERICAN AFFAIRS

As a new prime minister, Chrétien brought no broad new vision to Canada's relationship with the United States. Instead, he offered a simple defining principle: "business is business and friendship is friendship, and the two cannot be confused." The phrase deserves a place in *Colombo's Canadian Quotations*, or perhaps on a Chrétien statue on Parliament Hill.

And Chrétien didn't confuse the two. Because "business is business," he reneged on the first promise that he made about the relationship: that he would "tear up" the NAFTA. (Shocking—politicians breaking promises. Next you'll be telling me that Pete Rose bet on base-

ball!) After a farcical claim to have wrested "improvements" to the agreement from President Clinton, Chrétien proclaimed the NAFTA.

Ten years on, Chrétien's about-face seems prescient. After wrenching adjustments, the Canadian economy rebounded to become North America's and the G8's most dynamic in terms of job creation. Assessments of NAFTA's first decade conclude that Canada has benefited more than the United States or Mexico from continental free trade. If Chrétien read the *New York Times* analysis on December 27, 2003 (and he almost certainly did *not* read it—it ran to 3,000 words) he would take satisfaction from the conclusions that "In Canada . . . NAFTA helped shape a more competitive economy," and that the "growing pains" during the transition "were cushioned by a strong social safety net."

Chrétien believed in Canada's "strong social safety net," did his best to preserve it, and never tired of talking about it, especially to American audiences. Instead of prattling about "shared values," he pointed in his speeches on US-Canada difference. From a US perspective in 2004, that social safety net looks wonder-

ful. To use only the example of health care, we spend 15 percent of our GDP to buy measurably worse care than Canadians get for 9.7 percent of GDP. And every American now knows that Canadian governments, unlike our own, set limits to the rapacity of pharmaceutical companies.

## A DISTINCTIVE FOREIGN POLICY

In terms of Canada's international security relationship with the United States, the Chrétien government emphasized Canada's values and steered a distinctive course despite US pressure, even before George W. Bush succeeded Bill Clinton in Washington. When the *Helms-Burton Act* of 1996 threatened US reprisals against foreigners doing business with Cuba, Chrétien made an official visit to the island. Neither the US embargo nor Canada's constructive engagement moved the Castro regime one inch or one centimetre toward democracy, of course. Neither policy is really about Cuba: both are designed for domestic political consumption. Canada was able to wear Cuba as a badge of foreign policy independence.

Chrétien also gave Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy scope for his "human