The idea of sustainability arose from fused sentiments of both hope and despair. Despair, at the continuing degradation of the natural world by human activity, propelled (at least in the North) by what Thomas Hobbes called "The restless desire for thing after thing"; and in the South, by brutal necessity in some instances, and the "development imperative" in others. Despair also at the enormous discrepancies between North and South, rich and poor. And despair at the pathetically short-term thinking that characterizes most decisions made by governments, businesses, and individuals.

"[T]he environment is where we all live; and 'development' is what we all do in attempting to improve our lot within that abode".

Sustainability also implies hope that a combination of persuasion, regulation, and education could bring about a new environmental consciousness, a more enlightened attitude toward nature, and a willingness to redesign our economy to drastically reduce our "ecological footprint". Hope as well that humankind would embrace a deeper commitment to social equity. And hope that the culture of decision-making at all levels would come to reflect concern for the welfare of future generations by integrating in all spheres the ecological dimensions of policy.

Cynics scoffed at the term "sustainable development", stating that business got the noun while environmentalists were stuck with the adjective.

First introduced nearly 25 years ago, the concept of "sustainable development" gained prominence in the 1987 publication Our Common Security of the World Commission on Environment and Development, headed by Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Brundtland. The report defined development and environment broadly: "...the 'environment' is where we all live; and 'development' is what we all do in attempting to improve our lot within that abode"; and insisted that they are "inseparable". It defined development as sustainable only if it "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Cynics scoffed at the term "sustainable development", stating that business got the noun while environmentalists were stuck with the adjective. Parly in response to the criticism that so long as development is equated with growth sustainable development is a dangerous oxymoron, many have replaced the phrase "sustainable development" with "sustainability". Whatever term is used, the challenge remains of re-designing our economies so as to avoid destroying, or irreversibly damaging, the ecosystem on which they ultimately depend, while addressing satisfactorily the concern for intra- and inter-generational equity. Successfully meeting the challenge may be a pre-condition to the survival of humankind beyond the next century.

In devoting a substantial portion of this issue to a discussion of Sustainability and the Future of Canada, we take a broader focus and a longer look into the future than is usual for Canada Watch. Leading off the discussion is Federal Minister of Environment, Sergio Marchi, who re-affirms the responsibility of the federal government to "protect and preserve our natural inheritance for future generations of Canadians".

Key international agencies are retreating from earlier commitments to sustainability and ignoring the need to recognize all forms of "capital", including natural and social as well as physical and human.

While recognizing that effective action requires co-operation across jurisdictions within Canada and internationally. Marchi is confident that at least at the federal level, policy is "moving in the right direction". Philippe Crabbé is less sanguine, however. He notes an erosion of Canada's leadership position internationally, so evident in the Brundtland Commission of which Jim MacNeill was Secretary General, and in the Rio Earth Summit, headed by Maurice Strong. Key international agencies are retreating from earlier commitments to sustainability and ignoring the need to recognize all forms of "capital", including natural and social as well as physical and human.

Rodger Schwass and Sally Lerner review the prospects of preserving and enhancing Canada's natural capital and social/human capital, respectively. Whereas Schwass calls for a re-examination of the resource basis of our economy, Lerner argues that without an adequate infrastructure of social policies, particularly with respect to work and income, economic polarization and insecurity will undermine other efforts to achieve sustainability.

John Robinson brings us back full circle to the basic challenge of sustainability—how to integrate the economic, ecological, and social imperatives at a sufficiently "deep" policy level so as to address the apparent incompatibility between our present lifestyle and consumption patterns (especially in the North), and the ecological carrying capacity of the planet.

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Prior to secession, American interests lie squarely in maintaining a united Canada. If Quebec secession were to become a reality, however, the Americans see their interests shifting in the direction of minimizing the economic and political fallout from the change in Quebec's political status.

We expect that Bouchard will face increasing pressure in the next few months to postpone the promised third referendum. That issue has now been referred to the Supreme Court, which is expected to hear arguments in the case in February or March of 1997. Meanwhile, Quebec Premier Lucien Bouchard is having difficulty kick-starting the Quebec economy given the lingering uncertainty over the timing and result of a promised third referendum. We expect that Bouchard will face increasing pressure in the next few months to postpone the promised third referendum. The problem for Bouchard is that acceding to that pressure will alienate many PQ activists and may, in fact, split the party. All of which makes for extremely difficult but interesting times for the Quebec Premier over the next year.

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