

EDITORIAL  
**IN THIS ISSUE**

BY DAVID V.J. BELL & PATRICK J. MONAHAN

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.

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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 integrat-

ing in all spheres the ecological dimensions of policy.

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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. Partly 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 "sus-

tainable 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 reaffirms the responsibility of the federal government to "protect and preserve our natural inheritance for future generations of Canadians",

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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. Crabbé ends his article with reference to the need for a "new governance structure" at the local level to institutionalize sustainability goals.

The Office of Environmental Commission of Ontario is just such a structure. It was created through the Ontario *Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR)* that was proclaimed in 1994. Eva Ligeti reviews the legislation and the work of the Commission and discusses parallel initiatives in other jurisdictions.

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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In the second part of this edition of *Canada Watch*, we offer our readers a fresh perspective on the national unity issue. In late September, following publication of a controversial article on the Quebec sovereignty movement in the respected journal *Foreign Affairs*, a subcommittee of the United States Congress convened public hearings on Canada's national unity problems. American scholars who

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are close observers of the Canadian scene were invited to offer their views on the implications of Quebec secession for American interests. Three of those scholars—Joseph Jockel of St. Lawrence University, Earl Fry of Brigham Young University, and Christopher Sands of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington—subsequently edited their remarks for publication

and their articles appear in this issue of *Canada Watch*.

While the three American scholars disagree on some issues—including the controversial question of whether the “rest of Canada” would remain united as a single country in the event that Quebec were to secede—their comments also reflect broad areas of agreement and common ground. For example, all three Americans make a sharp distinction between American interests prior to, versus following, Quebec secession. 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. They all raise the possibility that the United States might be called upon to put together a “bailout” package similar to that negotiated for Mexico following the collapse of the peso in late 1994. America's position on this and other issues should be guided by its own self-interest, which consists in attempting to prevent the collapse of the Quebec and Canadian economies.

We expect that all Canadians with an interest in this issue—whether they be sovereigntists or federalists—will find these American perspectives extremely sobering. The same reaction might well be produced by the final contribution to this month's issue, John Thompson's article “The Price of Independence”. Thompson, an expert on conflict resolution, points out the high social and economic costs that have typically been associated with unilateral dec-

larations of independence over the past 175 years. His analysis is particularly pertinent given the recent debate over whether the Quebec government has the right to issue a unilateral declaration of independence under either Canadian or international law.

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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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**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN CANADA... *from page 1*

Over the last decade, sustainable development has become the political ideology of the times at the international, national, local, and organization levels. It came about as a political compromise between the advocates of economic growth and the supporters of environmental conservation. Growth was and still is widely perceived as necessary to remedy poverty, while poverty, especially in the rural areas in Less Developed Countries, was perceived as the enemy of environmental conservation. Growth, on the other hand, is seen as being at the expense of future generations who may see the very basis for growth being eroded above their head and under their feet: clean air and water, productive soil for agriculture, natural fibres and products.

Sustainable development was supposed to be a different kind of growth in which considerations of both intra- and inter-generational equity were prominent. Economic growth is necessary, but it must be subordinate to the moral doctrine of distributive justice. Sustainable development is not only a political ideology; it is also a moral doctrine for society. Its individual moral tenets were less clear except for the “Think globally, act locally” bumper sticker exhortation. The tensions between economic growth and economic development are a dialectical component of sustainable development. Growth is the increase in the Gross National Product, i.e., an economic, unidimensional, and objective valuation concept