

Reactions to Clark's cultural confab

TORONTO - Fear and loathing, not to mention skepticism, remains the dominant attitude towards free-trade with the U.S. among Canadian cultural leaders, despite meetings between Canadian industry members and various levels of government and the return of Marcel Masse as minister of Communications.

At a three-hour meeting in Ottawa Nov. 26 between 25 invited cultural leaders and the federal government, the former expressed their desire of not wanting Canada's cultural components on the free-trade bargaining table to External Affairs minister Joe Clark, International Trade minister James Kelleher, and Secretary of State Benoît Bouchard. Despite industry consensus, the cultural leaders received no guarantee that culture would be kept out of Canada-U.S. negotiations. One participant, ACTRA general secretary Paul Siren, conceded that reaching an agreement wasn't the purpose of the meeting. Rather, said Siren, External Affairs minister Clark

was told there was no need to emphasize "better access" (Clark's rationale for using culture as a bargaining chip) to the U.S. market. Instead, the cultural leaders wanted the Mulroney government to protect and ensure access for Canadians to their own market and pointed out that ownership and control of the nation's cultural components are the real issue.

Even given the clarity of that message, Siren said there are still problems understanding the words and actions coming out of Ottawa. One was the perception by Siren that Clark takes his marching orders from the government: "Regardless of what he hears from us, he will go with the Cabinet."

Commenting on the *Time* magazine-sponsored speech Dec. 4 at the University of Chicago in which Prime Minister Brian Mulroney equated cultural sovereignty with political sovereignty, Siren had "no idea" what the PM meant by that statement. If Mulroney's statement was indeed the case,

then Siren couldn't see the government trading away Canadian culture. But should the converse apply, the end-result, said Siren, would be our "looking at becoming another entity of the U.S."

Asked to comment on Ontario Premier David Peterson's stand at the late-November First Ministers' Conference in Halifax decrying the inclusion of culture in trade negotiations as giving away of Canada's soul and identity and his vow to resist such a move, Siren regarded the move as "politically wise." The premier's defence of industrial and cultural industries vital to Canada could only provide him with some political currency, said Siren, noting that trading them away would be a bid "to gain ephemeral concessions from the U.S. that are not likely to come anyway."

Peter Mortimer, executive vice-president of the Association of Canadian Film and Television Producers, voiced similar sentiments about the Ontario premier's position in Halifax. Mortimer said Peterson took a "sensible and very intelligent" approach and that, before Canada's other first ministers, he "represented articulately a view that anyone in the cultural industries would have difficulty disagreeing with (and which Mortimer said "contrasts sharply" with remarks made by the PM and Clark). As one of 22 of the province's cultural leaders invited to a think-tank, orientation meeting Nov. 30 and Dec. 1 with Ontario Culture Minister Lily Munro, Mortimer noted "general support" among the participants for Peterson's position.

Although that particular occasion had been planned by Munro before the free-trade issue caught up with it and was intended to inform the province on how it could provide more efficient support to cultural bodies, the bilateral issue wasn't skirted. Discussion that weekend noted that, while there's been free-trade for a considerable time in the film area, there's been no strength to Canada's film industry as a result of its lack of a strong, Canadian distribution arm. Mortimer, who holds the view that free-trade benefits to Canada "have been insignificant to say the least" and that there's little reason to think otherwise in the television sector, added that his sense of the November Ottawa meeting with Clark was "an opportunity to let the cultural industries ventilate" and from which they left feeling nothing had changed.

Mortimer did find cause for rejoicing in the return of Marcel Masse as Communications

minister. Masse's return, he said, portends a change in attitude within the federal government (which he said showed "a certain disregard and lack of understanding for the cultural sector" and was "diminished" without Masse's input). And on the recent appointment of former Liberal Communications minister Francis Fox as a two-member task force of special consultants (the other member being James Marsh, editor of the *Canadian Encyclopedia*) to Masse, Mortimer viewed the choice as a good one. Since Canada-U.S. issues remain the same today, Mortimer believes Fox's long tenure in the Communications portfolio and his resultant familiarity with those issues would render the former minister "entirely useful" to Masse.

Holding a somewhat less receptive view of Premier Peterson's posturing in Halifax as a defender of Canada's culture was the CFTA's executive director, Samuel Jephcott. Doubtful that the provinces and the federal government can come together to speak as one in any free-trade negotiations with the U.S., Jephcott pointed out that, in such circumstances, "culture becomes one of those national, indefinable issues." His reading of Peterson's stand (and of the other provinces, as well) was that culture was being used as

a tag to protect Ontario's auto industry. "I'll give him all the support he needs but I don't believe him for a minute," said Jephcott, adding "I don't think the Ontario government believes culture is that much of a priority and I don't believe Peterson is there to make sure TVOntario isn't given up in the free-trade discussions."

On the Fox appointment, Jephcott remarked "It amazes me how apparently dangerous all these moves could be" and wondered whether it was done because the non-partisan hiring of a Liberal would make Fox unassailable or would afford a scapegoat (with one potential risk the CFTA executive director cited being a public backlash from having elected a Conservative government which then turns decision-making over to Liberals). Jephcott did however praise Fox as a "consummate worker, certainly as good as anybody if not better." On Masse, Jephcott said the question is whether he can convince the External Affairs minister and the federal Cabinet that culture entails "a very wide definition" of Canada. In comparison, Jephcott said that culture, for Americans, consists only of ballet dancers, and so the problem in any negotiations involves persuading them to accept the broader definition Canadians bring to culture.



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