OF HOCKEY, MEDICARE AND CANADIAN DREAMS

STEPHEN J. TOOPE is President and Vice-Chancellor, the University of British Columbia. A former President of the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, and Dean of Law, McGill University, Professor Toope also served as Law Clerk to the Rt. Hon. Brian Dickson, of the Supreme Court of Canada. He publishes in leading international journals on international dispute resolution, international environmental law, human rights, the use of force, and international legal theory. His most recent book with Jutta Brunnée, *Legitimacy and Legality in International Law: An Interactional Account.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2010) won the American Society of International Law's 2011 Certificate of Merit for Creative Scholarship.

ABSTRACT

As Canada approaches its 150th anniversary, Canadians need to decide what we want to be when we grow up. Our national sport and Medicare alone will not define us. Understanding our strengths and facing our problems squarely, what visions could Canadians be dreaming of as we face a stormy future?*

Hockey is a great, fast-paced sport, and it has served well as an emblem for Canadians' sense of self. Set in winter snows, demanding agility and fortitude in the face of harsh conditions, and requiring a robust competitive spirit, hockey speaks both to what Canadians have inherited from a frontier history and to what we hope to be.

It is too bad that the national game is dominated by an NHL that seems greedier, insensitive to the expectations of fans and dominated by the need to satisfy a US market. And the increasingly obvious risks associated with out-of-control violence may one day bring the current hockey regime to account.

Medicare is a great social policy achievement, and it has served well as an emblem for Canadians' sense of self. Emerging from the wide plains of Saskatchewan, and reflecting a desire to protect the vulnerable amongst us, Medicare speaks to an open spirit and an aspiration towards social equality.

Too bad the system underperforms less costly systems in Europe and fails to produce health outcomes that an advanced society should expect to see. The costs keep rising, crowding out other social expenditures of both federal and provincial governments. And access seems to depend too often on who you know.

Is this the best we can do as Canadians? Are hockey and Medicare our defining features? Do they best represent who we are and what we hope to become? As Canada approaches its 150th anniversary, we Canadians need to push ourselves a little to figure out what we want to be when we grow up.

It may seem strange to say that we aren't grown up yet, for we are among a handful of countries that has managed democratic rule for so long. Yet our democracy has, for much of its history, been a dependent one, first on the United Kingdom and then on the United States. It was only after the First World War that Canada began to develop an independent set of relationships with foreign states, and only in 1931, with the passing of the Statute of Westminster, that the Canadian Parliament was accorded status equal to the Parliament of the UK. Our economic policy was long constrained by our absolute dependence upon the United States in foreign trade. From the 1960s through to the early 2000s, the share of Canadian trade with the US rose from roughly 60 per cent of total trade to over 80. With more attention to Asia in the last few years, the concentration of trade with the US has fallen, but remains over 70 per cent. For much of our history in the twentieth century, Canada hid behind the US on major matters of foreign policy as well. Although we liked to think of ourselves as "honest brokers," much of the world saw us merely as somewhat gentler versions of Americans.

These hard-sounding comments should not be mistaken for self-loathing. Canadians have much to be proud of, as our country has evolved through the last century. We have created a society marked by relative openness to immigration, especially in comparison with most of Europe. Our ability to attract large numbers of people from foreign shores, respecting and even borrowing from many of their traditions, while encouraging social integration, is enviable. It is practically unmatched in other liberal democracies. It is a truism, for example, that Vancouver is now the largest Asian city outside Asia, but what is truly remarkable is the ability of immigrants from China, Korea and elsewhere to build lives that are still connected to their histories and to have other Canadians acknowledge that history. UBC has the largest Mandarin-language programme in North America, and many of its students are Anglo-Canadian, of Korean and Japanese origin, or foreign students from around the world.

Canadians should also be proud of our history of social mobility. Today, when many influential Americans, like Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, worry that the US is no longer a "land of opportunity," Canada is out-performing the US as a place where it is possible to rise from distinctly modest backgrounds to find economic security. A major reason for that continuing mobility is that education is publicly financed to a large extent, from day care right through to doctoral programmes. University and college education is still relatively affordable in Canada, opening up worlds of opportunity for new generations of students, from here and from around the globe.

On the cultural front, Canada has also seen an explosion of talent and global recognition over the last few years. Canadian authors like Atwood, Gallant, Hagi, Huston, Laferrière, Martel, Munro, and Ondaatje are international best-sellers and prize winners. Canadian actors star in major Hollywood films. Although English-Canadian cinema is not in its strongest period, Quebec cinema continues to produce inventive and influential films, including three nominated for best foreign-film Oscars in the last three years. In pop music, airwaves and IPods around the world are filled with the likes of Drake, Justin Bieber, Celine Dion, Carly Rae Jepsen, and Leonard Cohen. The Vancouver school of conceptual and post-conceptual photography is globally influential, with artists like Jeff Wall offered retrospectives at major galleries world-wide.

Canadians have lots to celebrate, aside from hockey and Medicare, though we tend not to celebrate very loudly. How many Canadians even know that Nancy Huston, a Calgarian by origin but writing in French, won France's prestigious Prix Fémina, or that Canadian composer, Howard Shore, has won three Oscars, three Golden Globes and four Grammies for his film scores? Just last year, Canadians could have celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, a constitutional text that has influenced legal systems around the world, in part through direct borrowing and in part through the work of the Canadian Supreme Court which, since the advent of the *Charter*, has proven to be one of the most internationally cited courts in the world. Small-minded politics out of Ottawa precluded much attention to this anniversary.

But amidst the many reasons that we should celebrate, there are also reasons to worry. While we continue to target for roughly 250,000 new immigrants each year, their integration into our economy has faltered, even though they are better educated than ever before. Between 2000 and 2005, according to Statistics Canada, the income gap between Canadian-born workers and recent immigrants with university degrees widened significantly. Our productivity as a nation has also stagnated. Over the last thirty years, the productivity gap between Canadian and US workers has increased to almost $10,000 a person per year. This is not because Canadians don't work hard, but because our business performance in innovation is tepid at best. The Jenkins Panel on Canadian innovation reported to the federal government in 2010 that the expenditure of Canadian business on research and development had fallen since 2006, declining to the level of 2000, when Canada was already merely at the average of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.

Consider also what has happened to real wages over the last thirty years. Statistics Canada reports that average real wage rates increased by only 14 percent in Canada from 1981 to 2011, failing to match the rising cost of living. Even though social mobility is better than in the United States, it is less robust than in many European countries, which have traditionally been seen as bastions of privilege. The Conference Board of Canada laments that from 1990 to 2013, the wealthiest Canadians have significantly increased their proportion of total national income, while the poorest, and even middle-income groups, have lost ground.

Like the inhabitants of many other advanced economies, Canadians may live through a slow-moving demographic train wreck over the next few years. Not only are there likely to be too few working people to support the social safety net for the Boomer generation, but even now a growing gulf is opening between generations, with younger Canadians worrying that they won't ever find meaningful jobs or be able to afford their own homes. UBC's Professor Paul Kershaw demonstrates that the average household income for young Canadian couples has stagnated since the mid-1970s, adjusting for inflation, while average housing prices in Canada have skyrocketed by 76%. Culturally, many of our once-treasured institutions and organizations are in perilous straits. In 2012 to 2013, funding cuts to arts organizations kicked in at the federal and provincial levels. The Playhouse Theatre in Vancouver closed, The Toronto Symphony operated in deficit, one of the last major Canadian independent publishers, Douglas & McIntyre, filed for bankruptcy protection, and the National Gallery of Canada cut staff to address a budget crunch.

Incanting the names of Sidney Crosby, Roberto Luongo and Carey Price just won't be good enough to protect Canadians from the storms to come, or to ground a rich sense of identity. Nor will Medicare alone be our sure port. Understanding our strengths and facing our problems squarely, Canadians need to figure out who we are, now that we really are quite close to grown up. What visions could Canadians be dreaming to as we face a stormy future? What might a robust sense of Canadian-ness, of pride in our society, look like 50 years or so from now, at the 200th anniversary of Confederation?

The social inclusion that we have offered to generations and generations of immigrants will continue, and be buttressed by better economic integration. That inclusive spirit will finally be matched by a respect for the traditions of the First Nations and other aboriginal Canadians, and society-wide efforts to help ensure their economic, social and cultural vitality. We will have re-captured our fundamental, if demanding, connections to the land and the landscape, defined so clearly in Margaret Atwood's *Survival* or Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*. Those connections will imply a profound commitment to understanding and upholding the delicate balancing required in the exploitation of resources and treasuring the natural environment.

Canadians will have re-imagined our place in the world, recognizing that our social and economic links to Asia are an important trade strength, but that the greatest source of long-term opportunity might well be in Africa. We will admit that we cannot secure our future through military adventures because we will never have the staying power required to deal with internal conflicts and guerrilla-style war on foreign shores. Our focus, instead, will be on entrepreneurial social, cultural and economic engagement around the world, matched with military training missions and limited participation in collective security efforts designed to protect vulnerable populations. We will finally have cracked the code on Canadian-style social and economic innovation, innovation that draws on the diverse talents of an

astonishingly intercultural and multilingual society with deep family, social, cultural and economic connections that span the globe. To spur that innovation in all fields of endeavour, Canadians will have found the will to risk for the great, rather than settling for the good.

And yes, hockey will still matter, but a hockey that has re-found its connection to people more than dollars, and a hockey that doesn't sacrifice the well-being of players in an attempt to mimic ultimate fighting. Canadians will have employed our new-found social innovation mojo to re-engineer Medicare to ensure its fiscal sustainability and improve health outcomes.

Canadians' dreams will be about hockey, healthy kids and pensioners, friends from all parts of the world, gorgeous natural vistas and culturally rich urban neighbourhoods, and work in far-away places where Canadians are welcomed as partners in creative social and economic initiatives. Adult dreams.

NOTE

* The views expressed are personal and should not be attributed to the University of British Columbia.