

WESTERN ALIENATION: *A THIS MORNING* ROUNDTABLE

L'ALIÉNATION DE L'OUEST : UNE TABLE RONDE DE *THIS MORNING*

On Feb. 7, 2001, the CBC radio program *This Morning* held a public forum on the question of western alienation. The host was **Michael Enright** and the panelists were:

The Right Honourable **Joe Clark**, Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, Member of Parliament for Calgary Centre.

David Kilgour, Liberal Member of Parliament for Edmonton Southeast and the author of two books on Western Canadian history: *Uneasy Patriots*, *Western Canadians in Confederation* and *Inside Outer Canada*.

Diane Ablonczy, Canadian Alliance Member of Parliament for Calgary Nose Hill.

Doreen Barry, professor of politics at University of Calgary.

Sheilah Martin, professor of law, University of Calgary.

Philip Resnick, professor of political science at the University of British Columbia, author of *Politics of Resentment*, *British Columbia, Regionalism and Canadian Unity*.

In a first-time collaboration, *Policy Options* is pleased to publish an edited transcript of part of the discussion. The guest editor was *This Morning* Associate Producer **Peter Kavanaugh**.



Le 7 février dernier, la radio de la CBC présentait, à son émission *This Morning*, une table ronde consacrée au sentiment d'aliénation qu'éprouve l'Ouest du pays. Les personnalités suivantes participaient au débat :

M. **Joe Clark**, député de la circonscription de Calgary-Centre et chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur;

M. **David Kilgour**, député libéral d'Edmonton-Southeast et auteur de deux livres sur l'histoire de l'Ouest canadien

(*Uneasy Patriots* : *Western Canadians in Confederation* et *Inside Outer Canada*);

Mme **Diane Ablonczy**, députée allianciste de Calgary-Nose-Hill;

Mme **Doreen Barry**, professeure de science politique à l'Université de Calgary;

Mme **Sheilah Martin**, professeure de droit à l'Université de Calgary;

M. **Philip Resnick**, professeur de science politique à l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique, à qui l'on doit *Politics of Resentment* : *British Columbia, Regionalism and Canadian Unity*.

Pour cette première collaboration, *Options politiques* est heureux de publier une version révisée d'une partie cet échange. **Peter Kavanaugh**, producteur associé à *This Morning*, était le rédacteur invité.

Michael Enright: Joe Clark, let me suggest to you that while there are pockets of resentment and perhaps even anger in the west, the current tub-thumping about western alienation is a myth. It's a creation of the media—the eastern media perhaps—or of some political parties.

Joe Clark: No, it's not a myth. There's a deep-seated alienation in western Canada. There has been for some time. It takes its form sometimes in simply an anti-system feeling, which is deeply rooted here. That's probably the minority part of it. I think there's also a significant sense of frustration that western Canadians are not able to have the impact upon—or think we're not able to have the impact upon the shaping of the nation. Is it a crisis? Not yet. I think it is a very significant opportunity for a national government.

Sheilah Martin: Well I think it's a real feeling that is justified if we look at history, and at the structure of the government and where Alberta and the west sits in it. Westerners' feelings, their concerns about their place in Confederation, have been remarkably durable, and have existed whatever political party has been in power. So it can't just be alienation from a particular type of political party. And I think in large part as well, it's attitudinal.

Philip Resnick: Well, I wouldn't say that everyone in western Canada feels alienated, and I think one should recognize the divergence. There is a significant divergence of opinion between the larger cities and certain other places. I'm thinking of cities like Winnipeg, maybe Edmonton, Vancouver and Victoria, on the one hand, where I don't think the sentiment is nearly as strong, and the smaller cities, the suburbs and so on, on the other hand, where I think the feeling is strong. Having said that, I do think that historically there has always been a sense that the west is different. The issue that's arising now out of this most recent election is a certain desire for recognition as a distinct part of this country.

Diane Ablonczy: I wouldn't say it's alienation in the sense of a coldness or a withdrawal or estrangement because I think western Canada very much wants to be part of the national debate. Western Canada is growing, it's strong, it's vigorous, it has solutions and ideas to bring to the table. And it wants to do that. I think its frustration is that the central government, the west believes, is utterly indifferent to the ideas and the aspirations that western Canada wants to put on the table in the national debate.

David Kilgour: Alienation, as you said, is a psychological term, and it's one that's been applied to us. A westerner, an Albertan, today told me he thought even the expression was a put-down. But whether you call it alienation or disaffection it certainly exists, and has existed. It's an historical thing that the people here in this theatre know and your listeners from the west know about. But it's an opportunity that all governments have to face, and it's one that we're facing by, for example, reducing taxes. An Albertan in the back row told me today that his taxes this went down by \$500. So we have listened to the west, and to Albertans, and we have lowered taxes and lowered them significantly.

Doreen Barry: Western alienation isn't a myth. It has its roots deep in the region's history, particularly on the prairies, which entered Confederation on a different basis from the other provinces. And the legacy of western alienation is this deep and abiding suspicion of the federal government. And the conviction that Confederation was for the benefit of central Canada.

Michael Enright: I want to get into the question of alienated from what. In my lifetime, we've had four prime ministers from the west. One of them is here tonight. The west has been involved in federal-provincial conferences over the years. What are we talking about here? Who is alienated from what part of what aspect of Canada?

Sheila Martin: That's a very good question. We need to be specific here and to analyze it carefully. I don't

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think that Albertans feel alienated from other Canadians on a personal level. I think, though, that when we look at the way that the anger or concern for place has manifested itself, it's alienation from a central government. Not even alienation from other provinces or from the east, but with the central government apparatus, and how that works and structures things for the west.

Michael Enright: What does that mean? What do you mean the structures and how it works? We have a Parliament, we have people elected from all parts of the country...

Sheilah Martin: When you look at the impact, though, that a province the size of Alberta can have in that Parliament, when Quebec and Ontario have the majority of the seats ... Of course precedence is given to the parts of the country that have more population. But over time that structure may have contributed to the feeling that we're not being listened to as carefully as we might have liked.

Michael Enright: I want to throw a number at David Kilgour. An Ontario MP represents about 96,070 constituents. An Alberta MP represents about 96,075 constituents—just about the same. What's your problem?

David Kilgour: Well actually you've raised a good issue. The Supreme Court

Philip Resnick: There's no question that a lot of the resentment and frustration in recent decades in the west has arisen from the sense that Quebec has dominated the national agenda ... But I think there's something much more specific which has triggered the current round of discussion, and that is the outcome of the most recent federal election.

of Canada said, under Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin, that we could allow a 25 per cent deviation on populations. But in terms of rep by pop, I think most Albertans and most westerners would like to see a 10 per cent maximum variation between ridings.

Michael Enright: But clout-wise you're on the same level as Ontario.

David Kilgour: Yes, but our population is growing very much faster. Next year's census will show that Alberta should probably have 31 or 32 members of Parliament, British Columbia more like 37 or 38. In fact our institutions are always behind. As everybody knows, in BC and Alberta our population has trebled in the last 20 years, whereas the population of Canada as a whole has gone up much less than that.

Michael Enright: So, Mr. Clark, does it matter if we've got too few people out here and there are a whole lot of easterners? Is that the problem?

Joe Clark: No, I think the problem is that the country's institutions, its nature and its expectations were shaped when this was a much smaller place. And there's a sense that western Canada continues to be treated as a smaller place, even when it isn't any more.

I think it'd be interesting to separate out the question of the anti-system feeling. I think that is a real phenomenon but a different one. Where this

came to my attention most dramatically — this question of things being dug in, of western Canada having come late to the country — had to do with the practical issue of government purchasing. A pattern of purchasing had grown up that had most of the buying being done in central Canada. There was some in Atlantic Canada, but most of it in central Canada. It was very hard to change. The question of setting up separate agencies like ACOA and the Western Opportunities Department have taken on lives of their own, but part of the reason we set them up in the first instance was to try to find some critical mass that could change those buying patterns.

Now, extrapolating from that, I think that one finds quite generally a sense that people with good ideas go into the Canadian structure and find that their good ideas are slightly discounted because of where they come from. That's the problem now.

Michael Enright: If my memory serves, and it rarely does, the government of Canada has a contract for the maintenance of the CF-18, people in Winnipeg had a cheaper bid and the contract went to Quebec.

Joe Clark: Yeah, and that's the headline of the point I'm trying to make. The more substantive issue is the consistent difficulty of getting established patterns changed.

Michael Enright: You were at that table. You could have said ...

Joe Clark: I was at that table. No question about that. And we can spend the evening on this issue if you want.

David Kilgour: Joe, I was a Conservative in those days, and I can assure you that that was the beginning of the end for me with the Conservative Party, when you guys — and I was a member of your caucus then — when the Mulroney government went for Canadair rather than Bristol Aerospace in Winnipeg. That was the beginning of your end as a party in western Canada.

Joe Clark: Well, David, you and I can have a discussion about why you left and where you went on some

other occasion. With appropriate modesty, I think this is a larger question than that.

David Kilgour: It is indeed. I agree with you on that, Joe.

Philip Resnick: There's no question that a lot of the resentment and frustration in recent decades in the west has arisen from the sense that Quebec has dominated the national agenda. That is an ongoing issue and it was alluded to in the CF-18 discussion we were just having. But I think there's something much more specific which has triggered the current round of discussion, and that is the outcome of the most recent federal election.

If you look at the actual representation in the House of Commons you would have the impression that everyone in Ontario except perhaps for one or two per cent had voted Liberal, and that 80 per cent of the folks living in Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia had voted Alliance. In fact we know that half the folks in Ontario did not vote Liberal. And half the electorate in British Columbia and Saskatchewan, and a little under that in Alberta didn't vote Alliance.

But the perverse effects of our first-past-the-post system we inherited from Great Britain lead to this outcome, and also mean that the Liberal Party, now for the third time running, has had a caucus overly dependent on the heartland province of this country, namely Ontario. I think that has contributed to the sense of resentment,

Diane Ablonczy: Our party believes that we should be looking at reform of the electoral system, to have a more proportional representation, simply because there are some very perverse effects currently. But let's not kid ourselves. The bulk of the support for the Liberals is in central Canada.

particularly, I suspect, of many people who voted Alliance in this last election, who feel there's really no hope for a breakthrough and that ultimately the whole thing is fixed against the west.

Michael Enright: In your province of British Columbia, the Canadian Alliance, with less than 50 per cent of the vote won 80 per cent of the seats. Diane Ablonczy, you like that, don't you?

Diane Ablonczy: Well, actually I don't. Our party believes that we should be looking at reform of the electoral system, to have a more proportional representation, simply because there are some very perverse effects currently. But let's not kid ourselves. The bulk of the support for the Liberals is in central Canada—wonderful and excellent representatives like David notwithstanding. And...

Michael Enright: The bulk of folks are in central Canada.

David Kilgour: Yeah, but that brings up the question of why...

Diane Ablonczy: But what that means is, that there is a continued focus on the needs and aspirations and voices from that part of the country. We must fix that if we're going to be a truly federal national system, and respect and give some validity to what other parts of the country bring to the table.

Michael Enright: When Jean Chrétien says the west is different, everybody gets angry. But *isn't* the west different?

Doreen Barry: I think that western Canadians, and particularly Albertans, share some fundamental values that are pan-Canadian. But in political terms it's very easy to mobilize westerners against the federal government and against central Canada, because of this history on which they base their opinions: you know, the tariffs, the fact that natural resources weren't turned over to the prairie provinces until 1930. Now, all of those things have been addressed but nevertheless there is this residue of suspicion of the federal government, of central Canada. And

this drives Albertans, particularly, to use a different lens when they are assessing this question.

Michael Enright: I'd like a little history here. In 1905, the Provincial Rights Party was set up. There have been populist parties in this part of the country for a hundred years, including parties such as the CCF, the Progressives, later the NDP, the Reform Party, the Saskatchewan Party, and so on. What is behind all this? Is it the oil in the ground?

Doreen Barry: No.

Michael Enright: What is behind all of this discontent that seems now to have blossomed into what we are all calling "alienation."

David Kilgour: A great many things. Demographically, we're significantly different from much of Canada in the sense that about six in ten western Canadians do not come from Europe, Britain and France. They come from other parts of the world.

We broke the land here. Most of our parents and grandparents, or a lot of them, went out and broke the land, and we inherited a lot of their attitudes. We like frugality; we believe in cooperation; we believe in public health care—a whole lot of things this region has contributed to Canada. We do not believe in elite accommodation. We believe in a populist sort of democracy where everybody is equal; we don't look for élites to accommodate. This is one of the reasons why western Canada is very special: We've tried to democratize Canada, whether it's the Senate or whatever, and we will continue to try to democratize Canada.

Michael Enright: Now, populism is based on the idea that there's something called the popular will. It's the job of politicians to discover what that will is, and act accordingly. Is the popular will in the west somehow different than the popular will in Ontario or Nova Scotia or Prince Edward Island?

Joe Clark: Depends on the question. It depends on where it's expressed. Philip made a point that I think is quite important, about the urban-rural differences, which are sig-

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nificant everywhere in the country. They may be more significant than the regional differences when we get to it. On an issue like free trade, to take an example, there was a clearer will in favour of free trade in western Canada and in Quebec.

Michael Enright: Why do you think that was?

Joe Clark: Well it may have been, hold on, because it was a western idea a western idea with deep roots but also a western idea that was seen to be brought forward by western Canadians. Premier Lougheed was a prominent advocate.

Philip Resnick: Canada is a country of regions and regional identities, there's nothing new about that. The west has certainly been one very important part of that. But within the west — we've got to be honest here too — there are multiple identities. It's not only the urban-rural divide; there are differences, alas, but they're there, within the region. For example, British Columbia for certain purposes thinks of itself as a region apart. Alberta may for certain purposes think of itself as part of the prairies but my hunch is that increasingly Alberta is beginning to think of itself as a region-province almost in its own right. Those sentiments are there and are going to continue to be there. And there's nothing illegitimate about them *per se*.

The problem arises if for one reason or another regions with a growing

population, growing economic importance and so forth, feel that their voice in the larger national stage is not being heard. And I think what we're getting in this most recent round of the alienation debate is another sense that somehow the voices of western Canada in multiple forms are not being heard nearly as loudly, clearly, or as effectively in Ottawa as they ought to be.

Michael Enright: There are 66 members of Parliament opposed to the Liberal government's way of doing things. That's not a voice but a choir. What is the problem with that? Why is the west not being heard?

Diane Ablonczy: I think the short answer to that is that west is not being heard because it still is far from the levers of power in Ottawa. And even when the west does have the levers of power, as it did to some extent with Mr. Clark's government, or some other representations in the Mulroney government, the predominant voices still seem to favour the central-Canadian viewpoint. There is an impact on the debate, but not a defining of the debate to the extent that western Canadians feel is in order.

Doreen Barry: I think that the western Canadian voice isn't being heard as loudly as Ontario's because we have a smaller population and because we have fewer MPs. But in addition to that, there is sense that even when we did have important Cabinet ministers from Calgary and western Canada...

Joe Clark: Or prime minister.

Doreen Barry: Or prime minister, it didn't seem to make much difference, because there are structural problems in this country. Alberta and the west are a periphery. So you'll have this metropolis-periphery problem whoever is in power.

Michael Enright: When Preston Manning invented the Reform Party, his slogan was "The west wants in." Into what?

Sheilah Martin: Into the power structures, into being seen as a credible participant in Confederation. If you look at the history and see some of the

attitudes, if you look back on some of the economic policies, many people in the west would argue that the prairies were used as a support service for central-Canada industry.

Michael Enright: National Energy Program. Pierre Trudeau. 1980's.

Sheilah Martin: One of the many examples. When you're asking questions about popular will or wanting in, it's to be heard in a way that's respectful, and where due consideration is being given to that perspective. When I said it's attitudinal, I mean that a lot of times people are worried that legitimate concerns aren't registering the way they should, given their under-

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standing of how a country like ours should work.

Michael Enright: I read in the local press, as I come in on the airplane, that the Premier of all Alberta, Mr. Klein, says he will protect Alberta consumers of energy against rising costs. (I detect a note of disbelief in the audience.) No other province can say that, and I would suggest every other province would say that's unfair.

Sheilah Martin: I think that's just a function of the fact that Alberta is now a very wealthy province. But over the course of history there have been variable relationships. But just the question being posed—what does Alberta want into?—suggests a power relationship that we are on the outside and

we're being excluded. I think westerners want into the kind of influence and ability to affect the national agenda, that they perceive central Canada has.

Michael Enright: Professor Resnick, in your book *The Politics of Resentment: British Columbia Regionalism in Canadian Unity* you say that while British Columbians and Canadians share a number of values, British Columbia wants respect and wants to be treated as a serious actor in the national debate. What does that mean?

Philip Resnick: I'm going to go back for one second and say I quite agree with the original formulation by Preston Manning about the west wants in, and I want to emphasize that that has a rather different temper to it than what one has been hearing from Quebec for the last 40 years: It sounded rather different. There were certainly very good reasons to think—or fear, depending on one's perspective—that the desire was really to get out, not to be in.

Now the "in" here does mean "in." I'll back up what Sheilah and others have been saying: It means a significant role in decision-making, for example, representation in some of the more important federal agencies: the Bank of Canada, the CBC, the National Energy Board. There is a long series of things where the sense is that somehow western Canada has simply not had that kind of a clout.

Michael Enright: Ms Ablonczy, is it all a matter of resources here? Is that what we're talking about essentially, that the west—Alberta, British Columbia to a certain extent—is resource-rich, and therefore we in the west want to show our muscle, economic or otherwise?

Diane Ablonczy: I wouldn't agree with that at all. Ontario has, what?, 90 per cent of the world's nickel. There's hydro-electric power in Quebec and Newfoundland. There are plenty of resources across the country. I think the issue really is whether those resources carry a value-added that brings the power that the manufacturing heart-

land has traditionally had. One of the things that has always puzzled me—and Mr. Kilgour and Mr. Clark might have an answer to it—is that even when there's a majority government which has huge representation from the west, like the Mulroney government, the power structure doesn't seem to shift to any appreciable degree.

Michael Enright: So, what happened?

Joe Clark: Well in some cases in fact it did. On agricultural policy, it did. Anyone who compares the aid that was extended to Canadian farmers under the Conservative government with what's paid now would agree with that. The Free Trade Agreement, which, as I say was largely generated as a western idea, happened. But there's no doubt that those were not the natural governing circumstances. The natural governing circumstances have a power structure in place, and it tends to lag behind reality. It's like the reputation of universities, they tend to lag behind—excuse me anyone from a university here. What we have to try to do is find some way in which there can be a much closer relation between the power that is there and the problems that are there.

Michael Enright: Do you want deputy ministers from the west? Is that what you're saying?

Joe Clark: I mean in part deputy ministers. When I had to chair the constitutional conferences, I had a hell of a fight with my colleagues to take the hearings on the road. People didn't want to leave Ottawa. Whenever there's a debate, as there is right now about whether the G-8 summit should be in Ottawa or in Calgary, the argument is it should be in Ottawa because that's where the embassies are. There are always arguments for doing things the old way. That's the power structure. How do you change habit? How do you do it with authority? And I really think that's the issue we should be looking at.

Michael Enright: David Kilgour you've been trying to change it.

David Kilgour: Yeah I have. Well a lot of people have, but one of the agencies is the CBC and it was mentioned by Philip. I have figures for... they're a bit dated now, but in 1988-89, your agency of the government of Canada spent about 82 per cent of its national budget on goods and services within Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal. Western Canadians would like to think that the CBC represents the nine million of us that live in this region just as much as you represent the people who live in Toronto Montreal and Ottawa. Now that's part of what I call cultural imperialism. It's profoundly disquieting, I suspect, to everybody here

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tonight, to think that you, as you said earlier, you flew into Calgary. Why isn't your show or Sheila Rogers, why isn't she producing that show—and I know she does her best in this—but why aren't all of the CBC television and radio shows presenting Canadians to themselves fairly on a regionally fair basis too?

Michael Enright: That's the mandate. We're supposed to be doing that.

Diane Ablonczy: That's a symptom of the disease. The disease is that, because there are so many seats in Ontario and Quebec, as long as the government has a stranglehold on that area, it doesn't really matter so much whether they're responsive or respect-

ful or inclusive of the input from other parts of the country. Isn't that really the heart of the matter?

Michael Enright: Sixty years ago William Aberhart talked about the 50 bigshots back east. Is that what we're talking about now? That the east is controlling?

Doreen Barry: I want to go back to what it is that the west wants. And, if I can be indulged for a moment, I want to relate an experience of mine. I was lamenting to a friend of mine who teaches Canadian literature in the US. And I said to her it's really sad that the western experience and the western settlement experience hasn't found a place in the Canadian identity in the way that the west in the US is very central to that identity. In fact, they think the American west was the crucible of American democracy. And she said, you know, if you think about it, the popular culture has the western cowboy as its central character, but in Canada, if you look at Canadian literature, she said, and the people who get Governor General's Awards, for example, that is part of the Canadian identity. And she said that the most authentic Canadian literature is western literature. And she considered Margaret Atwood and Robertson Davies not so Canadian. You can sniff at that.

Michael Enright: Well, I wouldn't sniff at W.O. Mitchell, and Jack Hodgins ...

Doreen Barry: Margaret Laurence.

Michael Enright: ... and Margaret Laurence, of course. Professor Martin, isn't it part of the way this country works: that you use the leverage of power in order to get certain things for your region? What is wrong if the west decides to take on some of the appurtenances of the way Quebec has operated in the last few years?

Sheilah Martin: There is a bit of a feeling in this province that Quebec has received special status and treatment and distinct privileges because it has talked the language of separation. As a strategic matter, there are people here saying, well we have concerns,

Joe Clark: I think people would scoff a little bit at the idea of there being a sense of culture and identity here. And yet there is a sense of culture and identity here, certainly not identical to that in Quebec ... But part of the issue here is that the Quebec sense gets taken seriously, and the western sense does not.

they may not be based in culture, they may not be based in language, they may be different historically, but we have our own set of concerns that we want to make sure are on the table. And it could be a strategy in terms of separation. But even if you think that that's not a good strategy, what it does convey is the importance of taking the issue seriously, because people are prepared to talk in harsher terms, and Confederation is a relationship and it changes over time. It only changes in good ways if you listen and have strong communication, and you can talk about the matters that arise.

Michael Enright: Ms Ablonczy, if I recall, there were two members of your party who were at the convention that launched the Alberta Independence Party. Separatism, is that an option?

Diane Ablonczy: No, it's definitely not an option, and I don't think that there's any kind of solid support for it, nor do I think there will be.

Michael Enright: Historically a lot of people have talked about it...

Diane Ablonczy: Well, but that's talk. The point is that it's another symptom of the frustration that is felt here. And I think it's a legitimate expression of the frustration, it's not one that's going to go anywhere in my view. Nor should it. And it's not a realistic solution. But we have to recognize that the west is growing; it's dynamic; it's becoming stronger; it's economically becoming a powerhouse; it's positioned to take advantage of the Pacific

Asian trade bloc, it has a stronger understanding of the US through its oil industry links and so on. But it's simply not being given the kind of voice in national affairs that would not only benefit the west but would benefit all of us in Canada. That—the indifference of the central government to what the west has to offer—is what is so frustrating ...

Philip Resnick: On the separatism thing, there have been ripples, not just here in Alberta, but in BC, too. From time to time there have been voices saying let's get out, sometimes these have been opinion-makers, the odd politician, and sometimes in polling you will get, depending on the mood and the moment, ten per cent or so or, or 15 even, saying, yeah, let's go. But I quite agree with the politicians on this panel that on the whole the sentiment, the deep sentiment I think, of British Columbians, like Albertans and others in western Canada, is certainly to remain in Canada.

But, and this is the big but, there's a difference between our sense of being a region, one that wants to be understood and respected as such, and what would really be implied in going the route of independence or secession, which is thinking of oneself as a nation. People in Alberta and British Columbia do not have—and this is the difference with Quebec—they don't have the sense of being a nation, nor do they really want to be a different nation, but, there is a real sense of being a region or regions, and there is a very healthy desire and I think a perfectly legitimate desire to be understood and recognized as regions.

Michael Enright: Is there a difference between an Alberta Canadian and a Maritime Canadian and a Quebec Canadian and a Newfoundland Canadian that speaks to its political complexion? Is there something that makes us so different from each other that we can't get together and agree on anything?

Joe Clark: Oh no. We can agree on a lot. But are there differences? Sure there are. There's probably less anti-

system feeling east of the Manitoba-Ontario border. There's a sense of belonging to the country that was created east of the Manitoba-Ottawa border. And out here there's a sense that we didn't create it.

This question of identity, the question of writers, is of great interest here, because there is a common view that, in addition to everything else, Quebec is an artistic place, with a sense of real culture and of real identity. I think people would scoff a little bit at the idea of there being a sense of culture and identity here. And yet there is a sense of culture and identity here, certainly not identical to that in Quebec, certainly with different origins, perhaps even with different influence over the community. But part of the issue here is that the Quebec sense gets taken seriously, and the western sense does not.

Sheilah Martin: In terms of the identities that we have, every person in every province that I've ever visited—and I've been across this country—feels that they're both: They're hybrids between their province and their country. And I think that that's a good thing. Of course, we can talk across the differences that we do have, if we do it in a meaningful and respectful way. I came to the west in the 1980s. I moved from Montreal. So I saw Quebec separation there and chose Alberta as my home. I had heard about western alienation when I was

Sheilah Martin: When I came here and had my first federal election, and turned on the television and at 8:01, when not a single vote in Alberta had been counted, and I was told that there was a majority government, I got it, for the first time. My vote wasn't counted and already I knew what was going to happen to the country.

in law school in Quebec, and didn't understand what it could possibly be about, given the more acute form of alienation that I had studied when I was in eastern Canada. And I must say that when I came here and had my first federal election, and turned on the television and at 8:01, when not a single vote in Alberta had been counted, and I was told that there was a majority government, I got it, for the first time. My vote wasn't counted and already I knew what was going to happen to the country.

Doreen Barry: I think one should ask the question "Who is a westerner?" Because there are a lot of people in this province and across the west who've come from somewhere else, many of them from central Canada. Are they transformed as they cross the border? Is there something in the water that suddenly makes them alienated?

Joe Clark: The answer to that is: yes, they are. There are all sorts of Ontarians. I run into them literally every day: people who have come out here to Calgary or elsewhere and say I would not leave. And that's not an anti-Ontario sense. It's that they have found a sense of identity and comfort here.

A lot of it is geographic. It's interesting: our identity is probably more geographic, whereas the Quebec iden-

tity may well be more cultural. But a lot of it is geographic. It does happen. And, to some degree—I think a little less—it happens the other way. There are some people who came from here who are more comfortable either in Ottawa ... or, more likely, in power.

Doreen Barry: But in fundamental ways, how are they different? How are we different from people in Ontario in fundamental ways that would matter in terms of policy, for instance?

Joe Clark: Well, I don't think they're fundamental ways. As well as being in a Parliament with David Kilgour in a party, I was in a government with Lucien Bouchard. And he represented a rural Quebec riding when I represented a rural Alberta riding. And I was convinced that if you took the people who lived in Lac St. Jean, and the people who lived in Yellowhead, and went down them on a value scale, you would find that the same values were held in Lac St. Jean as were held in Yellowhead ... So it isn't fundamental. But it does have to do with a lot of other things. Perceptions that we grew up with

David Kilgour: A poll came out during the election which suggested just that: that the views and attitudes of people across the country were remarkably similar. And what Diane should say is why didn't the people in

Ontario who had similar views as Albertans not vote for the same party? That should be her question.

Diane Ablonczy: I think that is important. Because over the years we've done a lot of surveys, polling and focus group tests and there's very little evidence that our parties' positions or views are rejected because they come from the west. That has not been the case. To some degree, they weren't communicated as well as they should have been. They were distorted by our opponents, which happens in an election. But there was no rejection because it came from the west. In fact, as ideas and as policies, they were very much accepted. And so what we need to do is recognize that people across the country do look for sound ideas; they look for virtually the same things in the way their government operates, but there's a difference in the kind of weight or voice that is sometimes given to those ideas.

Doreen Barry: But Diane, somebody has re-interpreted their election results to mean that western ideas have been rejected in Ontario, and therefore the west has been rejected by Ontario...

Michael Enright: I'm very sorry. I'm afraid I have to stop it there. I want to thank you all very, very much for participating.

Klein is key I'd like to take you back to the evening of Sept. 10, 2000, in Ottawa. The Prime Minister was hosting a dinner for all of the premiers and the three territorial leaders, in preparation for an important negotiation session scheduled for the next day. The centrepiece of the negotiations was an agreement on our health system renewal.

Throughout the previous summer, I had worked hard to help the Prime Minister and my colleague Allan Rock, the Health Minister, conclude this agreement of great importance to all Canadians. It wasn't easy. The federal government indicated to the provinces that solving our health problems isn't just a question of money: we also need

a plan. But the provinces were bound and determined to get additional money from the federal government. "No money, no plan," they told us. No plan, no money, we responded. We went back and forth like that throughout the summer.

And then, as always in Canada, we were able to work things out. Numbers began to circulate, as did ideas for a joint plan. However these negotiations are always difficult and some provinces still had major problems with the agreement. Ontario and Quebec, in particular, had concerns that it might constitute an intrusion into provincial jurisdiction.

Which brings us to the First Ministers' dinner on Sept. 10. As is well

known, one of the first premiers to speak out was your Premier. Ralph Klein said in his direct style, and I am paraphrasing, "I've seen the plan, I've seen the amount, I'm ready to sign." It was a decisive moment. The tone was set ...

The reason I'm telling this story is that it reveals a great deal about what your province represents within the federation. It's been five years now that I've been Canada's Intergovernmental Affairs Minister. I've lost count of the number of negotiations where we said back in Ottawa: Klein is the key.

Stéphane DION, at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, 12 April 2001.