

Noted journalist issues challenge

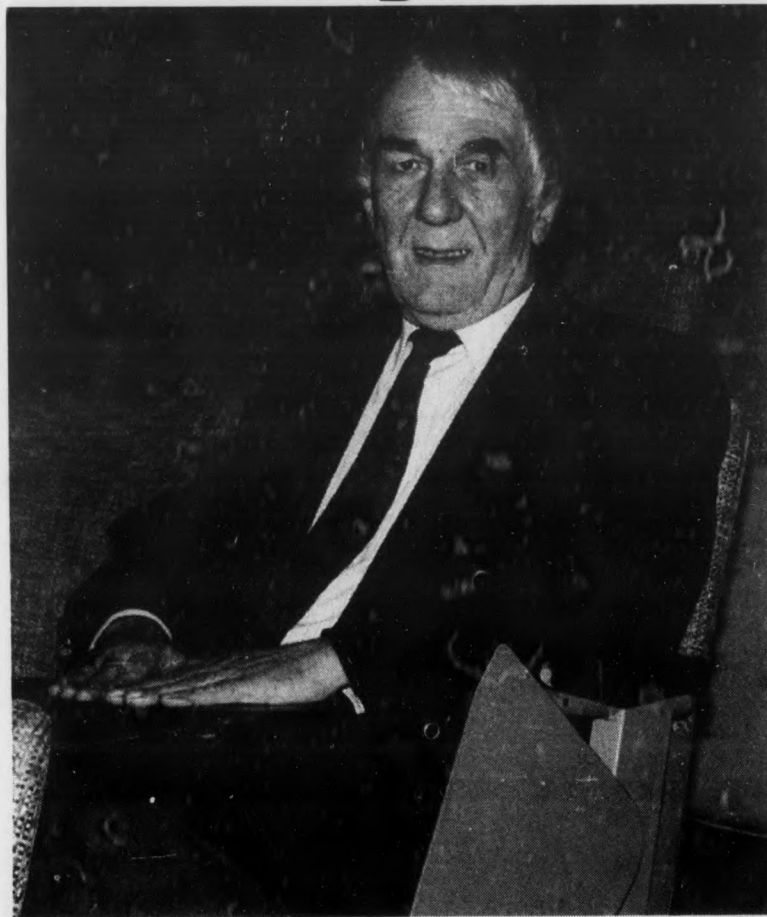


Photo: Mike Dean

by Gordon Loane
Brunswickan News

One of Canada's best known journalists says we need to create a country where the differences that exist between people are as irrelevant as if one is left-handed or right-handed.

"We must aspire to create a society where all the differences that exist

between people because of gender, colour, race, ethnicity or culture are irrelevant to our response to them or our reaction to them," said columnist Richard Gwyn, of the *Toronto Star*, in an address at Saint Thomas University this week.

Gwyn fears that we have created a society in the last ten years that has played up our differences and minimized our commonalities.

He cites the demands for recognition based on cultural and religious grounds.

While the fight for equality by various groups and individuals is well recognized and legitimate, Gwyn claims the fight for recognition has been the real objective.

"It has all served to differentiate certain groups from the rest of society," he said.

Gwyn cites the failure of Canada's multiculturalism policy as something else that is both differentiating us and dividing us.

Multiculturalism has created hypenated Canadians, Gwyn points out.

"I find it shocking that there has been so little dialogue in Canada between Jews and Arabs, between Serbs and Croates, between Muslims and Hindus, between Chinese and Hindus."

"Reaching out to each other is what being Canadian is all about," Gwyn said.

He cited the employment equity law adopted by the former NDP government of Ontario as another example of divisiveness.

"While the law was certainly well meaning and well intended, it was quietly rejected by the public," Gwyn claims.

"It created a situation where 80 % of the population were pitted against the 20 % of white males who felt they were being discriminated against. People worked quietly against the law for fear of being branded a racist."

The Conservative government of Mike Harris has moved to abolish the

employment equity law.

The last ten to fifteen years have brought enormous change to Canada's economy, Gwyn claims.

In his latest book *Nationalism Without Walls: The Unbearable Lightness of Being Canadian*, Gwyn says the global economy and finance, free trade and market economics have affected our egalitarianism and played up our differences.

"Canada is the most egalitarian country in North America but the effects of the global economy have forced us to cut social programs and make them less universal," Gwyn points out.

Gwyn feels Canada is no longer a nation state but a state nation.

"The state no longer defines us as a people. It is vanishing and has been hollowed down."

"The result is that income gaps are widening and there is the prospect of continuing unemployment."

Gwyn has a prescription for change. He claims we need to re-think our approach to citizenship and human rights.

"We have frittered away our citizenship and reduced it to virtual meaninglessness," he said. "We haven't done it consciously but we have done it passively."

Gwyn claims we have arranged our citizenship so that it is valueless for practical purposes.

"The one advantage of citizenship is that we can vote in elections and run for public office," he continued.

But Gwyn said we don't have to be a citizen to vote at nominating meetings which many times decide who wins the election.

Referring to the Quebec situation and the recent referendum, Gwyn claims Canadians began discussing their citizenship rights only after the hell was scared out of us.

"I simply do not believe another country in the world would value its citizenship so lightly that it would allow a group of people to make that decision on their own without saying - wait a minute Canadians have rights."

Gwyn pointed out that as citizens we need to examine both our economic rights and our rights as a community.

"Do we have any economic rights, do we have the right to employment, to the right to work sharing?" Gwyn asks.

"We also need to examine community rights," he said. "What are the rights of the community over its members, and what are the responsibilities of members to the community?"

The Brunswickan would like to apologize to Shannon Monteith, who took last week's cover photo of Neill House's House Committee.

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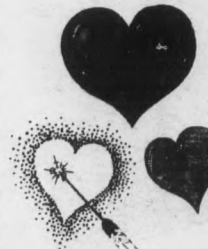
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