

Harper gov't comes under fire from former PM Joe Clark

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News Staff

Canada is in danger of losing its long-cultivated ability to punch above its weight-class on the world stage because of the Harper government's narrow view of foreign policy, according to former prime minister Joe Clark.

Clark was on campus Monday to meet with University officials and others to discuss a proposal for establishing a conference on hemispheric energy. However, the former leader of the now-defunct Progressive Conservative Party of Canada also approached the political science department about offering his views on Canada's foreign policy.

According to Clark—who held a number of portfolios in the 1980s including minister of foreign affairs for over six years under Brian Mulroney—Canada's foreign policy has been a balanced approach that has provided Canada with its influence on the international stage.

"When Canada has been most effective internationally, it has been because we pursued two priorities at the same time," Clark said. "We worked hard on our friendship with the United States, and we worked hard on an independent and innovative role in the wider world. Those are not opposite positions. They are the two sides of the Canadian coin and both must be given attention or we debase our currency."

Among the successes that Clark, a former U of A graduate, counts as having flowed from this policy is the free trade agreement that he helped negotiate with the United States, the agreement on acid rain and Canada's initial inclusion in the G7.

Clark also believes that this balanced approach has provided Canada with influence and clout in Washington. He said that this has allowed the two countries to work together on issues even when there's disagreement, and permits Canada to work multilaterally or in places around the world where American participation would cause resentment.

However, according to Clark, the Harper government has discarded this approach to foreign policy, one that had been the basis of the Canadian style for almost 60 years. In its place, Clark sees a strategy that's almost exclusively focused on good relations with the Americans. He noted that



JOSH NAULT

WHEN I WAS PM ... Joe Clark dissects the faults of the Harper Administration.

16 separate members of the Harper Cabinet visited the US in 2006, while during the same period only two ministers went to Africa, none to the Middle East, none to China, one to Haiti and none to South America.

"With the Harper government, there is a new, more deliberate insularity [in foreign policy] with the singular exception of our military engagement in Afghanistan," Clark said. "I believe that Mr Harper and his colleagues are moving deliberately away from central elements of the foreign policy that has been a key strength for Canada under both Progressive Conservative and Liberal administrations."

"Mr Harper's party, [formerly] known as the Reform Party, began self-consciously as a protest movement and it has no inherited tradition in international affairs ... moreover, their method is wedge politics, so there is scant domestic experience with brokering and embracing contesting points of view," Clark added. "These significant departures from Canada's traditional foreign policy should not be considered as rookie mistakes, but as deliberate policy."

In addition to expressing concern

over the singular focus on the US, Clark said there are three other areas of Canada's new foreign policy approach that he believes present a troubling departure from Canadian traditions. These include what he perceives as an absence of any evident priorities in dealing with the developing world, the erosion of Canada's professional Foreign Service, and the decline of the country's influence and relations with the People's Republic of China.

"The Harper government has embraced a pre-Nixonian policy towards China, deliberately distancing Canada from the emerging megapower, thereby limiting our ability to affect China's performance on human rights or on other issues," Clark said.

In addition to outlining his serious views on the waning of Canada's foreign policy, the former two-time leader of the Progressive Conservative party also kept the crowd of students and professors entertained.

"Today, as you may be aware was budget day. I try to miss budgets when I can; I had an unfortunate experience with one once," Clark quipped.

NEWS BRIEF

PEOPLE LEAVING OTHER PROVINCES LURED BY ALBERTA'S OIL BOOM

According to the Statistics Canada 2006 census, Alberta's population soared above the three million mark with an unprecedented growth rate of 10.6 per cent—double the national average. But this increase isn't just coming from international immigration; provinces such as Ontario and Saskatchewan are finding their residents choosing the "Alberta Advantage."

"These people are coming and are university educated, or have trade skills—a large number of them anyways, because that's what the demand is for welders and that type of thing," said Dr Melville McMillan, an economics professor at the University of Alberta.

Ontario has lost about 30 000 people to Alberta between 2001-06 and, according to StatsCan, they aren't being replenished by emigration from

other provinces. A *Toronto Star* article, entitled "One-way Street," noted that had it not been for international immigration, Ontario would have suffered a net loss in population due to the Alberta migration.

McMillan also stated that the loss of educated people also means that these provinces are missing out on the investment they have put in to educating their emigrating residents.

"A lot of these people are coming [to Alberta] having gotten their education in other provinces. That education costs a fair amount of money. It's a fairly significant capital transfer from one province to another, and particularly to Alberta," he said. "It's sometimes a factor that isn't considered when we think about transfers of resources amongst provinces."

But one reason for the migration, explained Dr Frank Trovato, a professor of sociology at the U of A, is the expansion of "social networks" in Alberta. He said that once people move to the province

they attract more people from their communities of origin.

Trovato pointed out that the biggest reason for the migration is obviously the oil boom. With so many jobs available, people around the country will have Alberta on their minds.

"[Someone] without a job, [who's] contemplating what to do, they are likely to think [let's] move to Alberta because there are jobs [there] and the wages are good," Trovato said.

With the migration being chiefly driven by oil, Dr Andre Plourde, U of A professor and chair of the economics department, says that the increased immigration into the province will continue to drive up the cost of living, especially when it comes to real estate.

"Housing prices are going to start to become more of an issue as people start thinking about this. Housing prices have grown much faster in Alberta, and especially Calgary and Edmonton, than [in] other Canadian cities," Plourde said.

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Fact: Luckily, they do it nowhere near Gateway News meetings, held Fridays at 3pm in 3-04 SUB.

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