



Peter Desbarats
Ottawa editor

✓ Blunt talk against the U.S. is now beginning

WINNIPEG

There are growing indications, here as well as in central Canada, that U.S. President Richard Nixon is rapidly taking over from Walter Gordon and Melville Watkins as the most effective advocate of economic nationalism in Canada. In the process, he may also be making a significant contribution to Canadian unity.

There was evidence of this when Manitoba's Premier Ed Schreyer, in an interview this week, spontaneously placed himself in the unusual position of agreeing wholeheartedly with a federal Liberal cabinet minister. Referring to a Chicago interview with External Affairs Minister Mitchell Sharp, rebroadcast the previous night by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the New Democratic Party premier said that he was "genuinely surprised and intrigued" by the minister's comments on recent U.S. economic measures.

"It certainly indicates to me," said Schreyer, "that we are at least beginning to think about the need for being more blunt and outspoken in our negotiations with Washington."

The Manitoba premier said that his reaction was based not so much on what Sharp said but the way he said it.

"The tone of his statements has intrigued me, and I don't disapprove of it. He's being realistic. Some people may get a little nervous because they think that this may be the opening round in a series of name-calling. I don't think it need come to that. But surely we have to be a little more plain-spoken where we feel that we have a right to resist a U.S. initiative."

Surprise may be shared

Schreyer's sense of surprise at Sharp's comments may be shared by students of his own brand of politics when they read this column. Despite his NDP affiliation, Schreyer has been more conservative in his approach to economic nationalism than many members of older parties. In contrast to his support of the "tone" of Sharp's recent comments, Schreyer in the past has used exactly the same criteria to condemn the economic nationalism Waffle group within his own party.

"While I agree with their analysis of the problem," he has said, "I sure don't agree with the tone with which they express it."

Schreyer's record is also filled with comments which are typical of Western Canada's open attitude toward the United States. Here on the prairies, anti-Americanism has never been as fashionable as in central Canada where the national memory includes recollections of loyalist emigration from the republic to the south and several invasion attempts. In the west, these are almost uncut pages in the book of Canadian history. As Schreyer said on a visit to North Dakota two years ago, "Despite the fact that we are two countries, there is a feeling of affinity that runs north-south even more strongly than it does east-west."

Schreyer told his American audience in 1969 that "you would get many Winnipeggers who would be more kindly disposed to their neighbors in the Dakotas and Minnesota than they would to those far Easterners..."

Extensive shock waves

It is against this background, and his own cautious temperament, that Schreyer's comments this week have to be assessed. They indicate that the shock waves generated by President Nixon last August have rolled right across Canada and right across the usual regional differences to some extent. In the light of the Nixon policies, the Manitoba premier maintained that on the Prairies, with the exception of the oil industry in Alberta, "there would not be much resistance to a course of action that would lead to greater Canadian economic independence.."

"I don't think that any of the problems that we have with current trade relations with the United States have a bearing on Western sectional feeling," he said. "The response in the West is much the same as anywhere else in Canada with respect to the Nixon surcharge."

Schreyer also said that the 10 per cent surcharge on a wide range of U.S. imports might be in the long run "a good thing for Canada in the sense of forcing us to discipline ourselves."

"The point that many nationalists haven't been willing to face is that, sure, we can try to repatriate more of our economy but to do so would require a belt-tightening," he explained. "There is no secret about the process of capital formation. It has to be squeezed out of consumption and that means in turn, no increase in living standards as such for a period of time."

"Now I think that for the most part in a consumer-oriented society in the postwar period, we haven't wanted to make that kind of sacrifice and no governments have been prepared to lead in that direction. But I think that if we have a repetition of the American surcharge action once, twice, a third time, it will force us into a position of greater economic independence."

"But it won't be without some pain," he cautioned.