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Comment

Order not without merit

Love him or hate him, Jean Chrétien deserves honour

National Report



metronews.ca/nationalreport

The online comment boards lit up yesterday with news the Queen was bestowing the highly prestigious Order of Merit on Jean Chrétien.

Many wondered how the monarch could do such a thing? You're getting senile, Queenie, they said. The guy was a political Soprano. Got lucky because he had no opposition.

As someone who has written a couple books on Jean Chrétien, I found it surprising, given his controversy-laden denouement, that such an exalted

honour came. Surprising, but not overly so.

As with so many political careers, you can fashion your rating for Chrétien by selectively choosing either the negative or the positive.

The negative? The sponsorship scandal, Shawinigate, GST flip-flopping, the gun registry fiasco, military helicopters, the APEC controversy, his pedestrian manner, his overcentralizing of power, his being hounded out of office by his own party. Fixate on these, and you've got a loser. Yep, the Queen has gone batty.

The positive? Balancing the terribly red books, leaving the economy in great shape, pushing back separatism with the Clarity Act, telling George W. Bush where to get off on Iraq, defending the ordinary people against corporate inter-

ests, winning three straight majority governments. Fixate on these — and it's a different story.

Chrétien was a narcissistic politician who viewed politics as sport. For him, it wasn't about ideals so much as the ego-gratification of winning. At the same time, he was a leader of conviction with rock-hard Canadian values. He hated ideology because "when you're doctrinaire, you're always looking to justify your doctrine." He never liked the rich because the rich, he said, always wanted more. "It's very dangerous," he said once, "when you find comfort with the big shots."

He was a consolidator, not an innovator, a pragmatist, not an intellectual. He mingled with the elites but down deep was never one of them. He would show up at a golf course on his own,

even as prime minister, and join in with whomever happened to be teeing off — a factory worker, a clerk, a salesman.

He bore grudges. Offend him and he would take you down — the way he did that day when, sporting his dark terminator shades, he dispensed with a protester. But Jean Chrétien loved the country and wasn't dour or mean-spirited. At root he was a bullish champion of salt-of-the-earth Canadian values.

Despite all his shortcomings, this is where his significance lies. Through four decades in the political maelstrom, he stood up for what this country means like few others ever have. For that he is deserving of high honours.

Lawrence Martin is a journalist and author of 10 books who writes about national affairs from Ottawa.



MICHAEL DE ADLER

Worth mentioning

Experts unearth history of pandemic flu viruses

Flu viruses that sparked the three worst pandemics in the last century circulated in their near-complete forms for years before the

with previous studies that suggested the H1N1 virus of 1918 was a mutant that jumped direct from birds to human and ended up

occurred, researchers in Hong Kong and the United States have found.

The H1N1 virus that sparked the Spanish flu of 1918-1919 circulated in

swine and humans well before the pandemic started, and it did not come directly from birds as previously thought, they added. Instead, it was probably generated by genetic exchanges between flu viruses from swine and humans.

This contrasts sharply

killing as many as 50 million people.

The findings are considered important because of the lack of studies of the virus in animals before

the current outbreak of H1N1. Through understanding the natural history of viruses, monitoring of current viruses can be fine-tuned, the team from the University of Hong Kong and St. Jude Children's Hospital in the United States wrote.

REUTERS

Other viruses

Published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, the study also involved two other pandemic viruses — the H2N2 responsible for the Asian flu of 1957, and the H3N2, which sparked the Hong Kong flu of 1968.

Views

Time to clean the slate on land treaties



Bernd Christmas

Canada's constitution of 1867 and the 1981 Charter of Rights are old pieces of paper. Old documents that have no meaning in today's age. We should just rid ourselves of these and start over. Besides, they were written by folks who just don't know what is good for us in a modern age.

Prepare the ramparts, it's go time!

Logic would say it doesn't make sense. Our societal and legal foundations come from these writings. The rule of law is etched within every word. No one would question the need for a system that keeps order and ensures that our collective and in-

dividual human rights are upheld.

So why is it a different set of rules when it comes to dealing with the legitimate land claims of our approximately 1.5 million Aboriginal Peoples? People that have been on this land mass for thousands of years. People that have been displaced, and forced onto parcels of land called "reserves."

Starting around the late 1960s, Aboriginal Peoples began to place legitimate land claims before the government of Canada. Those claims now total 1,046, only 272 of which have been settled since 1972. While government position has progressed, for the most part the basic premise is this: Any claim must first be approved by the government before it can proceed.

Does that make sense?

Focus On First Nations

Editor's Note: This is the first of a series of columns focusing on First Nations and Aboriginal issues leading up to the Assembly of First Nations convention, July 21-23, in Calgary.

For example, if you want to remove burglars from your house, then you call the cops. Land claim policy is the opposite. In the case of your home, you would first have to ask the burglars if it is OK to call the cops!

The issue is that we all believe our system of law is there to protect us. So we must ensure that all people in this country are protected, including Aboriginal Peoples.

Land claims must move forward in a legitimate

and efficient manner. They cannot be slowed down by governments that are afraid that the use of those old sacred treaties signed by chiefs with European monarchs is a waste of time, too costly, and meaningless. Treaties are the most sacred form of recognition between two parties.

If Canada is a democracy, then elected leaders must once and for all clean the slate with the Aboriginal Peoples of the land.

The government apologized to Aboriginal Peoples who endured the brutality of residential schools. Why can it not apologize and own up to the treaties signed by previous governments?

Bernd Christmas is a Mi'kmaq lawyer practising Aboriginal and corporate law with the Bernd Christmas Law Group in Toronto.

Metro Online Poll Results

76% SAID YES
Would Canada be better off if the next campaign elects a majority government?
24% SAID NO

Weigh in on today's question at metronews.ca

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