

Throwing a mean curve at leadership reunion

OTTAWA — Perhaps the date was right — Pearl Harbor Day — for someone to throw a stink bomb into our cosy group.

This would be our travelling road show, the some 30 graduates from around the world who have attended the leadership seminar organized by Washington's Georgetown University.

It is Canada's turn to host the reunion and the brainy types from Taiwan and Brazil and Israel, and points east and west, have been getting zapped with the Quebec gloom in Montreal and trade hype in Ottawa.

After being drowned in pessimism in Montreal, the worried organizers wanted to display the upside to the visitors. The Ottawa sessions have been heavy with the supposed joys of NAFTA, and how the new trade pact will bring peace and happiness to all concerned.

This is understandable since the chief host of the half-dozen Canadian Georgetown alumni is Tom d'Aquino, an ardent free-trader who is president of the Business Council on National Issues — a spokesman

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for Canadian business.

The man throwing the stink bomb is Bart Fisher, a veteran of these affairs, a trade-hardened lawyer who is a partner with Patton, Boggs & Blow, probably the most powerful lobby firm in Washington.

Trying to put the cat among the pigeons, he attempted to get some discussion going on the Treaty of Rome. He thinks all the Canadian experts on free trade are terrified of it.

The Treaty of Rome, lest we forget, was the original pact that was going to bring about "the United States of Europe." Eventually there would be one currency, not only tariffs but borders would disappear and everybody from Sicily to the Firth of Forth would be one happy family.

As the Maastricht fumble has shown, that great dream will probably never happen (especially if Maggie and her purse have anything to do with it).

Fisher thinks the sealing of the NAFTA deal means it's only a matter of time for an entity called Canada. Does trade follow the flag, or does the flag follow trade? Does it matter any more?

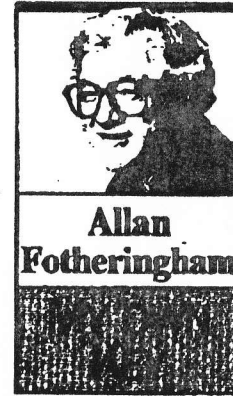
He thinks the Canadians who negotiated NAFTA on behalf of this country don't

want to talk about it because they don't want to think about it.

One must understand that those at the podium and those who are listening, like Fisher and the Republican watchdog from Washington and the other experts here from Britain and elsewhere, are all of a piece: They know each other from old movies; they speak a jargon like bridge players or makers of pizzas or baseball insiders that to an outsider could be Swahili.

Therefore, when the sly Washington lobbyist brings up the secret phrase, Treaty of Rome, they all know what he's up to and he knows they know what he's up to and he is blind-sided when possible. Which is most of the time.

What did the gang from India and Hungary and Zimbabwe learn from their sojourn? That, according to our Quebec experts, the



election of the Parti Québécois next year is a near certainty, partly due to the dishwater image of Liberal heir Daniel Johnson.

Both Alain Dubuc, editor of *La Presse*, and Joan Fraser, editor of the *Montreal Gazette*, told them that those PQ faithful who think the rest of Canada will quietly go along with any attempts to negotiate any form of "sovereignty-association" are living in a dreamland of their own creation.

I think the most thoughtful contribution was made by one Jan Dauman, a quiet man who is chief executive of Britain's Inter-Matrix Group.

After listening to all the glowing predictions of the advantages of free trade among Canada and the U.S. and Mexico, to be then extended to the most advanced of the South American countries, and linked to Japan and beyond, he made a point.

It was, as glorious as all this sounded, that it would simply make the already-rich countries even richer. As the visitors from Africa nodded, he said that isn't the challenge of the current world.

It's somehow to even out the differences in the global village where the gaps are widening.