

He'd do anything for a vote

John Turner was stumbling down the road to political ruin when lo, like Paul on the way to Damascus, or St. Joan the milkmaid, he had a vision. The vision said, "John, me boy, the only way to save your skin now is to scare voters to death—that'll get their attention, by jingo!"

Exit the inept politician and Bay Street lawyer. Enter John of Arc, the hero who'll save Canada from Yankee imperialists—never mind if they used to buy him lunch. Enter a new, wild-eyed John Turner, ranting and raving about how evil Yanks are going to gobble up Canada, guzzle down its water and turn all Canucks into bag ladies. Suddenly, Canadian politics turned sinister.

Before this election campaign, our politics may have been rather smelly and seamy. But it also had a distinctive Canadian quality of decency and reserve. Turner changed all that. He has introduced Canadians to demagoguery.

With nothing else to offer Canadians, Turner is hawking fear. Two things about all this worry me deeply. First, has Turner really convinced himself of the rubbish he's been spouting about how free trade is going to end social services and turn Canada into a banana republic? If he has, then he probably also believes the moon is made of green Oka cheese and social programs grow under mushrooms. He may need a long rest.

Second, I get a queasy feeling listening to the born-again radical John Turner preach and fulminate against Wall Street bosses and rapacious Americans. He has become a political arsonist—the man who starts fires and revels in their spreading glow. A man who seems

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ready to burn his way into office with outrageous lies and demagoguery—and to hell with Canada's tradition of political decency.

Turner's fast-flowing untruths also neatly divert attention from the Liberals' record as the party that ran Canada when we had a rock-hard economy and a dollar worth more than the mighty U.S. greenback. Turner was Pierre Trudeau's finance minister.

By the time Trudeau was run out of office by outraged voters, the Canadian dollar had become funny money and the economy a wreck. Thanks to the Liberals, Canada led all western nations in the growth of government debt. That's when Ottawa spends more on social goodies than it takes in. Our national debt tripled under the Liberals. Today, Canada's debt is 50% higher per capita than the huge U.S. debt that is causing predictions of economic meltdown.

Don't believe Turner's rantings for one moment. The real threat to Canada's holy social programs is not the sensible free trade deal or Wall Street. It's the onrushing express train of financial reality. Canada is broke and in hock up to its toque. Virginia, there is no more money for social programs.

And yet, Turner wants to spend \$30-odd billion more on new schemes, or is it \$55 billion, or \$70 billion? The Liberals, and their scriptwriters at the Toronto Star, are as liberal with other people's money as they are with the truth. In spite of the ominous writing on the wall, Turner wants to go on spending like a drunken sailor. He is ready to insult and alienate Canada's largest trade partner, the U.S., with whom we do 80% of our business. His contemptible anti-American campaign is stirring up a storm of retaliation in Congress which has never been happy with the free trade deal.

The rest of the world envies our free trade pact with the U.S. The one Turner wants to tear up. No matter that the ship of state may hit the reefs of economic reality, what counts, it seems, is that Captain John will be at the helm.

Voters tomorrow will decide whether they want to go deep six with the Liberal's drunken sailors. Their alternatives are hardly inspiring. But at least the glib Brian Mulroney and that old socialist humbug Ed Broadbent have maintained the tradition of political decency that makes Canada such a good place to live. Turner has not. His mendacious campaign makes Quebec politics look like a meeting of Memnonites.

John Turner, quite simply, has told falsehoods to the people of Canada and to himself. Many gullible, frightened people may vote for him. But one only hopes that more people will realize that they don't want Canada turned from one of the world's richest nations into a northern Nicaragua just so Turner can stay in Ottawa and not have to go back to work on Bay Street.