

On the 35th Anniversary of the Promulgation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms

In Memory of Rt. Hon. John George Diefenbaker,

Rt. Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau,

☞ Hon. Eugene Forsey, Senator

I.

Because we believe in a supreme *Being*
 And *Language*'s power that makes *Law* our king,
 Canadians may explore *Freedoms* plural
 To draft a *Just Society*—moral
 In its decisions, charitable
 In its deeds, so that everyone's able
 To flesh out a dream, live for a *Vision*—
 In “freedom of conscience and religion,”
 To worship and think as one judges wise,
 To invent new techniques, or improvise
 New ways of doing, or earning a wage,
 New ways of living well in each language
 Official, new ways of sharing problems
 And solutions, thanks to our shared *Freedoms*....

II.

You are free to believe and express what

You know as *Right*; to justify or rebut;
 Free to assemble with whomever else
 Seem to share your perspectives; free to repulse
 Contrary thought *peacefully*; free to vote;
 Free to live in Canada, or go out
 To gird the globe and return; free to roam
 From province to province; keep a home
 Anywhere and work anywhere: To be
 Mobile is the essence of being free.

III.

You are free to disagree with police
 (So long as you don't contradict *Justice*
 Elemental), and *not* face billy clubs
 Or handcuffs or fired shots or Taser stubs,
 Unreasonable searches, seizures, stops:
 Only suspects need be eyed by Cyclops.
 You are free, if arrested, to retain
 A lawyer and seek bail, and not remain
 In jail, and to deserve a speedy trial
 So that *Innocence* attains acquittal.
 You are right, upon arrest, to expect
 Your body's *Dignity* merits *Respect*,
 And not be threatened with *Harm* or *Woe*,

Or suffer rank, uncivilized *Sorrow*...

IV.

You are right to expect *Equality*—

Impartial non-prejudice, *Civility*,

No matter how you look or what you speak:

Equality Rights for *all* lets *one* be *unique*.

Not every group has always forever been

Free of governmental *Persecution*;

And so *Affirmative Action*'s declared

The right way past wrongs may now be repaired.

V.

English and French are the authorized speech

In Canada—and through New Brunswick's reach;

And English or French, where minorities,

May ask for schools in their communities.

VI.

To be *Indigenous* is a status

Treaties endorse, and so Indigenous

Peoples may explore privileges granted

By accords, *Crown*-and-First-Nations-planted,

When Canada was colonies, a realm

Of settlements upon which settlements
 Were made, twixt First Peoples and governments
 Monarchical. These original rights
 Are guaranteed in *The Charter of Rights
 And Freedoms*, and cannot be extinguished
 Nor cancelled, nor naysaid, nor relinquished.

VII.

Happily, the *Charter* does recognize
 This multicultural mosaic we prize,
 And the absolute, pure *Equality*
 Between male and female and every *Body*,
 And also the power of the Parliament
 To grant services to each resident,
 Regardless of region, so that income
 Or locale, do not determine the sum
 Of *Health Care*, or *Welfare*, or *Equity*
 Available to every polity.

Coda

What came into force, April 17,
 1982, was the *People's* keen
 Desire to continue to imagine
 A *Native-Land* democracy, akin

To popular sovereignty, where all
Are equal, and *Rights* and *Freedoms* enthrall—
So long as they enable possible
Utopia and/or dreams plausible,
Notwithstanding the “Reasonable” clause
That sanctions liberties that scoff at laws.

George Elliott Clarke
Parliamentary Poet Laureate (2016-17)