The 400 Year Celebrations

Words © 1983 by Jim Payne
Music by Peter ("The Poet") Leonard
(originally "The Hole in the Wall")
Notation rendered by Patty Rogers

They want us to celebrate in Newfoundland this
summer Humphrey Gilbert's arrival four hundred years ago
The history books tell us things known of Sir
Humphrey that before celebrating we'd do well to
know Now Humphrey looked only for a new land to
conquer had no plans to sail to the New Founde Isle
But just off our coast he ran short of provisions and
had to come in to St. John's for supplies
They want us to celebrate in Newfoundland this summer
Humphrey Gilbert’s arrival 400 year ago
The history books tell us things known of Sir Humphrey
That before celebrating we’d do well to know
Now Humphrey left England to look for a new world
Had no plans to sail to the New Founde Isle
But just off our coast he ran short of provisions
And had to come into St. John’s for supplies.
Old Gilbert looked only for a new land to conquer
“Just as well them as another” said he
Sailed into the harbor and plundered the city
Robbed people who worked on the land and the sea.

Now this is the man that they want us to honor
400 years later it serves to remind
Of injustice and oppression at the hands of the Empire
And the puppets who since then have ruled us in kind.

Oh sure, it’s great, there’ll be lots of money
400 thou each from the province and feds
It just goes to show that there is money up there
Whenever politicians take it into their heads.

Sure, it’s great, there’ll be lots of money
Which year after year until now’s been denied
But where will the bulk of the money be going
To American yacht racers and the RCMP ride.

To finance a bus trip up to Toronto
And once it gets up there to put on a show
To feed fancy fish dishes to a lot of mainlanders
Done up so the fish taste won’t even show.

Yes some of the money will be sent on the island
A few people here will get jobs for a while
But only so they can bring in a few tourists
To come here and see us, the crowd who kill smiles.
They talk about Newfoundland culture and heritage
As something for sale to the folks up along

Boys, come down to Newfie, they whine and they wheedle
We’ll give you a scoff and a scuff and a song.
So Newfies, make merry and tourists’ll come see you
Take pictures and watch and say “Isn’t that cute?”
And then when they’re gone and it’s back to the winter
With the wind in your face and snow under your boot.
I have no objections to people come visiting
I welcome them here just like anyone else
What I say is that why isn’t money ongoing
So Newfoundlanders can celebrate first for themselves.

We should celebrate the fact that we made it this far
Despite all the hardships of living from the sea
From Sir Humphrey Gilbert right through to the present
We’ve lived through our share of tyrants and thieves.
We sold our resources, we sold independance
Our heritage wasn’t worth very much then
But now that we’re running out of items to auction
We sell off our culture, what have we left then?
All this stuff should be for the Newfoundland people
The music and merriment should be for them
Newfoundland artists should have steady work here
Not every few summers on a government whim.
So remember Sir Humphrey was an unpleasant fellow
When you’re out celebrating in the sweet summer sun
There’s good entertainment so get out and see it
And be proud of what Newfoundland people have done.

I hope that all hands have a good time this summer
Between black flies and fog and the odd August gale
Be nice to the tourists and tell culture vultures
That Newfoundland’s heritage is not up for sale.