

Give me a light

I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year,
"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown."
And he replied, "Go out into the darkness and put your hand into

the hand of God.
That shall be unto you better than light and safer than a known way."
(Quoted by His Majesty the King in an Empire broadcast.)



Canada is split right down the middle these days. And I don't mean the Quebec thing. It's the Mounties.

On the one hand, we have people screaming that the cops with the red coats are a bunch of scoundrels. On the other we have an equally vociferous group defending their every law-breaking deed.

I agree with both sides, for a change. I hate the thought of living in a country where my phone can be tapped, my mail opened, and my property broken into by a secret police.

But I think people who believe that any police force, in any country, that can combat terrorists, kidnapers and high-jackers, without breaking the red tape of the law occasionally, are extremely naive.

Every so-called civilized nation in the world has its secret police, as any spy story reader can tell you. The only difference lies in their aptitude, and the degree of deviousness and ruthlessness employed.

They run all the way from the bumbling British M.I. 5 through the slippery American C.I.A. and the sharp French Surete to the Rugged Russian K.G.B. and the brutal, simplistic sadists of some South American countries.

Among the secret police of the world, I imagine the RCMP are probably ranked about 49th, coming just after Iceland and New Zealand. They simply are not ept, devious or ruthlessness enough to stand any higher.

Despite all the thundering fulminations of the hot air artists in Parliament, the idea of the Mounties as a secret lurking terror in this country, threatening the civil liberties of all of us, is almost hilarious.

They haven't enough money, men or brains at the top to be anything more than an irritant. They are probably outnumbered by members of the Opposition looking for publicity, dissident former Mounties who have quit the Force because they had to get their hair cut, and smart journalists who seem to have no trouble turning up the redcoats' latest caper whenever they feel like it.

It's true they have been accused of all sorts of dreadful things, most of them illegal. They have tapped phones and planted bugs. As do industrial spies and the Mafia and probably a lot of other organizations we don't know about.

They have opened private mail. I'd like to know how they go about this, unless they stand by a post-box and snatch the mail from your hand as you're about to drop it in. Otherwise, they could wait three weeks to get their hands on a likely letter, the way our postal service works.

Briefly

The week before Christmas was hectic and we didn't manage to get to all the Christmas parties and special events we had planned to. Maybe next year!

They have committed arson, so they say. So have a lot of merchants, but the latter call it having a fire sale.

Burglary. They stole dynamite, go the charges. No pun intended. Not a bad idea, really, when the dynamite belongs to some bad guys who are known, with good reason, to be about to blow up something they should not with it.

They have withheld deliberately, information from the politicians who are supposed to be keeping an eye on them. So why? If they told the politicians everything they were going to do, the latter would either try to grab some votes by stopping it, or try to grab some votes by taking credit for the act, if it worked.

This is some crazy country, when it comes to secret service work. Remember that poor Russian spy who tried to turn himself over, with a load of documents, to Mackenzie King, back in the cold war days? He was told to go peddle his wares elsewhere, and the poor guy walked the streets in winter, looking for someone to defect to. Somebody finally took him off the streets, and he uncovered a huge Russian spy ring in Canada.

Then we had the massive overkill when a two-bit outfit in Quebec, the FLQ, pulled a couple of kidnappings. What a shemozzle! Hundreds of ordinary citizens were arrested with nary a habeas or a corpus, the army was called in, and the kidnappers made monkeys of the mounties and the Montreal gendarmes.

After strangling one of the victims and turning the other loose, the hoods were escorted by police to Montreal airport and flown, free, to Cuba. And thus Canada's police forces, with incredible ineptitude, announced to the whole world that the way to deal with terrorists is to buy them off. It's been going on ever since.

Sorry, but I can't get all worked up about the RCMP, and its alleged trespasses. It's great stuff for the Opposition, but it's more like Gilbert and Sullivan than the Gestapo.

That doesn't mean I'm not aware of the potential gravity of the situation. Sometimes I hear a soft click just after I've picked up the phone. Maybe it's the Mounties. But most likely it's my wife, on the upstairs telephone, trying to catch me making a poker date when she's going to be out to sewing class. (I usually let the other guy talk, put down the receiver carefully, race upstairs and catch her in the act.)

And when I took my grandboys to see Santa Claus at the big department store, I warned them, "Don't say a word to that guy in the red coat with the beard, even if he asks what you want for Christmas."

He probably has a dossier on me. When I was 17 I wanted to go and fight in the civil war in Spain. Years later, 20 years before anyone else in this country, I urged editorially that Canada recognize Red China. I once inadvertently voted NDP. And you know what those add up to.

"He's a RED!" as they'd have said 30 years ago. Today the Mounties probably have me down as a "potentially delinquent liberal with leftist tendencies," in a file marked TOP SECRET.

Deserves a medal

Box 125, Tara, Ont.
Dec. 19, 1977.

Acton Free Press
Acton, Ont.
Dear Editor,

I was a little surprised regarding the reaction or lack of same of my last letter to your paper.

However, Mrs. Gordon from Georgetown wrote in your letters to the Editor column expressing her gratification as to the quality, care etc. shown her mother in Jeanette's Rest Home and commending the staff.

Rightly so! And, unless there has been extensive changes, most of that staff was trained by Mrs. Katherine Kelly.

I find it both pathetic and amusing to hear and read of the comments of persons signalled out for the Queen's Silver Jubilee medal. Most recipients seem to be unaware as to why or how they were singled out for this recognition. One fellow in this county received his for apparently his interest in judging flower shows.

Others have been "good citizens" who served, at I am sure for more than adequate remuneration and received theirs,

with of course proper humility. Well, I'd like to have seen Mrs. Kelly receive some sort of recognition for her years of more out put of human decency and kindness than a dozen of those "deserving" paragons ever thought of.

Her dedication to her patients, when she ran her Nursing Home for Extended Care,—and I assure you, a hell of a difference from a Residential Home, where the good souls there need only minimal supervision,—was really something to deserve a medal,—not silver but pure gold.

And when you choose a citizen of the year, good people of Acton, with the possible list of candidates you choose, why not put Mrs. Katherine Kelly at the top of your list?

Am I partisan? Damn right—I think it's high time Acton is aware, or should be of one of her better assets and am more than proud to call her friend. She'll probably kill me for all this, but luckily we're expecting lots of snow and hopefully she'll not be able to get hold of me til Spring.

Merry Xmas to all at the good old Free Press!

Cheers,
Sheila O'Rourke

Free Press Editorial Page

The night of time

by Ward Chesworth,
University of Guelph

We have almost reached the end of another year and to some of us that seems like a long time. But judged against the enormous sweep of geological time, single years, or even the Biblical lifetime of three score years and ten, are about as noticeable as the individual grains of sand on a beach.

Most estimates of the age of the earth place it at upwards of five billion years. Primitive forms of life, viruses and bacteria, first appeared about three and a half billion years ago and most major forms of life had evolved by the last half billion years. One of these was the group of animals called the vertebrates—animals with backbones. Eventually by the slow processes of natural change this group gave rise to true human beings (Homo sapiens). But this wasn't until a mere 50,000 years ago.

It's difficult to grasp the scope of geological history because most of us can't envisage a million, let alone a billion years. The best way is to scale everything down to the span of a single year and consider that the planet earth was formed on

the first of January. Right up until the end of September comprised the Precambrian era during which the rocks of the Canadian Shield were formed.

The Paleozoic era came next and lasted until the 25th of November. The rocks of southern Ontario belong to this time slot. The next stretch of time is called the Mesozoic, when dinosaurs lived in what is now Alberta. It lasted until the 19th of December. Then the Tertiary era began and went on until the last day of the year. The Western Cordillera was formed during this time. The Quaternary era, the last million years of geological time, takes up the last four hours of the last day. In our region four successive ice sheets covered the land during this era. Recorded history began with just over a minute to go, and Jesus Christ was born at less than thirty seconds to midnight.

In the seventeenth century and long before the immensity of geological time was suspected, Sir Thomas Browne wrote:

"The night of time far surpasseth the day, and who knows when was the equinox."

Musical ministers

One of the more traditional parlour games starts with (a) some players, (b) a number of chairs equal to one less than the number of players and (c) a source of music. The music plays while the players prance around the chairs. When the music stops, the players rush to the empty chairs. Whoever is left standing is out of the game. And the game continues until there is only one player.

In Ottawa, they've taken this old favorite—called "musical chairs"—and modified it for political players. Several cabinet members occupy the ministerial chairs. Every few months, the political tune changes and the ministers are shuffled into other chairs. Some of the ministers are left without chairs when the music resumes. Most of the others fall into chairs that are different from the chairs in which they started.

All of this is considered good fun in Ottawa. But "ministerial chairs" costs the Canadian public dearly. At this very moment, virtually no minister in all of Ottawa truly controls his ministry.

Most people, hearing this news of ministerial eunuchy for the first time, are shocked. More surprising, however, is the fact that some ministers do have at least a partial grasp on their portfolios. After all, the game of ministerial chairs doesn't provide enough time for the average human to gain control of such a complex function as running a government ministry.

The Post Office, for example, has had no fewer than six different ministers since the start of 1966. Is it any wonder there has been trouble in the department? Even at that, however, the ministry has enjoyed more stability than National Revenue or Consumer and Corporate Affairs (eight ministers each since January, 1968). Apparently, ministers who understand their portfolios are considered dangerous.

The upshot of all this movement has been transfer of control from elected officials to senior civil servants. At one time, deputy ministers existed to translate ministerial edicts into action. Today, deputy ministers are the true directors of their departments while ministers have become figureheads. Probably no Minister of National Revenue since Herb Gray (October 1970 to October 1972) has truly understood the Canadian tax system.

There are people who believe that this is not cause for concern.

The civil servants, the theory goes, are quite capable of running the country. That, in fact, may be the case (though the evidence suggests otherwise). However, our constitution contends that elected representatives should run the country, leading—not being led by—the civil servants.

Compounding the difficulty, the deputy ministers are appointed by the Prime Minister. Consequently, undue power is placed in the Prime Minister's office. Unfortunately, the P.M.'s office is the only part of Ottawa which has an idea of the overall picture.

Democracy is still the most cherished of Canadian ideals. But democracy cannot exist when the bureaucracy is stronger than the politicians. It's time to put an end to parlour games in Ottawa.

A Happy New Year to all of us



Our readers write

Reade foregoes increase

Chairman and Councillors,
Regional Council of Halton
Mrs. Munro and Gentlemen:

This letter will serve as my notification that I, like Councillors Munro and Ciprietti, am turning back the proposed 1978 stipend increase. I insist of course, that any future group AIB calculations are to be performed such that my increase cannot be redivided among those who still see fit to accept further increases. My reasons are as follows:

1. The present stipend is more than adequate for the demands of the office.
2. The present stipend is in the top 33 per cent among the regions surveyed in the chairman's report.
3. Corry as it may appear, there still exists a valid concept of serving and contributing time without expectation of substantial monetary reward.

To those who argue that this office requires full time work thus justifying the

existing stipend and more, I can only respond that I hold an alternate view; moreover, those who subscribe to such an argument merely provide a classical case of Parkinson's Law in operation.

Despite the likely cries of "grandstanding" from some of my colleagues, I have chosen this method of stating my position with the hope that at least some taxpayers will be concerned enough to express strong opinions to their representatives as to the need for this continual increase in stipends.

It is my conviction that cost control in government cannot be attained solely through resolutions. Prerequisite requirements are example and leadership by the elected representatives starting at the grass roots level.

G.C. Reade
Councillor-Ward 2

Enough of postal disruptions

Following is a letter which Halton MP Dr. Frank Philbrook sent to the Postmaster General with copies to Prime Minister Trudeau, all MPs and Senators, Jean Claude Parrot, President CUPW, Robert McJarry, Letter Carriers Union and all Halton media; and filed for publication here: Dear Mr. Minister:

The reaction I am hearing from my constituents is loud and clear.

They have had more than enough of repeated disruptions in postal services and they want their Government to put a stop to these trying events.

Is it fair to have senior citizens kept waiting for their old age security pension cheques? Low income families without their family allowances? Small businesses without their invoices and regular payments of bills? Interruptions of mail services now seriously affect all Canadians and the general Canadian economy.

Until a few years ago Canada had one of the best postal services in the world. We had good reasons to be proud of it. That is no longer true.

Canadians in Halton and elsewhere now

tell us that they regard the Post Office with scepticism. They anticipate problems at the most inopportune time.

They want the postal system to serve Canadians well again, starting now. I know that you and the Government of Canada will do your utmost to make this happen.

In the spirit of the Season, I remain,
Yours Sincerely,
Frank Philbrook,
Member of Parliament,
Halton.

This and that

"In modern civilization subways are not safe, streets are not safe, parks are unsafe but under the arms we can have total protection."

Heavy use of alcohol has been implicated in the development of certain cancers, especially of the upper digestive and respiratory systems. In studies done by the Addiction Research Foundation of Ontario, it was found that 16 per cent of deaths due to the combined group of cancers of the mouth, larynx, pharynx, and esophagus occurred among alcoholics or persons with a heavy alcohol use. In a follow-up of more than 6,000 individuals treated between 1951 and 1963, it was found that cancer of the mouth, larynx and pharynx was five times more frequent among alcoholics than in the general population. Think about it, drinkers.

THE ACTON FREE PRESS

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Business and Editorial Office



Founded in 1975 and published every Wednesday at 89 Willow St., Acton, Ontario. Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulation, the Canadian Community Newspapers Association and the Ontario Weekly Newspapers Association. Advertising rates on request. Subscriptions payable in advance, \$7.50 in Canada, \$25.00 in all countries other than Canada; single copies 15 cents; carrier delivery in Acton 15 cents per week. Second class mail Registration Number 2915. Advertising is accepted on the condition that, in the event of typographical error, that portion of the advertising space occupied by the erroneous item, together with reasonable allowance for signature, will not be charged for but the balance of the advertisement will be paid for at the applicable rate. In the event of a typographical error advertising goods or services at a wrong price, goods or services may not be sold. Advertising is hereby offered to sell, and may be withdrawn at any time. Datas Printing & Publishing Co. Ltd. David R. Dine, Publisher BR Cook Advertising Manager Copyright 1977