

Outlook on Lifestyle

Trust busters in spotlight

Canada's revitalized trust busters will be in the spotlight over the next few weeks after the announcement of the merger between the country's second- and third-largest brewers.

Shortly after the merger between the Molson Cos. Ltd. and Carling O'Keefe Breweries was confirmed, a spokesman for the Bureau of Competition Policy said the deal will be reviewed by the federal agency.

One of the bureau's mandates is to ensure that mergers - and other business transactions and practices - do not unduly lessen competition and harm consumers.

Review of a transaction of the size of the Molson-Carling O'Keefe deal is automatic under the new competition law that went into effect a year and a half ago. The changes made then overhauled a decrepit 75-year-old act and toughened the competition watchdog's powers.

But, though the law gives the bureau greater powers, that doesn't mean Big Brother is watching over the business communi-



Ottawa

Vic Parsons

ty, ready to pummel offenders at the first opportunity.

Indeed, the approach taken by director Calvin Goldman, a Bay Street lawyer who took on the combines job two years ago, is to "speak softly and carry a big stick."

NEW POLICY

That policy was outlined in the bureau's recently released annual report for its first full year of operation under the new rules. The report noted that, historically, the bureau had investigated violations of the act, with a view to prosecution and levying of criminal penalties.

For mergers, for example, that was not a successful approach.

Under the old act, not one merger prosecution succeeded in three-quarters of a century. It proved impossible to show beyond reasonable doubt that the public had been hurt.

"However," the report continues, "it has become clear that, in many instances, the goals of maintaining and encouraging competition can be pursued with greater effectiveness and certainty, and with less time and expense, through an approach to enforcement which stresses the promotion of voluntary compliance with the act and relies on a broader range of responses to non-compliant behavior."

That's a long way of saying it's better to talk through emerging problems rather than waiting for the government regulator to brandish that stick.

And that's where the bureau has a good deal of clout. Often, from the business viewpoint, it's wiser to take a step backward to achieve a goal instead of getting tied up in lengthy and expensive court wrangling exposed to the public

eye.

EDUCATION BETTER

The report says the bureau is placing emphasis now on communication and public education. Companies are being encouraged to seek advice about transactions at the earliest possible stage. The hope is that conflicts can be narrowed down to only the most serious and contentious.

This willingness to resolve issues before they get out of hand has already proven successful. A case in point is the December Federal Court order forbidding fixing of real-estate commissions.

Federal officials say they are already seeing increased competition and consumers are benefiting from negotiation of the fees they are charged. There have been no consumer complaints about fixing in the last month and discount companies are expanding their businesses.

Moreover, the Canadian Real Estate Association and several regional boards lived up to part of the arrangement by publishing the court order in daily newspapers last Thursday.

On the merger front, the report concluded 133 examinations last year - about 10 per cent of the total mergers in Canada - and 120 were found to pose no problem. Seven mergers are being monitored and two were abandoned after investigation by the bureau. In four others, changes were made to the proposal to alleviate bureau concerns.

The Molson-Carling O'Keefe merger will mean two brewing companies - the other being John Labatt Ltd. - will overwhelmingly dominate the industry. If interests of beer-drinkers and the smaller breweries are threatened, the competition bureau won't hesitate to say so.

REVIEW

The Great Wiped Out North

By JACK McLEOD

Back in 1906, Ambrose Bierce, an American journalist and wit, published the first edition of his celebrated Devil's Dictionary. It was a bitter, sardonic book containing comical and imaginative re-definitions of familiar words, so popular and widely quoted that it became a classic, often re-printed.

Now, we have a similar book about Canada by Allan Gould, another journalist and wit, who has seized Bierce's idea and run with it through the thickets of Canadian political and cultural pretensions. The result is a fresh and amusing romp, diverting and sometimes satisfying. Gould is, however, more jolly and laidback than Bierce and may be (like his subject) too... um... gentle.

Gould has a sharp eye for idiosyncrasy and a deft way of exposing it. He is a rare and clever fellow, a certified egghead with three university degrees, but also a tough-minded working journalist with a sure instinct for pricking balloons. A brisk writer, Gould is the author of nine books. Odd, I think, that he is not better known. He deserves to be. Is it possible that we are still too timid or insecure to cherish our own humorists until, like Leacock, they are acclaimed abroad?

Gould's new work is *The Great Wiped Out North, or When Sacred Cows Come Home to Roost* (Stoddart, 228 pages, \$19.95), with illustrations by Graham Pilsworth. It is breezy and enjoyable.

Gould has long since won his spurs and takes sly pleasure in sticking them into critics from A (pronounced eh?) for Amiel, Barbara, "Attila the Honey," to Z for Gzowski without the G, "known as the North Pole, he gained fame for his G being silent when nothing else was."

The author aims his darts at Canada Post and Air Canada, Atwood and Elmer the Safety Elephant, Conrad Black and Peter

C. Newman, the familiar icons of our often over-blown "identity," and gives us chortles of delight when he skewers them. Gould has fun with:

-Alimony... "adding insult to injury."

-The CBC... "to air is human; to forgive CBC programming, divine... All this for less money than a parking meter - and just as exciting."

-The Globe and Mail... "Canada's most influential newspaper, because it carries a good selection of articles from the U.S.'s national newspaper, The New York Times."

-National Energy Police... "an ingenious concept on the part of the federal government of create Western Separatism."

Many of Gould's entries are not just definitions but short essays designed to communicate information as well as to produce smiles. He is an extremely knowledgeable rascal, and, like every good satirist, he wants to provoke as much as to entertain. Humor is, after all, a serious business. In the preface he insists:

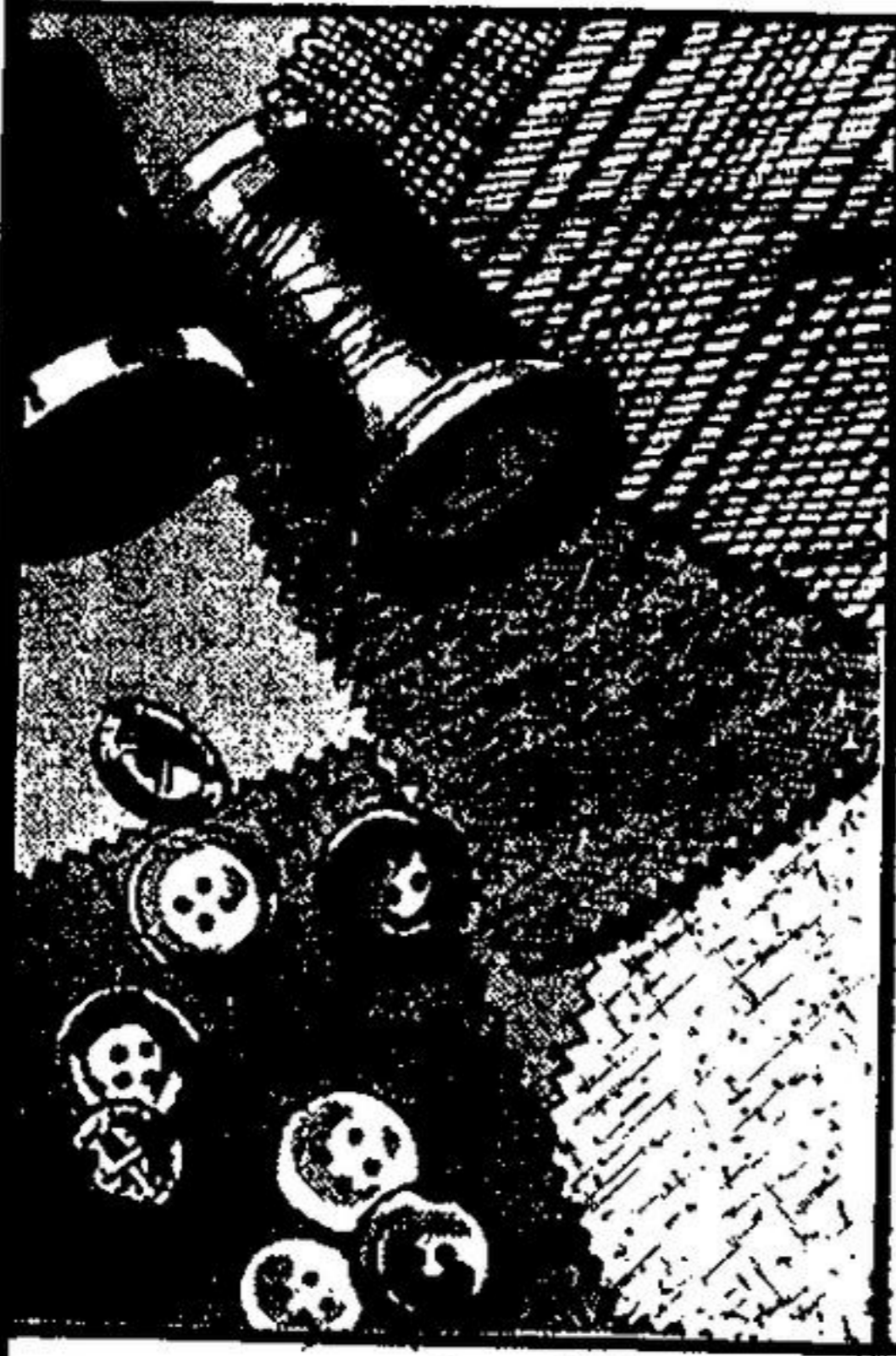
True Patriots Laugh. I believe that the truest patriots are both willing and anxious to laugh at their country's foibles and imperfections, and help to work towards correcting them. If this book moves some of its readers to laughter and a crusading desire to make this (pretty good) country far better than it pretends to be, then I will be satisfied.

Good stuff, that, and there's much more like it between these covers.

And yet... and yet, Gould gives pleasure with soft humor more than with the snap and bite of satire. This admirable book is more nice than nasty, more tickling than trenchant. Somehow I get the feeling that he's just too nice a guy, a stylish jabber but not a tough puncher. There is a difference, after all, between the humorist and the satirist, between the bright jokester and the memorably mordant wit.

-Jack McLeod, a professor at the University of Toronto, is the author of two comic novels, *Zinger and Me* and *Going Grand*. He is the editor of *The Oxford Book of Canadian Political Anecdotes*.

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ASK KATHY

DEALING WITH DESSERTS

Q: I love desserts! I enjoy preparing them, and I enjoy eating them. But I'm concerned about my family's health; I don't feel good about those rich calories. Do you have any suggestions?

A: Desserts add a special touch to any meal. And, fortunately, there are many healthful, low-calorie dessert recipes available. Following is a sample recipe:

Chocolate-Strawberry Cake

- 2 cups apples, chopped
- 2 cups strawberries, fresh or frozen (unsweetened)
- 1 Tbsp. vanilla
- 1 Tbsp. chocolate extract
- 1 Tbsp. Diet Center Lite™ sweetener*
- 1 cup Diet Center Protein Powder, Chocolate*
- 2 tsp. baking soda
- 1 cup bran, unprocessed

Place first 6 ingredients in blender and blend well. Pour



KATHY HAJAS
Diet Center Counselor

mixture into a large bowl. Add the remaining dry ingredients and mix with an electric mixer. Spray a Bundt pan with low-calorie, nonstick spray. Pour mixture into pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes. Cool and refrigerate or freeze. When ready to serve, garnish with fresh strawberries.

*Available at Diet Center. For more healthful recipes, call your local Diet Center.

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