

the HERALD Outlook

Brace yourselves

Ottawa
Stewart MacLeod
Thomson News Service

Well, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's "national reconciliation" was great while it lasted, but we might as well brace ourselves for an interruption or two. The first one has already started. It's called the Alberta provincial election. The next will almost certainly follow later this year. It will be called the Quebec provincial election. And if the new Newfoundland premier, to be chosen next month, wants a fresh mandate, we'll get a Newfoundland provincial election.

It could be a bumper year for Ottawa-bashing. This is the real stuff of provincial election campaigns, a foolproof ingredient that has probably elected more premiers than anything else. Trouble is, it always leaves an impression of strained federal-provincial relations, an impression that Mr. Mulroney has desperately tried to dispel since he assumed office.

This will almost certainly be his most difficult year. In Alberta, Premier Don Getty, a fellow Tory, began hammering on Ottawa's butt even before the campaign officially began. He clearly put the prime minister on a sticky wicket by announcing plans to have Albertans elect their next senator - a proposal that was termed unacceptable and inappropriate by Mr. Mulroney.

Then the premier, who seemed to be a veritable apostle of the prime minister's during the federal campaign, teed off on Ottawa's interest-rate policy and federal plans for a new national sales tax. Again, it was a case of central Canada regulating the economy for its own convenience.

FULLY EXPECTED
There will be more Ottawa-based aggravations before the campaign is over. From Quebec, they are coming even before the campaign begins. Premier Robert "we want our share of the loot" Bourassa, who helped his friend Mr. Mulroney sweep 63 of Quebec's 75 seats last November, now is finding that certain things transcend personal friendships.

"Quebec's interests," says the Liberal premier, "come before the cordiality of the personal relationships which may exist." And, he could have added that these particular interests tend to manifest themselves prior to provincial elections. Anyway, Mr. Bourassa wants the proposed new space agency in Montreal.

In one sense, you can hardly blame the guy. Since merely hinting at such an announcement helped federal Tory candidates so much last November, it seems only fair that provincial Liberals now benefit from a firm announcement. Hinting might be good for one campaign, but not two. "The moment of truth is approaching," said the premier, who served notice on Ottawa "firmly and soberly" that an announcement would be expected within a week or two. At least the Ottawa-bashing from the two provincial elections won't involve free trade or the Meech Lake accord. Both premiers support Mr. Mulroney on these issues.

COMMON APPROACH
The inevitable renewal of federal-provincial hostilities should not, of course, be taken too seriously. It's just something we have to go through from time to time in the practice of our Canadianism.

Mr. Mulroney knows this better than anyone, and he won't take offence at the slings and arrows that would otherwise puncture his sensibilities. He knows that, when it comes to getting re-elected, a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do. He's done it himself. Ironically, getting elected federally requires an entirely different tack. Provincial bashing is a no-no. What federal leaders must do is pour out the bucks, whether through regional development funds, the financing of megaprojects, the cleaning of the environment, or launching new studies on regional disparities or transportation links.

That gets provincial leaders on-side, particularly those of the same political persuasion. In the case of the Quebec premier, Mr. Mulroney even managed it with someone of a different persuasion.

Doesn't seem quite fair, but then what is? Mr. Mulroney can take heart in the temporary nature of the Ottawa-bashing. The fact is that federal-provincial relations have improved noticeably since he took office. A few election campaigns won't cause any long-term damage.

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Press pandemonium



Your Business
Diane Maley
Thomson News Service

No one sees more press releases than the press. So when it comes to drawing one up, who would be better able? Almost anyone, it would seem from the recent experience of the Ontario Press Council. Members of the press council gathered last week to take a stand against the Ayatollah Khomeini's order to kill novelist Salman Rushdie for blasphemy. The press council knew it should say something; it just wasn't sure what. One member suggested they issue a press release denouncing the Ayatollah; another countered that it might be better to issue a release criticizing government for not criticizing the Ayatollah severely enough. Yet another member thought such a stance might be unfair. "You're dealing with an almost irrational individual making worldwide statements," said Peter Moore, rector of St. George's Anglican Church in Guelph. "The government just doesn't know how to handle this. Let's not be too critical."

SLIPPERY STANCE
Well, perhaps the press could speak out against the death threat made against Revenue Minister Otto Jelinek, one thoughtful member offered. Better to denounce Mr. Jelinek's book at the border, someone countered. "The press council must speak out against such bullying and incitement to violence," Naomi Griffiths, professor of history at Carleton University, said. "We know that in Canada the

civil laws against threatening have been broken. There has been no comment on this by our federal leader. There has been no comment on this by our provincial leader." If it were only a case of our "civil law against threatening," one might be able to understand the confusion and lack of conviction. But in the face of incitement to murder, international terrorism, violation of international law, violation of domestic law and an attack on our founding principles, one cannot but wonder at the press council's cynicism.

"Do we have a position on censorship? We could trot that out here," Mr. Moore offered. One would hope the press has a policy on censorship. In Canada, we try to draw the line against hate literature such as pornography and anti-Semitism. We don't always succeed.

But unlike Iran, which is a theocracy, we're a secular state; we do not sentence irreverent writers to death, nor do we censor blasphemous works.

REFER THE MATTER
Apparently exasperated by the waffling, Neil Reynolds of the Kingston Whig-Standard called for the council to take a stand. "The press council should reflect on the dangers of racial and religious sensitivity becoming a barrier to the free dissemination of information," he said.

In the end, members referred the matter to the council's executive to come up with a statement that would reflect their views. If the meeting was any evidence, the executive may have some difficulty in reaching common ground.

Given how hard it seems to be for the press to write a press release on such a clear-cut issue, one wonders how come so many press people end up in government affairs or public relations, where they have to issue press releases by the dozen.

Tempting fate?



Staff Comment
Brian MacLeod

It was a chilly day last week when I made my way out of a basement gym on Mill Street in Georgetown, fumbled with my keys, threw my gym bag into the trunk, dug out the right key once more and settled into the seat of my car - only to have my view obstructed by an eight by 10-inch piece of paper.

I wound the window down, dug the paper out from under the windshield wiper and scanned the top line: "With love all things are possible."

I was inclined not to read on, but I couldn't help myself.

"This paper has been sent to you for good luck. The original is in New England. It has been around the world nine times. The luck has now been sent to you. You will receive good luck within four days of receiving this letter... provided you in turn send it on!"

"This is no joke," the letter continued. "You will receive good luck in the mail. Send no money. Send copies to people you think will need good luck. Don't send money as fate has no price. Do not keep this letter... it must leave your hands within 96 hours."

Chain letters have always baffled me. It always occurred to me that the same type of people who answer them are the same people who send money to television evangelists who face a heavenly recall unless they can pay the mortgage.

Apparently this chain's been around since 1963. Carlos Dadditt, an office employee, broke the chain. He lost his job. Then, after mailing the letter, he got a better one.

While in the Philippines, Gene Welch lost his wife 51 days after receiving the letter. He failed to circulate the letter. But, before her death he received \$7.75 million.

Joe Elliot received \$40,000 then lost it when he broke the chain.

Dalan Fairchild received the letter and threw it away. Nine days later, he died.

A California woman broke the chain. She was plagued with expensive car problems. (How unique). She then sent the letter on and received a new car. (The letter doesn't say if she actually paid for the car).

Apparently, the chain comes from Venezuela (you know, the country that recently imposed surfeits to help stop rioting). It was written by Saul Anthony DeGroup, a missionary from South Africa.

I'm supposed to make 20 copies and send them on within 96 hours.

I didn't. Now, for everyone who ever received this letter, for all those who didn't send it but thought about it, for all those who did send it, and especially for the poor sod who put it on my windshield, I'm going to tempt fate.

Go ahead. Do your worst. (Well, maybe not your worst...)

