

the HERALD
Outlook

Putting an end to Canada's National Dream



Your Business
Diane Maley
Thomson News Service

What's the difference between Canada and the Third World? Most Third World countries have passenger trains.

Via Rail Canada, our money-losing national rail service, is under attack again from the federal government. If the bunglers in Ottawa have their way, Canada may lose its passenger rail service. The federal government has been thinking about scrapping Via altogether. So much for the national dream.

More than nostalgia is at stake in defending the national rail service. Crowded airports, poor air safety and choking pollution are making passenger trains look more attractive every day. Rather than cutting and trimming Via for years, Ottawa should have been investing in new, light rail cars and fast trains, taking Japan and France as its models.

Now, after spending \$130 million fixing old equipment, the time to introduce fast new service has passed; Ottawa will not buy new equipment. Instead, Canada seems to be alone in questioning the viability of passenger trains. South of the border, Amtrak is gearing up to improve its already relatively good service.

And in Australia, a consortium of big international companies is studying a plan to connect the country's far-flung cities by high-speed passenger rail. The project would cost \$4.4 billion.

CAPITALIST ROADERS

That the Australian study is being undertaken by the private sector is telling. The consortium is headed by Broken Hill Pty. Co. Ltd., the biggest resource conglomerate in Australia. Elders (I excel), the company that bought Carling O'Keefe breweries, is also in on the plan.

Brian Loton, managing director of Broken Hill, likes to compare his project to the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway. One wonders what Mr. Loton might say when he

hears that no one in Canada - CPR and the federal government included - can afford to move people down the great Canadian railroad line.

What went wrong? The sad fate that may await Via Rail is symptomatic of a much larger problem - the decay of the country's infrastructure. This includes roads, highways, sewers, railway lines and rolling stock. By failing to reinvest for our future, we resemble such grossly mismanaged countries as Argentina.

Trains did suffer a loss of passengers over the past two decades. Ottawa's subsidy amounts to about \$90 a passenger per year, high by any measure. The rising popularity of air travel at reasonable prices left rail service out in the cold. But with new VFTs (very-fast trains, as they are called), all that is about to change in some countries.

GREASED LIGHTENING

The French national railway has a train that speeds along at 300 kilometres an hour; the service proposed for Australia would zoom along at 350 km an hour. Passengers could travel 870 km from Melbourne to Sydney in three hours, compared with 12 hours or the bus.

Indeed, Via has captured new business simply by rescheduling some of its trains. It managed a 50-per-cent increase in passengers between Toronto and Ottawa by replacing the overnight train with an additional day train. The heavily populated Quebec to Windsor corridor in central Canada is begging to be exploited by a faster train service.

The federal government is being short-sighted if it expects Via to shape up immediately or close shop. Big investments pay off over time. Besides, the cost of laying off Via's 7,500 workers is estimated to surpass \$1 billion.

Do we have a Broken Hill or an Elders, a consortium of giant, visionary companies willing to step in and fill the gap? Perhaps, but their investment would be selective. The Quebec to Windsor corridor, the most heavily populated region of the country, could no doubt be served by some bold entrepreneurs.

But if Via were left to die, most Canadians would probably have to do without rail passenger service.

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PUBLISHER
David A. Beattie
EDITOR
Brian MacLeod
AD MANAGER
Dan Taylor

STAFF WRITERS
Brian MacLeod

Donna Kell

SPORTS WRITER
Paul Svoboda

ACCOUNTING
June Glendenning

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING
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"I can't tell what time it is now that our parrot imitates the cuckoo clock..."

Black-robed figure in "mood management"

by GIL HARDY
Thomson News Service

Meet Robert Marleau, deputy mood manager in the sometimes fractious House of Commons.

He's the black-robed figure seated at the head of a long, polished wood table in front of his boss and chief mood manager, Speaker John Fraser.

His official title is Clerk of the Commons, which makes him Fraser's chief adviser on procedural matters. But for Marleau, a 40-year-old native of Cornwall, Ont., they are really in "the mood management business."

That means, among other things, an open-door policy which encourages MPs to seek them out for an explanation of an unpopular ruling. It also can mean delaying a ruling until tempers have cooled in the House.

"The place was designed for some intense discussion," Marleau said in an interview. "These are very committed people and, as a result, there's often a lot of emotion."

Marleau, Clerk since 1987, after four years as clerk assistant, says he was more of "a technocrat" before Fraser became the first elected Speaker in 1986. But that doesn't always satisfy an MP furious over a ruling.

"That intensity, to some degree, has to be managed. The Speaker tries to do it by being very polite in the chair, by trying to understand why the member is doing something, and that has sort of spilled over on me. It's a very successful technique and I think we make a good team."

Marleau is the first Clerk to rise through the ranks of the Commons table officers. Previous appointees sometimes came from other branches of the Commons or were unsuccessful political candidates.

His career in many ways mirrors the changes that Parliament has undergone in the last two decades.

While teaching French at a Cornwall-area high school in 1969, he responded to a newspaper ad for committee clerks. Marleau's interest in Parliament had been sparked during his University of Ottawa days when he edited committee reports in French "for about 50 cents each."

Parliamentary reform in 1968 had given committees a much heavier legislative workload. When they needed more clerks, Marleau applied.

But he almost didn't make it. The Commons had 10 openings and he was number 11 on the short list.

Then one of the 10 had a change of heart and Marleau was hired in 1970. He served as clerk to a number of committees until 1974, then worked for two inter-parliamentary associations.

He was named principal clerk of the committees and private legislation branch in 1981 and clerk assistant of the Commons two years later. By the time he became the 10th Clerk since Confederation in 1867, the House was in the throes of another round of reforms.

Many reforms were intended to strengthen the role of the individual MP as a law-maker. Committees were given more power and independence. Now, bills sponsored by individual MPs, outside of the government's agenda, had a much better chance of becoming law.

Marleau said the changes also "re-energized" the Clerk's office and brought table officers more actively into the parliamentary process.

"Reforms really changed the Clerk's traditional way of doing things. Members who come to the table know they will get a course of action. It may end up being a compromise, but at least they don't go away empty-handed."

The Clerk is responsible for the scroll, the handwritten record of Commons proceedings. He also prepares the daily schedule of business and administers the oath of allegiance to MPs.

Reforms have made MPs hungry for information about Commons rules and precedents. The Clerk's office has published a *Precis of Procedure*, which explains in layman's terms the workings of the Commons, and is about to release an annotated edition of Commons rules.

It will outline the evolution and history of each Standing Order so MPs will know at a glance why, for example, "There shall be no debate on any motion to concur in the report of any standing committee on estimates which have been referred to it except on an allotted day."

Book Review Tension and conflict

By JACK McLEOD

From 1957 to 1962, Basil Robinson had one of the most unenviable jobs in Canada. He was the liaison officer between the Department of External Affairs and the prime minister, John G. Diefenbaker.

Dief's mistrust and dislike of the civil servants he'd inherited from the long years of Liberal hegemony was legendary, particularly his antipathy to the "Personalities" in External Affairs. The Chief always harbored a "corroding envy" of Mike Pearson's having won a Nobel Peace Prize for his work at the United Nations. The officials in External, on the other hand, assumed that diplomacy should be handled mainly, if not exclusively, by the gentlemen-professionals in the department who understood such subtle matters. To them, Diefenbaker was just a brash small town lawyer from the sticks who had no experience in running anything, never mind a nation's foreign policy.

This tension and conflict of styles is highlighted in an excellent new book by Basil Robinson, Diefenbaker's World: A Populist in Foreign Affairs (University of Toronto Press, 352 pages, \$29.95). It is a weighty but readable and often fascinating account of Diefenbaker's conduct of foreign affairs. In addition to a rare telling of an insider's story of policy making, the book also provides vivid insights to the mind and the politics of the Man from Prince Albert.

During Robinson's years with Dief, the Tory government faced many important external problems, all of which are skillfully traced in revealing detail. There were controversies over South Africa's withdrawal from the Commonwealth, Britain's bid for admission to the European Economic Community, the Berlin crisis of 1961, trade with Cuba and China, the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, and, above all, the debate over nuclear arms for Canadian forces that split the cabinet and brought about the fall of the Conservative government in 1963.

THEMES

Two themes that run through the book are Diefenbaker's relations with the United States and with other world leaders. Churchill he admired extravagantly and paid homage to on visits to the U.K.; Harold Macmillan disappointed him; Nehru seemed inscrutable; de Gaulle was overbearing. Dief seemed to need a hero. As a new boy from a small power, he bristled at slights whether real or imaginary, and his appetite for being included and flattered could never be satisfied. Although he liked and trusted Eisenhower, John Kennedy aroused his suspicions even before they met, for JFK was what Dief was not: a sophisticated insider. Robinson writes that the "youth, wealth, connections and charisma" of Kennedy were upsetting to the Canadian prime minister, and the president's apparent preference for Pearson caused strain.

—Jack McLeod teaches political science at the University of Toronto. His latest book is *The Oxford Book of Canadian Political Anecdotes*.

KIT N' CARLYLE® by Larry Wright



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