

# the HERALD

Home Newspaper of Halton Hills - Established 1866

A Division of Canadian Newspapers Company Limited  
45 Guelph Street, Georgetown L7G 3Z6, Ontario

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Second Class Mail - Registered Number 0943

Page 6 - THE HERALD, Wednesday, October 25, 1989

## Editorial

# Polls show we're fickled

If the federal government is looking for a clear signal from Canadians on how to lead the country, it's not likely to get one from the polls.

At least not from what appears to be a fickled Canadian population which can't seem to make up its mind.

Canadians, if recent polls are to be believed, don't want services cut, they don't want significant increases in taxes but they want to reduce the federal deficit.

Under such directions from the electorate, Finance Minister Michael Wilson is in an unenviable position indeed.

Recent polls show Canadians don't want a nine per cent Goods and Services Tax. In fact, 80 per cent of you don't want it. But 54 per cent of Canadians say they would accept a seven per cent GST. However, Canadians are not prepared to accept a tax on groceries to bring that figure down to seven per cent.

Sounds like a no-win situation for Michael Wilson.

But there's more.

During the recent round of town hall meetings, and in many public discussions previously, Halton-Peel MP Garth Turner was told by the public to "run the country like a business."

In fact, some local businessmen have consistently said politicians would never be able to function in the business world because they can't come close to balancing a budget.

Yet, when the federal government attempts to cut a huge money-losing operation like Via rail (the government has put more than \$5.2 billion into Via since 1977) Canadians revolt. Sixty per cent of Canadians don't like the Via cut-backs.

Why not?

The federal government is simply doing what it's been told to do.

The bare fact is that in these times of heavily mixed economies, governments are in business to take care of money-losing functions that private operations won't touch. Sure, some private enterprises like the American Amtrak have promised to step in and operate some rail lines, but it's doubtful they'd run an extensive operation like Via which loses money consistently.

Deficit financing is a fact of life in most western economies and many have flourished under such economic managements since the Second World War. There's no argument, however, for a massive \$30 billion annual debt on which Canada is having a hard time paying interest.

And the Conservative government helped to slit its own throat by raising the awareness of the national debt during and after the election. The PCs ran much of their platform on reducing the deficit.

Now, they've got to try to solve the problem and they're finding it tough going.

After electing the government of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney for a second time, Canadians still seemed to be a fickled bunch.

And we continue this love-hate relationship with our leaders. That is, we love their goals but hate their methods of achieving them.

If the federal government is committed to bringing the deficit under control, recent polls show they'll have to go it alone.

# Who can see clearly now?

Derek Nelson

Queen's Park  
Thomson News Service



The Ontario education system is like a ocean of fluff in which clear thought stands out like islands in the sea.

George Radwanski is one such solid piece of ground amidst the mush. Another is Lakehead Board of Education chairman Evelyn Dodds.

Radwanski, an author and journalist, was the generalist hired by Premier David Peterson's Liberal government in 1987 to examine the Ontario educational system, specifically in terms of dropouts.

Dodds won election as a reform trustee in Thunder Bay on a platform that essentially parallels Radwanski's analysis of what is wrong with the system.

At base, both are calling for a return to democratic education, to the imparting of skills and knowledge to all children, learning that didn't occur during the era of "do-your-own-thing" education. This change requires universal standards for what is taught and for tests that should show what students are actually learning.

Professional educators are resisting such moves, which is why it was nice to see both Radwanski and Dodds again making their points in the public forum recently.

Radwanski was interviewed by the editors of that deliciously irreverent magazine, The Idler.

He noted his initial amazement at discovering (in another study) that the prime complaint of people in business was the education system.

"Some of the most successful people in business were saying, look, I can't trust a high school diploma; people are coming out of university who can't write grammatically, who can't read anything complex, who can't understand what it's saying and act upon it," he said.

"Very broadly, I think the system should prepare one for life as an individual, for one's own fulfilment; prepare one for a productive life in the economy; and for citizenship, for contributing intelligently to the governance of the nation. All this requires demonstrable knowledge, skills and affective attributes.

"For 20 years, the emphasis has been almost exclusively on affective attributes. The stated goals... have to do with self-confidence, self-esteem, an appreciation of this, an awareness of that - and that's necessary, but it is not sufficient.

### ONLY THING

"For 20 years, we've been told that learning to learn is the only thing you need... that teachers should simply provide the environment, the hothouse, the incubator.

(But) there's a lot that kids don't discover by themselves. The natural disposition of a child is to read something over twice and say, I know it. If you do that, you will fare badly on exams. If you don't write exams, you never know what you don't know until it comes back to haunt you.

"The way you learn is by reading, by asking yourself questions about what you've read, by copying out the important points, by trying to list them from memory, by asking a parent or a friend to quiz you. This process doesn't come naturally. It is a technique; it has to be taught," he concluded.

Dodds took similar kinds of thought down to the school room level in a recent submission to a legislative committee here.

"If one hour is devoted to mathematics in a day, will the children learn more from practising their multiplication tables and correcting their errors until they get the answers automatically, or will they learn as much by making pizzas and watching how a pizza gets cut up into eighths?"

"Is it as valuable for children to watch a video novel for two hours on television, or would they learn more that we consider important if they spent that time actually reading a novel?"

"Is it worth our money to be sending a class on a bus to a roller skating rink for a whole afternoon to learn something called 'socialization skills,' when that particular skill is elusively undefinable?"

The answers are obvious.



# The science of the hard sell



Rennie MacKenzie

Ottawa  
Thomson News Service

The hard sell has come to Ottawa's quiet, introverted science community.

The sprawling and diverse National Research Council - an institution even few Ottawans fully understand - has opened a marketing office to put more hustle into its sales operations and find more customers for its products and services.

The office isn't yet fully staffed, but the half-dozen that are there have already started ringing industry's doorbells seeking out cold, hard deals that will bring more cash and business into the establishment's numerous labs.

"We're not here to pussyfoot around. We're here to make deals," said manager Bob

Hargreaves of his fledgling marketing services branch.

Still in the early stages of development, the NRC's central marketing group has been concentrating on medium- to large-sized companies that have the interest and financial resources to participate in long-term research projects with the agency.

Hargreaves and his staff have been calling on selected industries and making sales presentations to industrial associations, "trying to get the message out the best we can." An advertising program is being discussed and a variety of promotional material is being prepared.

"A lot of companies don't know what NRC has. We have a visibility problem, in a sense, and we're trying to correct that," he explained.

So far, Hargreaves' sales force has been welcomed at the doors they've gone banging on. And early dividends are already in. The first deal, a collaborative project with a Canadian hi-tech firm worth "several hundred thousand dollars," has been concluded.

Hargreaves said his group is "well on its way" to a couple of other contracts with consortia in the primary resources and plastics industries.

The NRC's last five-year plan was aimed at bringing the government's lead research agency into closer orbit with the private sector and universities. But the need to recover more of the federal money spent on research is also seen as a reason for setting up the marketing group.

"The government isn't investing money in a place like NRC solely out of cultural or philanthropic feelings," Hargreaves commented. "Either the work is in the public good or it's relevant to industry."

The NRC has a complex schedule of fees for the use of its many laboratories, services and staff of 3,000, whom Hargreaves described as "very clever people."

But, in many cases, the NRC may be willing to share in the costs of a research project, he explained.

"If we can find companies that have the capability, the wish and the enthusiasm to work with us on a reasonably longist time scale, we can offer them a helluva deal because we are not necessarily driven by the bottom line."

Any joint venture with NRC, however, will require a firm commitment from the industry partner.