

the HERALD Outlook

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Is man the centre of the universe?



Diane Maley
Your Business
Thomson News Service

of its members to accuse man of speciesism, a prejudice unwarranted by the natural facts.

MAN AS CANCER

We are just one of many species on this planet, part of the natural flora and fauna, these critics argue. Yet, we are the one that can bring about the world's destruction. Man is a cancer, cells gone mad, critics of man-centredness say.

We could counter by pointing out that we alone among the birds, fish and animals are possessed of reason. Then we blush. Our reason is not apparent in the way we live our lives.

The difficulty concerned people are having with the growing environmental movement is in separating the wacky notions from the sensible ones. What may seem unreasonable at first often makes sense after reflection.

It seems unlikely that we will accept the notion that we are one with the beasts, all brothers in one big, natural family. Egalitarian as we may be, there are limits.

To accuse man of speciesism is not to say much. To accuse him of reckless disregard for his environment and the creatures that inhabit it is another matter.

Being rational creatures, we feel we have to define the problem philosophically before we do something about it, if indeed we can. Yet, most of us are paralyzed by a sense of helplessness.

Humankind is spreading over the planet like a virus. Cities sprawl into suburbs, which devour farmland in turn. Rivers, lakes and streams are sick with pollution. The water is undrinkable; the air unbreathable. Our food is poisoned with chemical sprays. Fish are dying, birds and sea creatures perish from oil spills. It's a grim toll.

Is man guilty of speciesism? Some people think so.

Speciesism is another wonder of modern philosophy, like sexism or racism. Speciesists hold that the man is superior to other animal species. By this definition, most of us are guilty.

We hold an anthropocentric view of the universe, which means we believe that man is the central fact, or final aim, of the universe. The Earth, the trees, the animals - even the sun and moon and all the distant galaxies - were made with us in mind.

Anthropocentrism has given philosophers nothing but trouble over the years trying to explain why, if God made the world with us in mind, it seems so indifferent to our needs and desires? Religious philosophers in particular have been dogged by this question.

Worse things than religious perplexity spring from the notion that we are the centre of the universe. The belief that everything is at our disposal has led to the attempted conquest of Nature and all that it implies.

It has led to environmental destruction, near extinction of wild birds and animals and thoughtless treatment of domestic ones. This is what gives the environmental movement pause, and leads some

SNAFU® by Bruce Beattie



"The last three lion tamers have been reported missing?!"

Michael Wilson has been with us longest



Vic Parsons
Ottawa Bureau
Thomson News Service

Not long after he took over as finance minister in 1984, Michael Wilson was asked if he feared his new job might be a graveyard for a promising politician.

"Sure, it may be a graveyard," he smiled. "But I'll have fun going to my grave."

Last weekend, Wilson became the longest serving federal finance minister since Liberal Douglas Abbott, who held the post from 1946 to 1954. Despite an abundance of hot water over the five years and two months he has had the job, Wilson has stayed the course.

Early on, Wilson had a reputation for integrity - the steadiest rock in a shaky cabinet. Ministers fell all around, but there was no question that the finance minister would stay on. Who else, indeed, could do the job?

That was true even though Wilson had shaky moments from the outset. When the government backed down on proposed cuts to pensions paid to the elderly, a lesser being might not have survived.

Indeed, it was Prime Minister Brian Mulroney who looked bad on that one. Who can forget the country's leader beating an undignified retreat before the wrath of pint-sized pensioner Solange Denis and her famous phrase: "Goodbye, Charlie Brown."

Lately, Wilson has been facing one of his greatest tests, the introduction of the goods and services tax (GST).

Criticism abounds. Take the report that surfaced Wednesday as federal and provincial leaders

gathered for their annual meeting. The report, prepared for the provincial governments, said the GST could mean up to 434,000 lost jobs and provincial revenue losses of \$8.9 billion. Wilson dismissed it as a "ridiculous distortion of reality."

GAINS PREDICTED

Wilson had predicted gains of 95,000 jobs with the GST and a boost to the economy of \$9 billion. Only Alberta, with no provincial sales tax, will lose out, his officials claim.

Meanwhile, Wilson has suggested the provincial opposition is merely a front. Although he refuses to name any, he says premiers secretly back the GST. Ditto for business.

The GST dust-up is not the only one confronting Wilson these days.

Critics delight in noting that Wilson took office promising to cut the deficit and slash taxes. This year, the deficit is likely to rise over last year's total, largely because of high interest rates.

Moreover, the national debt - about \$160 billion when the Conservatives took office in 1984 - now approaches \$350 billion.

As for taxes, when Wilson became finance minister, the federal sales tax on manufactured items - which he has described as a "silent killer of jobs" - stood at nine per cent. This year, he bumped it up to 13.5 per cent.

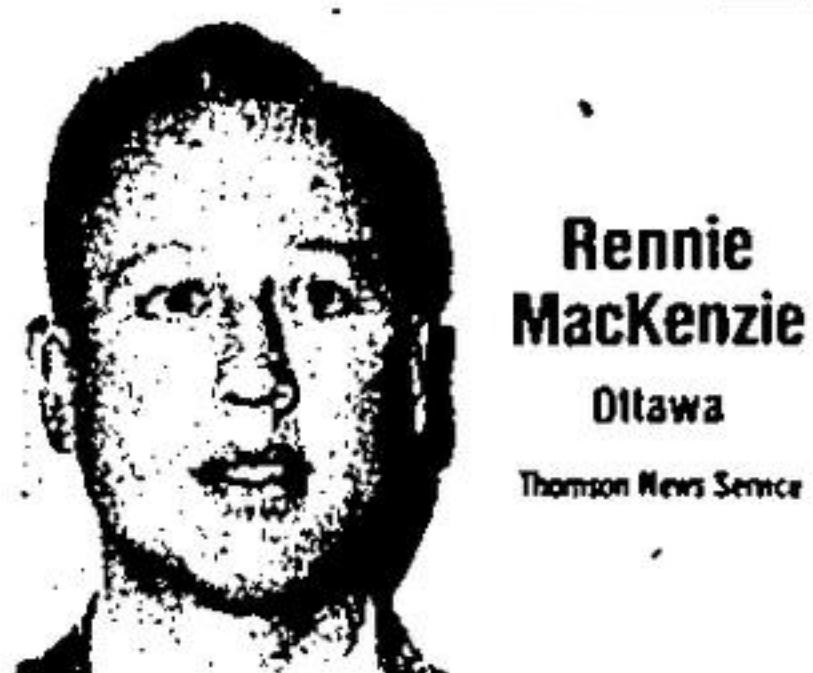
That led opponents to ridicule his pledge that the GST, which replaces the old tax, would be "revenue neutral." By raising the tax 50 per cent, they argued, he was making a mockery of his own claim.

SOME CUTS

What of tax cuts? Wilson brought in a new personal income-tax regime providing for lower taxes for many Canadians. But income surtaxes, originally called a temporary deficit-fighting measure, have now become permanent.

Initially, universal social programs were called a "sacred trust" by Mulroney, but Wilson introduced the so-called "clawback" of benefits from richer citizens and partially de-indexed payments.

Plans for emergencies are needed



Rennie MacKenzie
Ottawa
Thomson News Service

OTTAWA-The lack of plans to deal with national emergencies like the tragic 1984 release of poison gas in Bhopal, India, was a major grumbling point last month for the auditor general.

However, what Kenneth Dye may not have known when he presented his annual report to Parliament is that plans will be getting later this month when representatives of industry and government meet to compare notes and thoughts on preparing for disasters.

The fledgling Major Industrial Accident Co-ordinating Committee (MIACC), struck by the federal government after concerns were raised about the likelihood of a Bhopal-type accident occurring here, is at a critical point, says its directors.

Over the past year, a steering committee and eight working groups have been meeting under the MIACC umbrella to develop guidelines for the prevention and handling of disasters.

The MIACC group was organized by the transport and environment departments and Emergency Preparedness Canada at the urging of former environment minister Tom McMillan. Its first months were spent attracting interested participants from the provincial governments, municipalities, industries and a number of organizations that represent fire, police, emergency medical services and volunteer groups.

Now, with the basic research complete and options in hand, the chairman of the group's steering committee, Jean Belanger, declared that MIACC's "stakeholders" must agree to a permanent form and structure for the disaster-planning organization. More than 200 of the stakeholders, as MIACC refers to them, are expected to attend the Toronto meeting.

"MIACC has been a good vehicle so far in getting the process started, but we're now at a crossroads," Belanger, president of the Canadian Chemical Producers' Association, stated. "We must decide what is the most appropriate vehicle from this point on. There is no doubt in my mind that MIACC has an important and ongoing role to play. The question is how best to structure the organization."

BUFFER ZONES

The task, as MIACC sees it, is formidable. Much of it will require the unanimity of the provinces in adopting zoning standards for municipalities. As an example, Michael Salib, recruited from the Transport Department to serve as MIACC's executive-director, pointed to the need for uniform buffer zones around chemical plants. The provinces will have to be lobbied to adopt standards as part of their municipal planning acts, he said.

"It's a big, complex field," Salib said.

Berry's World

... BECAUSE OF OUR PERIODIC AND REPETITIVE ANNOUNCEMENTS ABOUT WHO AND WHAT IS COMING UP ON THIS MORNING'S PROGRAM, WE HAVE RUN OUT OF TIME AND WILL HAVE TO RESCHEDULE THE ...



Jim Berry
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