

## Opinions

## A silver lining behind every cloud (car)

I experienced my worst nightmare over the weekend but it wasn't without a silver lining.

It was Saturday afternoon and my editor couldn't get his car started. He asked me if I could give him a boost. "No problem," I replied, being the humanitarian that I am.

I got into my car, placed the keys in the ignition, turned the key but ... nothing. "What's the problem, Ben?" my editor asked. Confident as usual, I said "the car's a little temperamental."

Before going on any further I should explain the use of the word temperamental to describe my car.

Before owning a car and becoming completely dependant on it, I would never have thought a machine could ever take on human characteristics. But it's the dependance that creates a

personal relationship between car owner and his or her car. In the two years I've owned the car, the relationship has progressed, or should I say digressed from superior man and subservient machine to the exact opposite.

I guess subconsciously I think if I treat the car more like a person it will take pity on me and my bank account and not break down.

Anyway, back to the story at hand. I tried to start it again, again and again, but to no avail. The first fear that entered my mind was repercussions of not completing the work I had to do on the weekend. A chewing-out perhaps. Monday morning, or worse, my walking papers. Slightly paranoid you ask? Perhaps. The second fear to rear its ugly head was the lack of funds to repair the car. No



## Ben's Banter

By Ben Dummett

paranola here.

My worries were initially alleviated by my knowledgeable editor and leader. Being the expert he is on dead car batteries he predicted all I needed was a boost and I'd be on my way. And herein lies the silver lining that ended up extending longer than I ever im-

agined. I asked three different people, each with a larger car battery, to give me a boost and all tried everything they could to help me get my car started.

To them I owe a thanks. Only one problem remained, I still couldn't get my car started.

After the third unsuccessful boost, even I realized the battery wasn't the problem, especially after I used my deductive mind and thought to turn on the headlights. Needless to say they worked.

By this time, the afternoon had turned into early evening, all garages had long since closed, my car didn't work, and the Sunday work schedule weighed heavy on my mind.

Here comes the next part of the silver lining.

A co-worker gave me a name of a local mechanic whom he said

may be willing to make a service call Sunday at the Herald. Unconvinced somebody would be willing to give up part of their Sunday to fix a car, regardless of their love for engines, I reluctantly called the person.

His name is Rick Staitte and he never hesitated to help me out. We met at noon and he didn't stop working on the car until he fixed it, two-and-a-half hours later. What initially looked like a minor problem with the car's less than desirable spark plugs, turned out to be a major tune-up involving two trips for Mr. Staitte back to his garage for necessary tools. I won't tell you how much he charged me but take my word for it, it was more than reasonable.

Despite my problem-plagued weekend, it was uplifting to me to meet someone as generous with his time as Mr. Staitte.

## Relax and enjoy the GST - it's reality

OTTAWA - He may just be whistling past the graveyard, but Revenue Minister Otto Jelinek seems to believe the short attention span of Canadians will smooth over the transition to the GST.

The new tax on everything from diapers to caskets will sell itself, Canada's No. 1 tax man said bravely last week. Consumers will learn that, when all is said and done, it's good for them. And, they'll get used to it. Why, just the other day, Jelinek ate out and when the bill came, he plumb forgot about the new federal tax on restaurant meals.

"I don't believe the GST will be an issue in the next election," the revenue minister told reporters. "I don't think it'll be an issue in six months. There will be other issues."

Whether the average Canuck's memory is as murky as Jelinek's remains to be seen. Certainly, there could be other preoccupations for us down the road - continuing recession and lost jobs,

war, breakup of the country and native unrest.

The one-time world champion figure skater went into an impressive routine of leaps and spins when he was pressed last Friday on how Canadians were reacting to the GST.

Chaos? No such thing, Jelinek said. Only a few businesses that waited too long to adjust to reality, and now must have their drawers pulled up - with the helping hand of Revenue Canada.

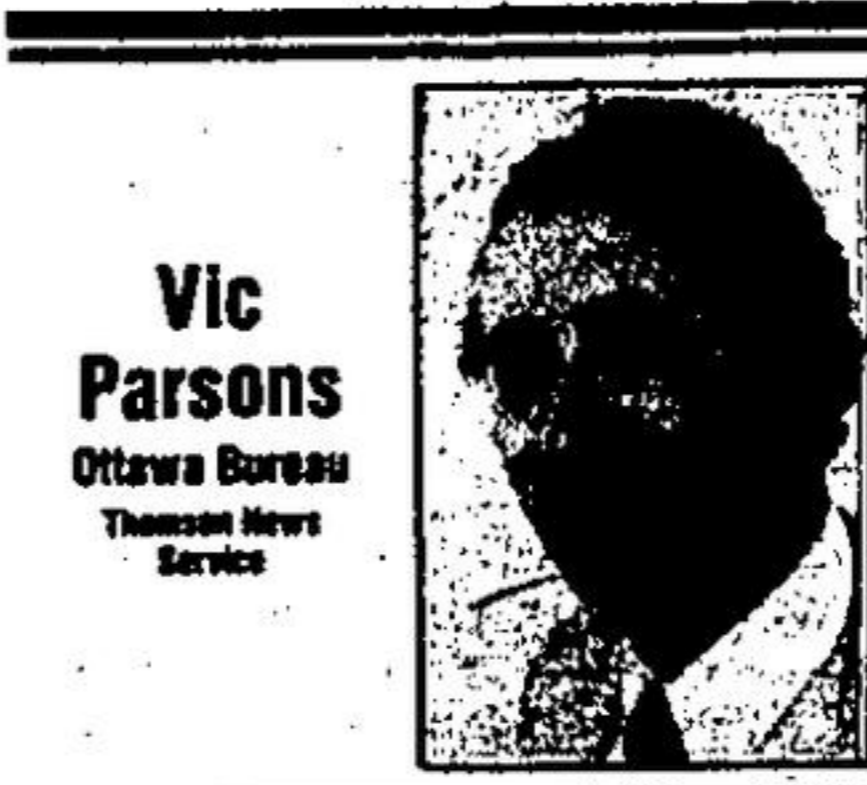
## OLD NEWS

All those reports about grumpy Canadians griping at the tax? Come on, the newspapers wrote those headlines up months ago.

How about the 14,000 calls a day to Ottawa's Consumer Information Office? Only 500 calls in the first two working days were complaints.

Why, Revenue Canada gets more calls than that on income tax questions!

Disgruntled Canucks fleeing across the border to make GST-free purchases? No such thing,



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Jelinek said. No change in traffic, and no additional pressure on customs officers due to the GST.

Bureaucratic nightmare? "We've planned this properly, and it's running well."

In short, there are no surprises, the tax boss said. "I think there's a sense of calm out there."

Well, Jelinek and colleagues may have overlooked one point. Danger lurks in the fact that most provinces have resisted merging their retail taxes into Ottawa's dream of one harmonized na-

tional sales tax.

The minister believes that, in time, all provinces will fall in line. That may well be.

But each time a straying province comes to the fold, broadening its tax to cover items that were previously exempted, the whole GST debate could be replayed. Undoubtedly, when the next federal election is called, there will still be provinces that haven't fallen under the GST spell. Brian Mulroney's Conservatives may see a price exacted.

## WRATH ESCAPED

There may be a way for the Tories to escape the wrath of voters, however. And opposition critics are already developing a conspiracy theory.

Liberal John Manley and New Democrat Lorne Nystrom were skeptical of Jelinek's claim that the GST will net, after costs, rebates and credits, about \$19 billion this year.

The tax will probably bring in substantially more, they argue. And the surplus might be just the

thing the government needs to finance a package of election goodies. Nystrom even referred to the possibility as the "1993 Game Plan."

Jelinek and Mulroney have already made references to some beneficial alternatives if the taxman extracts more than anticipated from consumers' pockets.

The prime minister has said there might be a reduction of the seven-per-cent rate, or the extra money could be applied to the federal deficit. We'll find out within a year if more cash will be available, he said recently.

Jelinek, distancing himself from Mulroney, says he's not sure how realistic it would be to cut the rate - he'd choose deficit reduction. A third option would be to trim income tax rates. But it would be up to the cabinet to decide how additional money would be used, Jelinek says.

In the meantime, the government would just as soon that you relax and enjoy the GST.

## Rural Canada being ignored by Federal government

OTTAWA - In all that's being written these days about holding Canada together - and Lord knows there's lots of it - a central question is whether we'd be better served by a prime minister from Quebec or one from English Canada.

A more compelling question, it seems to me, is whether we'd be better served by a prime minister from rural, rather than urban, Canada.

Both questions might seem rather academic to the present generation. Apart from the Joe Clark blip of 1979 and the John Turner micro-blip of 1984, we haven't had a non-Quebec prime minister since 1968. And we haven't had a rural-oriented prime minister since 1963.

It's true the Quebec question raises a more urgent debate, since that province obviously feels alienated. But, what's more frequently overlooked is that much of rural Canada has similar feelings. And, while politicians of all stripes are bending over backwards to understand Quebec's problems, no one seems to have the same concerns about rural Canada.

This point was driven home again during all those year-end interviews with our political leaders, particularly Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. Absolutely nothing emerged to indicate there was any gut feeling for small-town or rural Canada.

Actually, some of the comments indicated a complete insensitivity to these parts of the

country.

Take Mr. Mulroney's answer to questions about the dismantling and privatization of such institutions as VIA Rail, Air Canada and Petro-Canada.

## NO FEEL

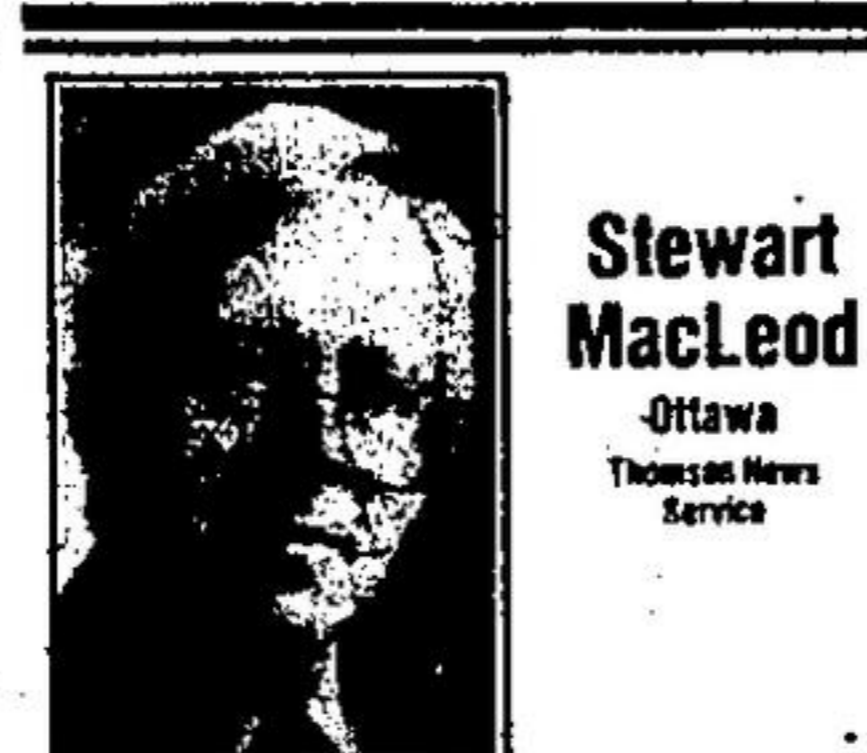
"You wouldn't have to have much confidence in a country to think that it was held together by Air Canada or Petro-Canada," he replied. As for VIA Rail, "it was costing hundreds of millions of dollars that taxpayers don't have to subsidize trains that nobody was taking. This has nothing to do with our sense of nationhood."

Oh, yes it does, Mr. Prime Minister. Perhaps not if you live in Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal or Vancouver. But when you hit the real Canada, trains have a great deal to do with our sense of nationhood.

However, among today's crop of politicians, there are probably very few who have ever viewed Canada through a train window - or talked with other Canadians in a railway waiting room.

I would even argue that, in smaller cities, Air Canada also contributed to our sense of nationhood - far more than regional feeder lines that might change names every few months and have no national identity.

But, more than trains and planes, perhaps the one institution that contributed more than anything else to our sense of unity was the post office. And that's put in the past tense because, with some 750 post offices turned over to private enterprise in the past



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decade, it's probably no longer true.

If successive governments over the last two decades had any feelings whatsoever for what makes Canada tick in smaller communities, none of these closings would have occurred.

## ALL MONEY

Sure, the new Canada Post Corporation now is making big bucks - and actual mail deliveries may be just as efficient - although I harbor some doubts - but not everything can be measured in economic terms.

The Governor General doesn't make a profit for us.

Yet, it could be argued that small-town post offices contributed far more to our sense of Canada than even the Governor General. But then, unless one has lived in small towns and experienced the friendly face of a local post office, this argument might seem absurd.

Perhaps the most ludicrous double-decisions ever taken by

government came in the 1970s when the closings of rural post offices were accompanied by an initiative to "increase the federal presence" in smaller communities. The Trudeau government spent untold millions to erect billboards claiming credit for new roads, airports, wharves, etc., while dismantling the most popular federal presence imaginable.

It was breathtakingly stupid. But then neither Pierre Trudeau,

nor most of his ministers, had spent much time socializing in rural post offices. Mr. Mulroney hasn't either.

I think our leaders have been dead wrong in saying these institutions have nothing to do with our sense of nationhood. They have everything in the world to do with it. But urbanites, afflicted with that billboard mentality, have never been able to grasp the fact.

No wonder we have problems.

## Berry's World



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