

EDITORIAL

with Hartley Coles



Those gas prices!

Gasoline prices haven't gone out of sight but they've increased enough to make most motorists and truckers groan. After all an increase from 51 cents a litre to 61.9 or higher is a hike of over 20 per cent.

What other commodity goes up by over 20 per cent in one day?

The oil companies who control the price, of course, deny they are gouging the public. They maintain they were losing money when the price of gasoline was in the high 40 cents or 50 cents a litre. The meteoric rise was due to the price of oil shooting up to around \$20, a barrel, they maintain.

And we can't blame the Province. The ad valorem tax which saw the provincial take increases every time the price rose, was removed in 1995, according to Premier Mike Harris. However, in a letter to The Toronto Star, Premier Mike says the Feds (Ottawa) are the only people who can control price gouging.

That's why it was more than interesting to read Member of parliament Julian Reed's response to Actonian Doug Anderson's letter to him on gas gouging in last week's New Tanner. Mr. Reed has long advocated alternative fuels as an answer to the oil companies and their price cycles. He chaired a task force on ethanol in the federal House which resulted in several initiatives to encourage the use of alternative fuels.

"It is very disappointing to me personally that the only areas where the alternate fuels have been adopted have been with taxi companies and police vehicles," Mr. Reed writes in reply to Mr. Anderson. And he is right. Unfortunately most of us are stuck with gas driven vehicles. Few of us can afford to dispose of our petro cars to buy vehicles which run on alternative fuels, expect perhaps ethanol which runs smoothly in most cars and trucks anyway.

I'm sure if ethanol was available, many of us would use it. But the big oil companies who have squeezed out most of the independents from most small towns leave us no choice. For instance, in Acton there were once at least eight service stations that served gasoline. The count is now two with two others a mile or two away. None of them offer ethanol, a cleaner and more environmentally friendly fuel.

The nearest service station where ethanol is available is at least 30 kilometres away. Who can afford to fill up when the drive for fuel is that far away? If, as you advocate, go to the dealer next time I purchase a car and tell him or her I want one that burns one of the alternate fuels, I still have to find a place where they sell it.

No one wants to be a slave to the oil companies and the cabals which control the volume and price, but there's little choice now for most drivers. Maybe it's time, as again you advocate, to break the bondage, and move in the direction of alternative fuels.

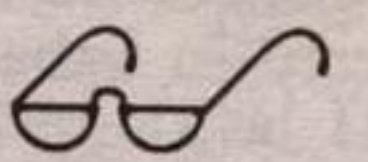
Maybe it is also time the federal government took the initiative to make these alternate fuels available.



HOMETOWN BAND: Putting together their own instruments and band in front of the Station Hotel in 1937 were from left, Jean Brunelle, Charlie Rushmere, Roy Chisholm, Sam Brunelle, George Hollinger and Robert Holmes. The Brunelle brothers were grandchildren of the Station Hotel owner of the time. (photo supplied by Fred Kingshott)



Editor's Notebook



From Lords to Acton knights

Can you connect the olde Hide House with Stratford, Ontario? If you can't, The National Post can.

Keen-eyed Tracey Tyler detected the gem in the middle of a column about Stratford in a July issue of The National Post. Called "Stratford by the Numbers" the column, by Christopher Michael, featured items such as:

"The number of years since Stratford was founded: 167.

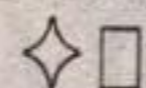
"The population of Stratford in 1998: 29,834.

"The number of art galleries in Stratford: 16

"The cost in collars per tonne, to dump in the city's landfill: 52.50."

Then further down in the middle of the column: "The number of countries from which visitors decided it was worth the drive to Acton to visit the leather shop The Olde Hyde (sic) House: 43."

How this gem nestled in other facts such as "The cheapest available ticket, in dollars, to see a play: 18" or "The most expensive ticket, in dollars: 69" is beyond my ken, as they say in Scotland.



Of course, The National Post is known far and wide as Conrad Black's shake-up of the Toronto newspaper establishment. Mr. Black, in case you're out of touch, has added to his fame as publisher of many newspapers here, in Britain and Israel, by suing Prime Minister Jean Chretien for blocking his way to a British peerage.

Mr. Black is following in the illustrious footsteps of Lord Thomson of Fleet, formerly known as plain Roy Thomson when he owned part of the Acton Machine Shop on Perth Street in Acton in the 1920s. Roy

Thomson got his start in the newspaper business when he sold advertising for The North Bay Nugget, I believe, and went on from there to buy the Timmins Press for \$1 or so during the Great Depression. Eventually he wound up owning The London (England) Times, the epitome of journalistic class in Britain, as well as one heck of a lot of Canadian newspapers.

Since he was the publisher of the most illustrious newspaper in Britain, naturally, it was assumed, he would become a member of the House of Lords. That required quite a bundle of money but the prestige was well worth it. Lots of doors, which formerly might have been closed, opened and this humble ad man rose from the ranks to the peerage.

Conrad Black's career did not carve the same phoenix-like career. He followed in the footsteps of his

father in the newspaper business, buying a small daily in the Eastern townships of Quebec. Using it as a stepping stone he acquired other newspapers and had many other business interests to boot. His business acumen and publishing smarts soon made him a household name. His fortune grew.

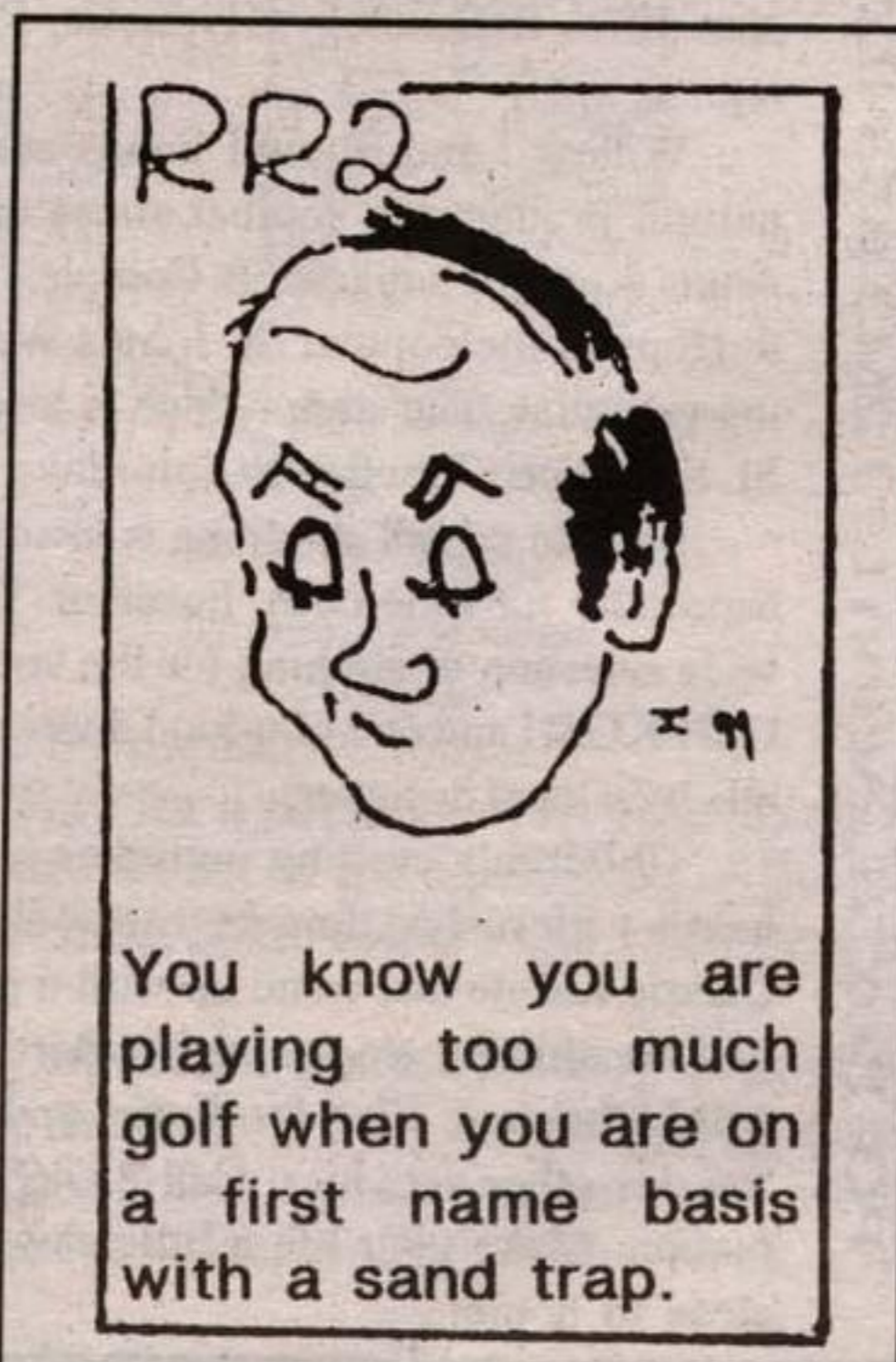
A student of history and admirer of famous military strategists such as Napoleon, Mr. Black also acquired another influential British newspaper, The Telegraph, known for its small "c" conservative views. He became a part time resident of England and married Barbara Amiel, a journalist with strong conservative views. It only followed that he would one day seek a seat in the House of Lords and become Lord Black of Something.

However, Prime Minister Chretien, no lover of titles for Canadians, implemented an 80-year-old Canadian House of Commons resolution called the Nickle Resolution (1919) which called for an end to the practice of granting titular honours to Canadians. Chretien asked the Queen to block Black's peerage, along with 36 others.

Mr. Black, naturally, was reported to be furious. He said Chretien was blocking his appointment because The National Post was no friend of the Prime Minister. Consequently he sued Chretien for \$25,000 claiming "considerable embarrassment and inconvenience."

There haven't been too many Lords in this neck of the woods. The closest we've come as far as this scribbler knows, is the knighthood bestowed on Sir Donald Mann, born and bred in Acton. Mann and his partner William Mackenzie formed

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