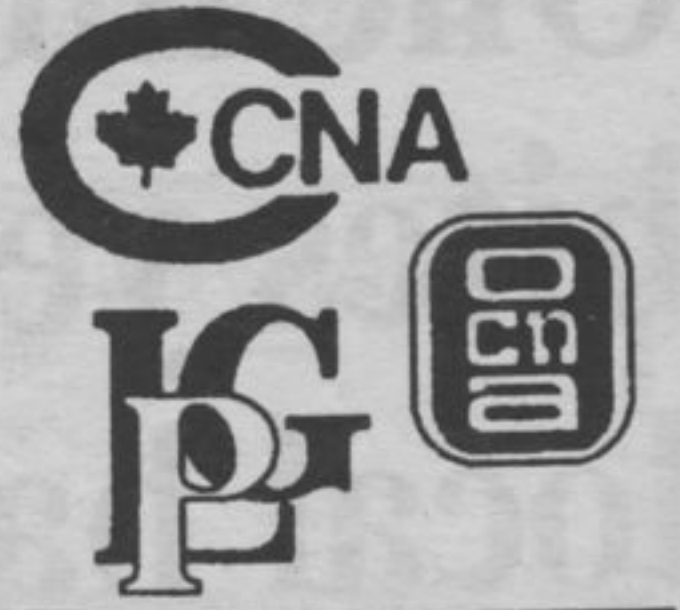


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Television is the great leveller, but it's also a pacifier

For the most part, cable television has allowed people in small towns to be tuned in with the goings on in the outside world, without the disadvantages that go along with urban life.

This is a fairly recent phenomena. I remember living in small town Cape Breton when I was 11, in the days before cable television and satellite dishes. Pretty much all we had was CBC and CTV, and CTV didn't come in very clearly.

Things like the woman's liberation movement, the streaking fad (remember that?), Woodstock, etc., had pretty much passed us by. Even today, people there still speak with basically Scottish accents, and many of the older people can still speak Gaelic, a language most Scots in Scotland can't speak.

But today, television is the great leveller, and young people in Schreiber or Terrace Bay know what the latest fashions are or who the newest pop idol is as soon as anybody in Thunder Bay—or even Toronto—does. Whether or not this is a good thing is debatable, but we are plugged into the world in a way never before possible.

On the positive side, a better informed and therefore more sophisticated population is bound to be more critical of our leaders, and expect them to achieve a higher standard.

Although this has led to an overly cynical view of politicians, in the long run it will make for an improved political process, in which politicians are less inclined to try and bribe voters with their own money at election time, as they have so often in the past.

Instead, voters will have the savvy to recognize hypocritical campaign platforms and slick campaign manoeuvres. This may be an overly optimistic viewpoint, but remember, never before in any society anywhere have leaders been subjected to the scrutiny our politicians receive every day.

However, there are negative aspects of this brave new world, and probably the biggest is the evolution of the so called couch potato. I have spent more nights than I care to admit sitting in front of my TV, mindlessly flicking the channels in an unending search of instant entertainment. TV is so passive, it may breed a passive society—a well informed one, to be sure, but also one that doesn't care if they Prime Minister's a crook, or if someone's starving in Africa. The gulf war last year seemed to me almost like a mini-series, with Saddam Hussein playing the part of the bad guy, and special effects all the more fascinating because they were real.

Our society will have to learn to adjust to the new realities and choices that have been thrust upon us. We have to learn how not to be absorbed by what we have created.



Wear a red nose, Canada

The best political slogan I've read in years was on one of those mobile illustrated billboard things you often see in front of hardware stores and doughnut shops advertising specials. The one I saw was standing in a parking lot in front of a convenience store in the tiny southwestern Ontario town of Acton. The message on the billboard read:

**LIGHTEN UP CANADA!
WEAR A RED NOSE!**

Indeed. I can think of no better doctor's prescription for this sad, confused and sullen country than to have each and every citizen don one of those red clown noses for a day. I'd love to turn on my TV and see Peter Mansbridge and Lloyd Robertson delivering the news from behind red clown noses. I want to see a clown nose on Karen Kain when she dances; on Wayne Gretzky when he scores; on kd lang when she sings and on Kerrin Lee-Gardner the next time she wins the World-Downhill.

I want to see Mulroney and Parizeau go clown-nose to clown-nose over Quebec sovereignty.

And I'd pay big money to turn on 100 Huntley Street and catch David Mainse pontificating piously behind a big red nose.

It is, alas, not going to happen. Canada is a country that takes itself far too solemnly at the best of times.

And these are far from the best of times.

Instead of the marvellous cathartic purging of a coast to coast Wear a Red Nose Movement, we are doomed to be subjected to more yammering from Quebec, more stammering from Ottawa, more hammering from the GST, spruce budworm, chlorofluorocarbons, Preston Manning speeches and probably, the way our luck is running, a nation-wide epidemic of Jock Itch.

And those of us who like to think we still possess a grain or two of sanity? What can we do to protect our meagre, dwindling cache of brain cells?

Go fishing, Canada. Get drunk. Make love. Go bowling. Buy yourself a sexy tank top. Dust off

your guitar and write a love song. Tell your boss a joke.

But mostly . . . lighten up a little, anyway you can.

I already know what I'm going to do. I'm going to sit down and wait for my next edition of *Prosebust*.

Prosebust is a quarterly newsletter put out by B&B Editorial Consulting Limited. As a general rule, editorial consultants aren't known for their

levity and wit, but they must be a rather special crew at B&B. Get a load of *Prosebust's* front page "modest proposals for constitutional solutions."

. . . Quebec shall have the right to leave Confederation as soon as it finds a suitable person to sublet to. Quebec will still have to come around once in a while to pick up its mail.

. . . After Quebec leaves, the remaining provinces shall have a year to sleep around before they have to commit to any new relationships.

. . . The House of Commons shall be moved to Winnipeg and all deliberations shall take place in the winter at the corner of Portage and Main. This will speed up legislation tremendously.

To cut translation costs, all government communications to the public shall be reduced to one of two statements:

- 1) give us money
- 2) stop doing that

The *Prosebust* newsletter is only four pages long and it comes out of Ottawa. It's like a zephyr of fresh air in that boundless ocean of hot gas about constitutional reform, sovereignty referenda, senatorial asymmetry and all those other "issues" Canadians have come to loathe.

That's the good news. The bad news is that it's a quarterly. There won't be another edition for about three months. I'm already waiting. That's me sitting on the Post Office steps.

Wearing a red nose.



Arthur Black

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