

Disenchantment with politicians has made us cynical

I saw my first prime minister when I was about ten-years old. It was a cool fall day and all the school children in the town were paraded to the CN station to catch a glimpse of Prime Minister John Diefenbaker.

I was so excited the night before the visit I couldn't sleep. On my list of exciting events, it fell somewhere between Christmas and the fish pond at the fall fair.

Our teachers had given the event a respectable amount of hype in the days leading up to the visit, making us recite the oath of allegiance over and over. For two weeks before the visit, we had to practise singing the national anthem every day in music class.

One of the cuter, younger students was selected to present a gift to the P.M. And each of us tried to outdo the other with newspaper clippings in our scrapbook entitled "The Prime Minister of Canada".

When the big day finally arrived I was ready. My clothes were laid out the night before: navy blue knee socks, my good black patent shoes (usually reserved for church), blackwatch kilt and white blouse and my navy wool cape with a hood. My sister wore her Girl Guide uniform.

I slept with rollers in my hair the night before. I was ready.

In the morning we were all paraded to the train station to await the arrival of the prime minister. We heard the train whistle from a distance about an hour later. There was pandemonium as teachers scurried about madly ordering the hundreds of us into military formation.

Being tall for my age, I was assigned to the back of the line, where I stood for the longest time on tiptoes so I wouldn't miss anything. A moment later, it was all over. The train had slowed long enough for us to catch a glimpse of the prime minister's white hair, then it chugged along to the next stop. But it was enough to keep us talking the rest of the afternoon.

I looked for school children in Magog last week when Prime Minister Brian Mulroney was here. Sadly, there weren't any. Prime ministers don't seem to be big drawing cards anymore.

Somehow in our angst over the GST and free trade, and our disillusionment with the state of the country, we've deprived our children of an opportunity to hold the people who lead the greatest country in the world in any kind of esteem.

Neither the office nor those who hold it command public respect. Our all-encompassing disenchantment with politicians has made us cynical. And that cynicism has transmitted a message to our young people that there is little good about our system of government, nor those who run it.

Maybe the prime minister was right last week when he said we should not let our quest for perfection become the enemy of the good.

SHARON McCULLY

Poor Glen Kealey

From a letter to the Vancouver Sun from Brenda Wahlen of suburban Coquitlam:

A week after potentially explosive criminal charges were laid against 16 members of the Conservative government and the RCMP, Glen Kealey exclaimed: "This is Canada's Watergate!" But time has proved Kealey wrong.

The Canadian media have yet to follow up on what could be the biggest scandal in Canadian history while Kealey has been described as "eccentric" and "paranoid" by reporters. The poor man just couldn't get through to the "fifth estate" that Canadians believe him and are fed up with the wall of silence that surrounds those who govern.

What matters is giving a damn

Reporter Kelly Langevin, writing in the Manitoba weekly Stonewall Argus-Teulon Times:

I was one of a handful of men who attended a vigil on the grounds of the legislature for Sarah Mae Phillips last week. Phillips was the Lundar, Man., woman who was fatally assaulted by her husband.

Although I was covering the event as a reporter, it was an uncomfortable feeling to be a man among the majority of women attending the vigil, many of whom have experienced the horror of sexual or physical abuse.

For some strange reason, I felt guilty. I have never physically abused a woman, nor have I ever had the urge to do so, even in the heat of anger.

(But by the end of the vigil) I no longer felt uncomfortable, I no longer felt guilty. I did not feel like a man, but a person. A person who cared about what happened to a woman I didn't even know.

I realized it doesn't matter what you are, man or woman... What does matter is giving a damn, speaking out, trying to stop the violence.

Perhaps I could change some attitudes, I thought. Maybe not every man's, but I could start with my own.

— From "What Canada Thinks", a regular feature of The Canadian Press.

Why won't Massawippi landowners talk trail?

Today anyone can walk on the existing rail bed along the eastern shore of Lake Massawippi. The public has done so for generations. People are continuing to enjoy the quiet beauty of the lake and the warm, intimate contact with its natural shoreline.

However, public access could soon be stopped cold if the sale of this corridor by Canadian Pacific to private interests is concluded in the coming months. Is this right?

"How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land?" asked Chief Seattle over 100 years ago.

The same poignant question still echoes as private landowners attempt to acquire large sections of the beautiful and natural Massawippi Railroad corridor.

MANY QUESTIONS

The future of the abandoned railroad line raises many questions. Should the land be kept intact and conserved as a public resource or should it be turned over

to private developers? Will private ownership lead inevitably to greater stress on this delicate environment? If bulldozers disturb the railbed, will harmful pollutants in the ballast, such as asbestos tailings, be released into the water?

Commentary

By Tom Vandermeulen

There's an old saying that locks and fences only keep out honest people. By moving to deny public access to some of the most breathtaking scenery in the region, are lakeside cottage owners unwittingly encouraging more trespassing and vandalism in the future?

There are many long stretches of the corridor where the rail bed could easily be integrated into a magnificent linear park using

sare, scenic, carefully planned detours around the more densely developed areas.

WHY NO COMPROMISE?

Why hasn't the Massawippi landowners association accepted the invitation of park supporters to sit down and work out a compromise solution along these lines? Are a few real estate developers and landholders using the association to acquire control of even larger pieces of the shoreline? What do they intend to do with the sizeable sections of the corridor where the rail bed is well insulated from summer cottages by woodland, rock cliffs and wetlands?

While Canadian Pacific and the leading private landowners secretly attempt to strike a deal, the public is left with a sense of being "ripped off".

Why must this natural heritage cease to be publicly accessible? What is preventing the Quebec government from reinstating its pre-1985 policy of publicly acquiring all abandoned railroads in

the province?

PUBLIC FUNDS

After Confederation the Canadian government used enormous public funds to finance the Canadian Pacific Railway. The Canadian government gave privately-owned Canadian Pacific a direct subsidy of \$25 million in cash, 25 million acres of suitable land along the transcontinental rail line, land for roadbeds and stations, \$37.8 million worth of existing rail lines, significant concessions on taxation of land and capital stock, and no duties on the massive quantities of materials imported for construction. The government also gave CPR a free hand at setting freight rates.

In those years government generosity with the railways was so great that it placed a heavy burden on the resources of the federal government. Three-quarters of all federal debt at this time was incurred through support of railways.

While the federal debt grew, the wealth and power of Canadian Pacific Railway also grew. CPR formed its own land company and made millions, later billions, with land originally given to it by the Canadian government.

PRIVILEGED

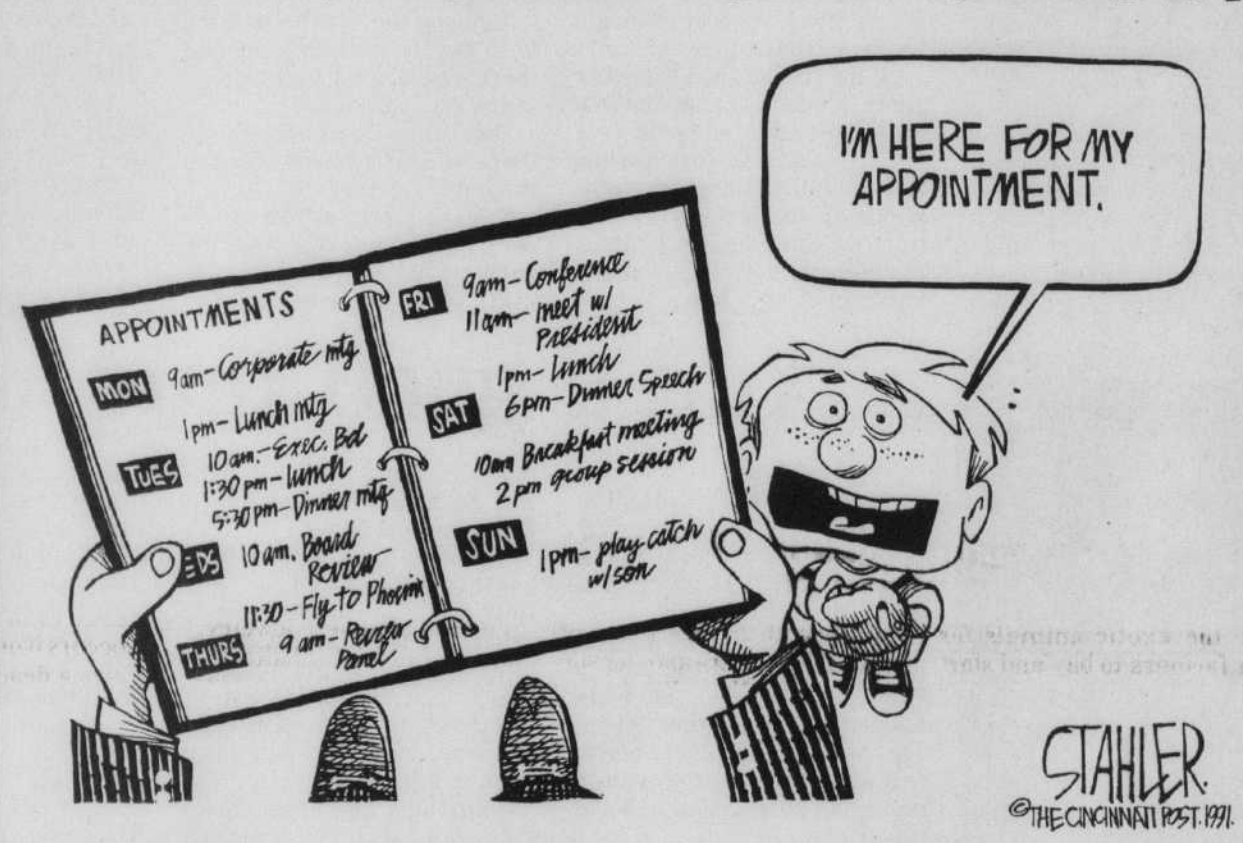
G. Meyers, in *History of Canadian Wealth*, rhetorically asks of the Canadian Pacific charter, "When had any company, except the Hudson's Bay Company, been invested with such extraordinary privileges and powers, immunities and rights?"

History shows that the Canadian public has given far more to Canadian Pacific than it has received in return. Now Canadian Pacific wants to sell a railroad corridor for millions of dollars.

Ironically, if the railroad property falls into the hands of private land developers and the privileged few, the public will have to endure one final indignity — it will lose its longstanding right to walk in peace along a rail corridor that it has paid for many times over.

Tom Vandermeulen is an executive member of Sentier Massawippi, a lobby group seeking the creation of a linear park between Lennoxville and Beebe.

NEWS ITEMS: FATHERS ARE TAKING A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN FAMILY LIFE



Violence toward minorities increasing in U.S.

By William Welch

WASHINGTON (AP) — The racial and ethnic makeup of the United States is diversifying — and so is hatred.

Reports of incidents of hate-inspired violence are up in many U.S. areas. And while increased reporting and sensitivity by police may account for much of the increase, experts say racial tensions are being heightened by cultural clashes among the changing minorities.

"The rapid increase of a minority population in an area almost invariably leads to conflict," says Howard Ehrlich of the National Institute Against Prejudice and Violence.

"A good deal of what is going on is genuine culture conflict, which then calls out the sort of underlying prejudice and racism that exists in society as a whole."

The majority of hate-inspired crimes, ranging from murders to vandalism, remain acts by whites against blacks, homosexuals or Jews.

Yet experts say the targets of hate are broadening, and in some cases so are the perpetrators.

JOB STRUGGLE

"We're seeing more and more of it," said Danny Welch, who monitors hate-inspired violence for the Southern Poverty Law Centre in Montgomery, Ala.

"Ten years ago you saw classic black-and-white issues," said Welch. "Now days... people are struggling for the same jobs — blacks, whites, Asians, Hispanics. It can create problems."

The 1990 U.S. census documented a dramatically changing racial mix in American society, with big increases in Hispanic and Asian-American populations and a relative decline in the majority white population.

Much of the increase is due to immigration, resulting in a doubling of the Asian-American population to three per cent, and a more than 50 per cent increase in

Hispanics, who now make up nine per cent of the population.

Blacks now make up just under half of the U.S. minority population. And if current trends continue, Hispanics will surpass blacks as the largest minority group within 20 years.

ON THE STREETS

More than statistics, those changes are showing up on inner-city streets, in suburbs and in towns around the country. Burgeoning minority groups are confronting resentment and racism. Bigotry is up, civility down, it seems.

"As diversity grows, hate crime statistics rise, and dealing with tensions caused by competition for jobs and housing, exacerbated by language barriers and cultural misunderstandings, becomes increasingly complicated," Lynn Duvall, researcher and writer with Klanwatch, writes in a coming issue of the group's monthly Intelligence Report.

Attacks on Asian-Americans may reflect envy and resentment of the economic success of Asia and the attention given to achievements by Asian-Americans. Tensions between blacks and Asian-American businessmen, such as Korean grocery store operators in black neighborhoods, have been seen in New York, Los Angeles and elsewhere.

Whites and others commonly fail or refuse to distinguish the varied groups of Asian ancestry. Klanwatch cites a case in Glendale, Calif., where a Korean Presbyterian church was spray-painted with derogatory remarks including "Go back to Japan."

FIRST CONVICTION

In Raleigh, N.C., a white man, Robert Piche, was convicted of second-degree murder in the death of Jim Loo, after Loo and friends were harassed in a pool hall. A brother, Lloyd Ray Piche, was convicted in federal court Ju-

ly 15 of conspiring to violate Loo's civil rights, marking the first federal civil rights conviction involving violence against Asian-Americans, according to the Organization of Chinese Americans.

"We are one of the fastest growing populations," said Daphne Kwok, spokeswoman for the organization, referring to Asian-Americans. "We are very visible. We stand out. It's very easy for us to be targeted."

In Washington, D.C., Hispanic frustration and resentment of the city's black power structure boiled over into riots last spring. Black-Hispanic tensions have been visible in other cities as well.

Eugene Mornell, executive director of the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission, says black-Latino conflict and Latin-Asian conflict are increasing in Los Angeles. Violence against Arab-Americans and Muslims surged during the Gulf War, he said.

"Historically, most of the perpetrators either arrested by the police or described by police have been young white males," Mornell said. Now, he said, they are "coming from virtually every group."

ATTACKS ON GAYS

Hate crimes often are not reported to police or not recognized as motivated by race or other hatred. Homosexuals who have kept their sexual preference a secret, for instance, may not choose to report an assault.

Attacks and intimidation on gays and lesbians have surged dramatically, however, according to counts compiled by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Some of that may be due to increased recognition of the problem by police, including the FBI.

"We remember not too long ago when the FBI put gays under surveillance," said Robert Bray, spokesman for the gay and lesbian task force. "Now we've been invited in the front door."

While hatred-inspired violence seems to be on the rise, so far there is no conclusive data to prove there is an actual increase or simply that they are being more widely reported, said Jack McDevitt, who studies the crimes as associate director of the Centre for Applied Social Research at Northeastern University in Boston.

This year the FBI began compiling voluntary reports from states and cities and is training local authorities in reporting under them. A law passed by Congress last year requires the FBI to compile hate crime statistics, but the first ones won't be ready until next year.

SUGGEST CAUSES

What inspires the hatred that leads to violence?

McDevitt points to economics, demographics and basic misunderstandings born of stereotypes and resentment.

As part of his studies, McDevitt has talked to haters, including members of violence-prone skinhead groups. He said some held startling misconceptions, including the notion that Asian immigrants were given a free car by the government when they arrived in the United States.

Most violence between races takes place not in all-black or affluent white communities, but in "zones of transition," he said. They are areas where the races live or work together, and where one group or both feels economically threatened.

"That's where we saw these things happening," he said, "where honestly people do feel their piece of the economic pie may be denied them."

But some say the problem goes beyond economic pressure to reveal deeper social problems.

"We think that the hate crime itself is just a tip of the iceberg," said Mornell. "It reflects a much larger increase in prejudice and hostility."