

## Now it's the silly season

From the middle of August until mid-September has been called 'the silly season'. Nobody quite knows why. The word 'silly' did not originally mean "foolish"; it meant 'care-free', something like the Scottish 'saucy' (French 'sans souci'). 'Silly season' may have been coined in a 19th Century newspaper office. While Parliament was in recess, the courts were not sitting and people who otherwise make news were out of town and out of reach, the papers were reduced to publishing the inconsequential.

Country folk were busy with the early harvest and the fall fairs with their events and out-of-town visitors had not yet begun.

The business of getting news involves getting to people. If they were all either on holiday or busy in the fields, journalists had little of interest to report. Columnists, of course, always have something to blather (more correctly, blather) about.

'Fiddleville' being past and our affairs still to come, one expects local news may be scarce for awhile. Don't be surprised if, when you disentangle one of your local papers from its elastic-bound cocoon of tangled flyers, it may be difficult to find much else. The clutter of a dozen or more loose advertisements in a newspaper is annoying to this reader, as are graffiti on walls and the junk mail delivered by Canada Post.

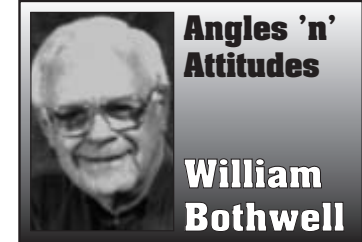
A slow news week brings an old New Yorker magazine cartoon to mind. It concerned The New York Times in its heyday when it was famous for the multiple sections of its Sunday edition being even weightier than its editorial opinions. In the cartoon a woman is sitting lap deep in newsprint, her legs lost in the paper lying discarded around them. Her husband, coffee in hand, asks, "Is there anything in The Times today?". Anything of interest in all those pages?

Another cartoon showed two newspapers with large respective headlines of MURDER and HUGE EXPLOSION. A dignified matron, parasol in hand, looks at them and says to the vendor, "I think I'll take the murder today".

The Toronto Star made a recent effort to increase its circulation in this county. Apart from the fact that its local 'home delivery'

amounts to a paper being tossed from a slowly moving vehicle onto a sidewalk, who needs a daily record of the mortal shots exchanged by gangs of immigrant youths in Metro? Didn't many of us leave the city to get away from all that?

In the silly season, or at any other time, I cannot imagine being without a good newspaper. I do have an aversion to tabloids, perhaps because of their association with a kind of journalism I find unsatisfying. Take The Sun, for example. In my estimation it cre-



**Angles 'n' Attitudes**

**William Bothwell**

ates a year-round silly season. Its reportage and opinion pieces do not credit to

its readers' I.Q. The good news is that its readership is declining. That may indicate a better educated, more discriminating reading public.

This space would be happy if the traditional broadsheet, such as you are now reading, were reduced to 'Berliner' size. It is a 'midi' format about one-third taller and one column wider than a tabloid.

In the U.K. The Guardian (daily) and The Observer (weekly) now publish in that format. So does Le Monde in Paris. Only two papers in North America have thus far followed suit, neither of them in Canada.

Page size, of course, does not in itself make a newspaper more readable but, whatever the current problems of publishers, I can't envisage a society of informed adults without the print media. Who with normal eyesight would abandon the satisfaction of holding and reading a book for words recorded on a disc?

Similarly, there is no substitute for the pleasure of a newspaper hand-held or spread before one on a table top. That will be unchanged a century hence in 2109. Just wait and see.

Most of us have experienced the eye strain involved in sitting in front of a computer screen too many hours a day. Who, then, will ever wish in off hours to read

extensive news coverage or opinion pieces on-line? If so, they would be wise to see their optometrist as often as their dental hygienist.

There will be fewer newspapers as communities grow and the world contracts. Already newspaper and magazine journalism are melding but the print media will keep pace with developments in film and on-line. I like the name of the new magazine-sized Toronto afternoon give-away for commuters that is coming in September. It will be called 't.o.night'. Great title! But it will need more than a re-hash of the morning's news.

Max Aitken, Lord Beaverbrook, the Canadian-born Fleet Street press baron, once said in Britain that a successful paper needed both a distinctive point of view (he called it a 'prejudice') and a broad outlook. In other words, it should entice or jar the reader out of narrow provincialism or unconcern. Every Canadian English language paper should have a French language editorial, perhaps reprinted from Le Devoir or Le Monde.

Mandarin Chinese, Arabic or Hindi may still be spoken by many Canadians but they are not native to this land. They will die out but French and English will remain. We may be multicultural but we must not be multilingual. That, like allowing dual citizenship, is divisive.

"All the news that's fit to print" is the New York Times mission statement. Better still, the Globe and Mail's motto used to be "Perspective is everything". Maybe now that my old colleague Reginald Stackhouse's son John is its editor-in-chief The Globe will regain a wider perspective and even, like the National Post, celebrate Christmas with something more than annual front page reproductions of Ken Thomson's Krieghoff winter scenes.

Independent newspapers, like this one not tied to a metropolitan chain, through their editorials, op-ed columns and letters keep us talking to one another as neighbours. They help emancipate people who live in bedroom communities from the isolation that daily commuting can impose. They deliver us from bondage to the mindset of Metro Toronto from which most of us are glad to be free.

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## NDP is what it has always been - fringe

Communications executive Paul Sweeney once quipped that "self-delusion is pulling in your stomach when you step on the scales." Which brings us, of course, to NDP Leader Jack Layton's absurd bravado at his wrap-up speech at the party's weekend convention in Halifax. Layton wants Canadians to buy his argument that the NDP is not only new and improved, but is ready to accept the role as a "centrist alternative" to the Conservatives and the Liberals.

Oh please, Jack. The NDP is what it has always been - a fringe player on the federal scene; a party which garners enough votes, at its very best, to hold the balance of power position in minority governments. But even that role has been tough to come by since the party continues to be outgunned for third place by the Quebec-only Bloc Quebecois.

And whatever chance Layton himself may have had to bring the party's fortunes to a higher tier, he blew that after the last election when he lusted so much for power that he was more than willing to join the Liberals and the Bloc in a coalition which would have given him a cabinet position and afforded the separatists a virtual veto over the government. (Mind you, Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff is equally guilty in endorsing that horrid idea. He just wasn't as obvious about it as Layton was.)

The NDP have had some strong leaders in years past - David Lewis and Ed Broadbent come to mind - but even then, they had no chance, none at all, of coming close to forming a government.

During one stage of the Mulroney era, the Broadbent-led NDP actually ran ahead of its rivals briefly in public opinion polls, a blip which prompted Maclean's magazine - to its everlasting chagrin - to run a cover picture of Broadbent suggesting he could be Canada's next prime minister. He didn't make it.

It's not likely that many Canadians even noticed that the NDP was holding forth in Halifax last weekend.

But it is instructive - and completely typical - that the one resolution which prompted at least a smattering of public interest, i.e. a proposal for the NDP to drop the "New" from its name - never did make it to the floor for discussion because, well, the windy delegates simply ran out of time.

If there's one thing that a socialist can do better than anyone else, it's natter on for hours over the most obscure point. So it's hardly a surprise that, since some of the delegates didn't even want the issue raised, they just talked and talked and talked until the bell rung.

Not that changing the name would have helped them anyway. It's there ideas which don't appeal. Not their name.

At the end of the convention, Layton told journalists that the NDP represents "new thinking versus old and a government that's on your side," saying "there is no other party offering that hope."

What's he talking about, you ask? Who knows. The NDP hasn't had a new idea since its founding convention in 1961 which is worth talking about, and there's precious little evidence that anything new came out of the Halifax gabfest. Layton says the party's plan to bridge the gap between the environment and the economy is new and exciting. No it's not. It's the same old, same old.

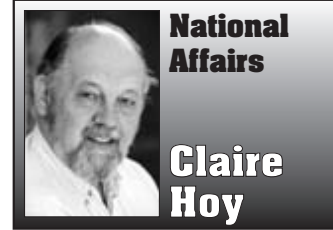
And, according to news dispatches, the convention spent most of the weekend railing against the banks and Bay Street. This is new? And improved? Layton argued that Canadians should remember that "this recession was triggered by a carnival of greed among bankers and speculators and mortgage companies."

Actually, the only reason those suspects were able to operate the way they did was because of the "carnival of greed" among the general public, particularly from people who were so desperate to live beyond their means that they bought into the cheap and easy credit. Whatever the bankers offered, if there were no takers, then we wouldn't be in this mess.

In the U.S., actually, the recession began with the collapse in the housing market, and that collapse was triggered - more than anything else - by government-mandated rules demanding that mortgages be approved to people based not on their ability to pay but on their membership in certain designated groups.

That's what happens when government runs the economy, which is why the NDP will never, ever, get the chance.

The guys we have are bad enough. The NDP would be unthinkable.



**National Affairs**

**Claire Hoy**

## Imaginative Urban Planning

One evening recently 'The Agenda' focused on the pros and cons of Toronto as a world class city. The participants, two former Toronto mayors, an ex-mayor of Winnipeg and a current Toronto councillor presented analyses of Canada's biggest city. From my perspective one of the most significant characteristics, important for major cities, was inadequately addressed in the debate, i.e. imagination.

A prime function of any city is being a business/commercial centre. From a social perspective this translates into employment, impacted upon by access to work and subsequent escape to more livable conditions. A current news item has been the controversy over remodeling Jarvis Street, a major access route to downtown. Jarvis is a continuation of a pleasant drive down Mt. Pleasant, turning into a 5 lane route south of Bloor St. (3 rushing lane lanes south in the morning changing to 3 northbound in the evening) Any narrowing of the road to facilitate bicycles or pedestrian traffic would result in cries of anguish from car drivers all the way to or from Loretto. "We need to widen Jarvis, not narrow it".

One imaginative solution we encountered was in Bangkok where additional express highways were built above major access routes in the city, i.e. building up rather than disrupting the major ground level traffic. Torontonians are not unused to traffic disruption i.e. subway construction, roads under repair. Jarvis could also be built down, creating much needed below ground parking space.

Toronto has several major commuter access routes into or

out of the city including the Gardiner, 401, Avenue Road and the Don Valley Parkway.

A great city however has to place emphasis not only on the industrial sector but by creating a balance between people and cars. My daughter and her husband have recently returned from a project in one of Poland's major cities. One of many alterations they experienced was addition of raised dining areas at the side of major roads beside eating facilities to create a 'restaurant mall'. I am impressed with Sparks St. in Ottawa which is wide open to pedestrian use only a block from the parliament buildings. This concept has been discussed many times for Yonge St. in Toronto but it takes a great deal of political courage to make major changes to traffic patterns or commercial areas.

I was intrigued by 'Curitiba' a city in Brazil written up in 'Natural Capitalism' (Hawkins, Lovins and Lovins 1999) of which I have written before. A very brave mayor took it upon himself to change the city. All municipal employees were ordered back to work on Friday evening to convert major roads to pedestrian walkways over the weekend. In a project initially opposed by the business managers, he rejuvenated a commercial society by enhancing the use of the downtown core.

Toronto is fortunate to have saved considerable space for people enjoyment purposes. Recreational land is of utmost importance in making a city livable. Thousands enjoy weekends, evenings, etc in High Park or the Don Valley from Lawrence Ave. down to the Science Centre and especially Edwards Garden. Even Queens Park is a delightful



**From the Global Classroom**

**Doug Skeates**

'oasis' in the city. Toronto Islands and Ontario Place provide relief for young families in the heat of the summer.

The real trick in creating a world class city is to find a balance between working and living. Cities such as Bangkok have been able to make even the business section accessible to people. Major roads incorporate pedestrian overpasses at important intersections. An intriguing aspect of downtown Toronto has been the underground commercial district. Road level walking is great for those who enjoy window shopping in the summer but it is a real experience for residents in apartments adjacent to the subway system to be able to reach their offices complete with lunch time breaks walking the stores from Front St. to Bloor St. without ever having to experience a typical blustery Canadian winter.

Toronto has come a long, long way towards greatness but there remains room for improvement. I don't think we have yet achieved world class status but there is much to show that Toronto is well on the way to becoming one of the world's great cities.

## Your Weekly Chuckle . . .

By KEITH HUNTER

"Have you read any mysteries lately?"

"I'm reading one now."

"What's it called?"

"My math book."

## Dipping Into the Past

### Brothers located horse thief but failed in bid to return him to justice

experience.

• Governor Bowles, of the Orangeville gaol, accompanied the Orangeville Citizens' Band on an excursion to Hamilton last week.

While there, Mr. Bowles visited the Asylum for the Insane for the purpose of seeing George Stewart, the author of the terrible Spanawood tragedy. Stewart is closely guarded and the Governor had to obtain an order from the medical superintendent before he was permitted to see him. Stewart recognized the Governor and conversed with him quite freely. Governor Bowles also saw Mrs. Johnston, of Mulmur and her daugh-



ter Ada, who were taken to the asylum from the Orangeville gaol a couple of months ago. Ada is acting as a dining-room girl and so far has given the attendants very little trouble. Her mother, on the other hand, has proved one of the most troublesome inmates they have had to deal with for years.

• A decision of importance to municipalities was handed out by the Court of Appeal at Toronto. In effect, it holds that no traction engine can go on a bridge without laying plank and if one does so, any damage will be chargeable to the engine's owner. In the case in question, the Goodison Thresher Co. brought an action

against the Township of McNabb for damage to an engine, which was under eight tons in weight, by the collapse of a bridge. No plank was laid but the plaintiff contended this was unnecessary. The court held, however, that without laying plank such an engine has no right on a bridge and must suffer the consequences.

### 75 YEARS AGO

Wednesday, August 23, 1934

• In Magistrate Hugh Faulkner's court yesterday, Tom Harshaw pleaded guilty to keeping liquor for sale. Police Chief Albert McNeil raided the Harshaw home on Friday last and found eight cases of beer and a quantity of whisky. The Magistrate sentenced him to two months in jail.

• If plans presented to Ontario's Minister of Highways are adopted the province's highways will no longer be designated as "the Kings Highways." Instead, the historic designations of the main thoroughfares would be revived. For example, Highway 2 between London and

Walkerville will be known as Tecumseh Road in honour of the great Indian chieftain who fought his last battles along the line it follows.

### 50 YEARS AGO

Wednesday, August 19, 1959

• A public meeting of ratepayers from six Dufferin municipalities Monday night resulted in the unanimous passage of a resolution asking Dufferin County Council to decide on the site for the proposed county Home for the Aged.

### 25 YEARS AGO

Wednesday, August 22, 1984

• Although it is behind schedule, Orangeville's expanded sewage treatment plant should be in operation sometime in October, says engineer Bob Willcox.

• Perrin Beatty, MP for Wellington-Dufferin-Simcoe, says policies of the present Liberal government "have destroyed the dreams and ambitions of a whole generation of young Canadians."