

"We Canadians are uniquely sandwiched between two militaristic, aggressive, and paranoid superpowers . . ."

# Hurtig tired of strong U.S. presence

by Alex Shetsen

Mel Hurtig, Chairman of the Council of Canadians and publisher of the Canadian Encyclopedia, has a very clear image of what Canada's role in world affairs should be. He also feels the current Conservative government's policies do nothing to fulfill that role.

Therefore, the Council of Canadians and other concerned groups have organized a public inquiry into Canadian defense and external affairs policy, to be held this weekend at the U of A Butte dome.

The enquiry, entitled "The True North Strong and Free?" will investigate Canada's relations with the super powers, its defense policy, its international standing as a peaceful and more or less neutral state, and other related issues. It will involve leading politicians, the military, journalists, and scientists.

The audience will participate in the dialogue. At the end of the two day session, the audience will be asked to vote on resolutions about Canada's foreign policy. The resolutions will arise from the proceedings.

The enquiry has been organized, says Hurtig, because "a number of us were very concerned about Canada's involvement in the escalating nuclear arms race."

"We Canadians are uniquely sandwiched between two militaristic, aggressive, and paranoid super powers," he says. "It's in our best interests to make sure that they don't go to war with each other, either intentionally or accidentally."

The SDI program is "just a quan-

more massive spending, more and more military buildings, and greater chances of nuclear holocaust."

Hurtig believes Canada should be much more active in UN peace-keeping efforts, and much more aggressive in trying to get together with other middle powers to de-

escalate super power tensions.

Unfortunately, Canada's world image enjoys the prestige and sta-

tus it did during the Pearson years. "Far too often we are regarded as a military and economic appendage of the United States," he says.

Trudeau's peace initiative of 1983, says Hurtig, was an important development. But it did not accomplish anything of lasting significance.

It did help Canada's world image, which Hurtig claims "had already been sliding by that time."

"There is now evidence that we agreed to test cruise missiles because the Americans threatened to impose sanctions on our lumber exports unless we cooperated."

It is precisely this attitude of the USA towards Canada that appals Hurtig.

"The Americans have been treating us as if we were their worst enemies rather than their best friends," Hurtig says.

He feels that it is the States, not Canada, that has real control of Canada's north. With SDI, that control will only increase.

"Even today," he says, "if Canadian planes need to land at DEW line bases in an emergency, they have to ask permission for landing from the Americans controlling these bases."

By the mid-fifties, Hurtig claims, Canada had emerged from a col-

ony into a respected middle power. But the current domination of Canadian policies by the USA is nothing less than a threat to our sovereignty.

"Very soon, people will be saying, look, if all the important decisions are being made in Washington, why don't we send two Senators down there, and maybe some Representatives? And that will be the end of the Canadian dream."

Despite Hurtig's strong views on Canada's relations internationally, he stresses that the conference will be as objective as possible.

"We have invited both the doves and the hawks, members of the government and the opposition, the military and the scientists," he says. The conference will discuss the feasibility of various policies; people attending will have the final say by voting on what should be done.

"We are doing, right here in Edmonton, something totally unique," he says. "The conference will be the focus of international attention on "a fascinating experiment in participatory democracy."

"It could be an important milestone in changing how public policy is determined in the future."

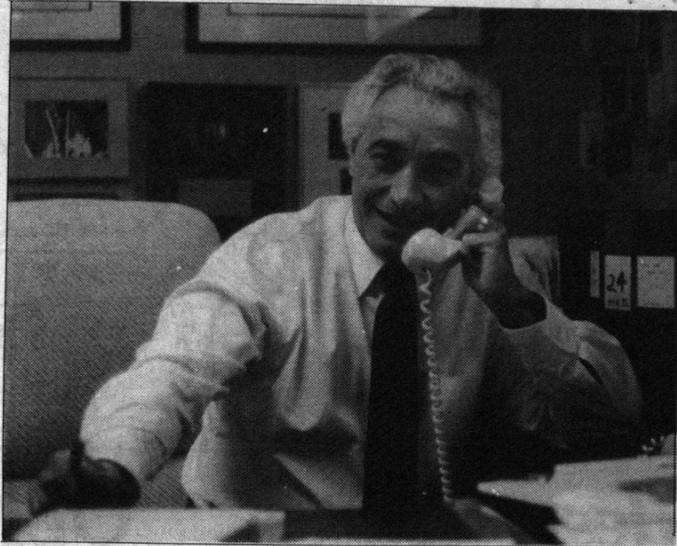


photo by Alex Shetsen

Edmonton publisher Mel Hurtig

tum leap forward in the nuclear arms race," according to Hurtig. "We have, every day, more and

more and more military buildings, and greater chances of nuclear holocaust."

## The forum: citizens will have a chance to question the pros

by Suzette Chan  
Canadian University Press

The interest in this weekend's "True North Strong and Free?" forum at the Universiade Pavilion comes from all across Canada, but mainly Albertans are signing up to participate.

Lois Hammond, one of the organizers of this "Public Inquiry into Canadian Defence Policy and Nuclear Arms", is not surprised that citizens of such a politically conservative province are concerned about foreign policy.

"People who are concerned about peace do not fit any stereotype," she said. "We are attracting a broad spectrum of people, of all political persuasions, of all occupations, of all ages."

Edmontonians are noted for staying at home in droves during demonstrations against the arms race. The peace and disarmament club at the University of Alberta has a reported membership this year of four.

But Hammond said citizens have awoken to the issues after dramatic

world events.

"It isn't that there is an upswing of left-wing politics per se, but the climate has changed, especially in light of recent events like Chernobyl, the space shuttle, and the crashes of the cruise missile," she said.

Hammond believes these events have led people to question their faith in technology, and to look to outlets for nuclear anxiety.

"People are saying, 'This is something I can put my faith in,'" she said. The enquiry will allow people to contribute to an organized, democratically-structured message to the Canadian government, she said.

Each invited speaker will talk for 15 minutes on an issue related to the defence question, and then will receive questions from a conference panel, and from the audience.

What makes this conference different from what Hammond calls "academic conferences" is that the public has an easy access and a definite voice.

Registrants will not only be able to question such illustrious guests

as author and broadcaster Gwynne Dyer, David Suzuki, Canadian Labour Congress president Shirley Carr and Robert Penner of the Canadian Peace Alliance; they will also be allowed to vote on resolutions that will be forwarded to the government and media.

Hammond said *True North* is modelled after a grassroots enquiry at Nanoose Bay, B.C., examining presence of the U.S. military there. One of the participants at Nanoose Bay was Mel Hurtig, an Edmonton publisher and founder of the Council of Canadians, who brought the idea back to Edmonton.

"Particularly with this issue, one of the things that can happen is that people get upset with the problem and don't know how to do something about it," said Hammond.

Post-conference packages will be sent to schools and concerned groups for further discussion and action.

But with the emphasis on action, conference organizers have decided to give priority to those on the waiting list who are of voting age.

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