

Advocate denies title

by Don Truckey



Elmer McKay, MF

Elmer McKay is not the combination public crusader/citizens' advocate many people in Canada today seem to think he is — and McKay himself is the first to maintain he'll continue to spurn such an image.

After exposing the "Sky Shops affair" the conflict of interest case which thoroughly embarrassed the Liberal government last year, McKay has become a mouthpiece for further allegations of abuse of the public trust, both through his own Progressive Conservative party and citizens at large.

But McKay, when asked how he feels about the crusading role thrust upon him, goes through a backwoods Nova Scotia shuffle and shrug, and simply replies: "Inadequate."

If pressed, he will admit he's afraid of being vaulted into the position of making statements without having the background to support them.

"It's a matter of credibility," he says. One groundless allegation and he knows the career of oracle Elmer McKay will be over.

It seems such a turn of events would not bother McKay, because, he says, he has never welcomed the "hatchetman" label. He was just the guy "who happened to test the wind and found it foul."

For a man with such a self-effacing opinion of himself and his work, McKay's record is not at all bad.

Speaking to an audience of 200 at a Tuesday SUB Theatre forum sponsored by the Faculties of Law and Engineering, McKay rambled through tales of woe and

mistrust in cases he's been involved with — including the Sky Shops affair, the Hamilton harbor dredging contract scandal, misallocation of funds within the Atomic Energy Commission, and illegal sale of information from Statistics Canada.

The common line — or lie — running through all these cases, McKay says, is a disrespect from the people involved for the "public morality" that comes part and parcel with their offices. Public servants often "trade on their knowledge" or retire early, he said. Profit from divulgence or application of information they have had access to, in their public offices.

Or public servants dispense funds "with an impunity unheard of in the ranks of elected Members of Parliament." The Atomic Energy Commission has a few million dollars floating around unaccounted for, McKay says, due in part because many highly-paid public servants don't have the accountability of elections hanging over their heads the way MPs do.

And since Canada has no Freedom of Information Act, comparable to the United States, the files and documents necessary to account for funds in government departments are often hard to come by. McKay argues the American political scene is now much healthier than ours after the Watergate scare prompted a nation-wide demand for access to previously unavailable government information.

In Canada, McKay says, searching out information is much more a matter of cultivating contacts and sifting rumors.

McKay's involvement in the

Sky Shops affair dates back to his interest in the tendering procedures for businesses located in government-owned establishments — Montreal airports, Dorval and Mirabel, for instance.

"I was able to get some documents — some company minutes — from Sky Shops indicating a high turnover of stock in a short period of time," McKay recalls. Further investigation revealed that a Liberal senator, Louis de Giguere had obtained 5,000 shares of Sky Shops for an exceedingly reasonable price — one dollar each — when the going price was 11 dollars. Le Giguere later sold the stock at \$20, after the federal cabinet Sky Shops duty-free shop at Dorval granted an extension of its lease until 1980.

McKay remarks Sky Shop sued him for \$250,000 after his disclosures became a hotly-debated issue in the House of Commons, alleging his suggestions of faulty advertising were prejudicial. Sky Shops has been convicted of faulty advertising since then; and the suit against McKay has been dropped.

Another area of concern has been Air Canada. McKay says his interest was aroused when he couldn't get answers to standard question — what the vice-presidents were doing and how much they were paid. The last public Air Canada report was available in 1972, none since — a circumstance McKay finds deplorable.

McKay says he is currently investigating rumors of widespread waste and inefficiency in Air Canada.

Garneau Committee begun

A committee has been formed to organize residents of the University's North Garneau housing community to deal with university administration of the area.

The Committee for the Defense of North Garneau currently has a petition circulating which calls for student

control over the student housing community.

John Williams, an organizer with the committee, says they will also be investigating avenues for obtaining compensation for damages and losses incurred on some residents of the area.

Williams can be contacted at 439-6622.

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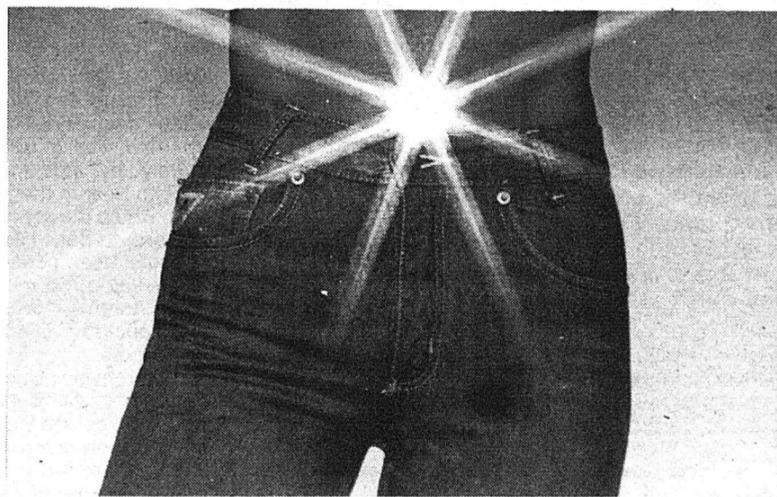
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