

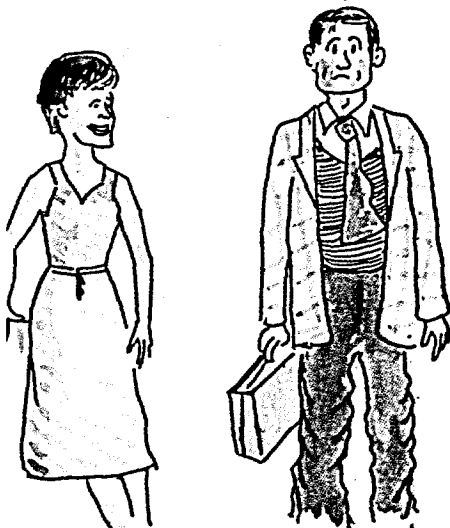
1985, REFLECTING ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, 1955

by Thomas Read

It used to be, and perhaps still is, claimed that a person's psyche can be determined by the doodles that decorate the margins of his lecture or conference notes. Well, let the psychologists have their fun with "Ministry of External Affairs — 1980". The real interest in this particular doodle lies not in the artist's psyche but, rather, in those aspects of the Department of 30 years ago that stimulated the satiric funny bone of a junior F.S.O., vintage 1955. In so far as these stimuli derived from a real concern for the Department's well-being they may be worth recording.

The first concern worth mentioning may have been entirely personal, but I doubt it. It is, after all, not only displayed but it is flaunted. It may therefore be assumed to have been frequently the subject of discussion by the brown baggers of the day. This was the development in the press (we did not have "media" in those days) of the slogan "Open Diplomacy", which was being cultivated by non-diplomats in search of an easy solution to the more popular of the world's problems. No bridge or poker player ever made money by exposing his hand before his reward was assured. The application of the subsidiary rule: "One peek is worth two finesses" to diplomatic negotiations apparently never appealed to the cultists whose passion for sweet and simple international innocence if widely adopted would have reduced negotiations to a gimme game, with the devil taking the hindmost.

Dip Doodles by Vic Lotto



Harry, I think the time has come for another Protocol course.

From these irreverent thoughts there developed the "Area for Open Diplomacy" with its facilities for exposing the working of the Department to public gaze. Although impressive, this construction is no more meritorious than the average public relations ploy, except that as drawn it bears some resemblance to the theatre of Marcellus in Rome, which, incidentally, was not seen by the artist/architect until a posting more than 20 years later.

The second concern that is evident indicates that the writing was visibly on the wall, even in 1955, for External's occupancy of the East Block. The "...spread of crimson felt along the hallways..." in the text, was not a phrase casually introduced. External's green baize "silence" outer doors were being replaced one by one, by the Privy Council Office's red baize outer doors as that office expanded.

This, the natural consequence of the appointment of a Secretary of State for External Affairs who was not also Prime Minister, and the latter's loss of the administrative support of the Department, was in fact the beginning of a process that distributed the Department's divisions among many locations in the centre city area.

Not many of External's juniors were aware that the Department's divine rights had not included guaranteed residence in the East Block, nor were they aware that by its own expansion External had displaced the Department of Finance, which at the time must have resented acutely the loss of its place on The Hill.

With the thought of eviction, sooner or later, impairing the future, it seemed wise to design the "East Block (very) Proper", as a fortress capable of being defended against bailiffs and other intruders. A smooth facade seemed appropriate, and would have been un-climbable; a drawbridge, a portcullis and a moat filled with alligators flowed from the pen. Fortunately for the artist the era of the helicopter had not yet begun.

Another reference in the text that seems worth noting is to members of other departments interested in "...our supply of Ambassadorial furniture...". The stimulus for this remark is not clearly recalled, but almost certainly it derived from the particular stupidity in the system that allowed the post-war generation of Trade Commissioners the prospect of careers that would end at the F.S.O. 8 level.

In itself this could hardly be objected to, but a standard of comparison was close at hand: the lordly creatures in External could look forward to soaring to F.S.O. 10.

In these circumstances it was hardly surprising that External should come to look like an extension ladder for those T&C officers whose ambitions had not been sated during their climb to the F.S.O. 8 level in their own service.

The brilliant success as Ambassadors of some of these lateral entrants suggests that the plank-and-moat treatment allowed for in the doodle would have had to be preceded by a judicious screening process, but External's juniors, in 1955, with their career prospects diminishing, would gladly have dispensed with all formalities save the long drop.

Some attention might be paid to the pessimism of the author regarding the number of rooms that would be allowed for in the new edifice. In 1973, when the Lester B. Pearson building opened, the formula: $n/2 \times 1/x \times 60\%$ seemed to have been discarded. There was room for everyone, and a bit over. It was only in 1974 that the first indications of shrinking space became apparent, and the justification for the formula once again raised its ugly head. More recently the formula seems to have been totally discarded and replaced by the "shoehorn" theory of space usage. This theory places a great deal of weight on the ability of the exterior walls to resist pressures from within. Fortunately it does not apply to the upper floors of Tower A.

The "ivory tower" that is a feature of the "East Block (very) Proper" is, like striped pants and cookie pushing, an ineradicable part of External's unwanted image. Yet it was included, I believe, as a necessary indication of the distance separating the junior officer turning over paper in a division from the departmental leadership.

Perhaps the idea that the top brass spend their days Thinking Great Thoughts is no longer current, but it is doubtless true for many of the Department's employees that the occupants of the current "killers' row" enjoy a form of invisibility, rather like patients in an isolation hospital. Perhaps the "ivory tower" wasn't such a bad idea after all?

To conclude this commentary two questions must be posed: is the availability of parking space for visitors and personnel any better at the Lester B. Pearson building than that envisaged in the doodle? And, second, would the pigeon loft, drawn to annoy Colonel Lockhart (who, if my memory serves, was already establishing his communications empire) be out of place today? No reward is offered for answers to either of these.