

The Brunswickan

Canada's oldest official student publication

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OPINION...

K C AND THE SUNSHINE BAND

by David S. Gorham

Is the K.C. Irving empire and all its regional tentacles really a beacon of hope and opportunity shining down into every vale, crevice and forest glade of New Brunswick, giving those who would otherwise have a job an 'Irving place in the sun?' Do we really feel a sense of belonging in the Irving empire, or are we owned by it? Is it really correct to say we are ensconced in a regional brotherhood, in a caring bond of mutual benefit, when the highest praise we can deliver to the good we derive from 'K.C. and His Merry Band' is the shallow cop-out "we'd be dead without him?"

Myths are strong in New Brunswick when the Irvings are discussed. We lack tangible, touchable, seeable proof of Irving's doings other than the superficial comings and goings of feller bunchers, tree trucks, (sic) S.M.T. buses and that army of yellow trucks.

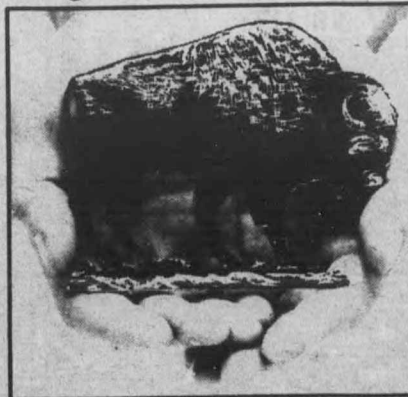
Where information about the Irvings does not exist, myth takes over like the equalizing of pressure in a ripped fuselage; the air rushes in sucking out the truth, leaving scant, torn evidence that there ever was a rational structure before the mythic air flowed in. Would we really be dead if K.C. waved good-bye? In what sense dead? Our unemployment rate is massive, but is always written off by the pumping of dollars into haphazard mega-projects and taxation give-aways to "them who already got it". The Maritimes are frequently written off by the Federal government's failed efforts and attempted solutions to regional disparity.

With the massive concentration of ownership found in the twin pillars of Irving (media : power of information and resources: forest lands, convenience stores and gas bars, transportation networks and one granddaddy of a refinery) there is a restricted atmosphere whereby the resources and information are monopolized or under heavily concentrated ownership (eg; refining of oil monopoly, transportation, especially trucking heavily concentrated, media such as newspapers and television concentrated).

All this market gridlock at the commanding heights of the provincial economy means smaller entrepreneurs and businesses must exist on the fringes of the economy or beg for scraps from the table of the Provincial Government. Even when someone achieves their success independently they can be subject to the strong-arm tactics of the Irvings at any time, especially if their legitimate interests conflict with the desire for more wealth and power which is the ethos of the Sunshine Band.

Is it free enterprise (which is always sung great praises in our culture as some great liberator of humanity) when a successful convenience store or gas bar not owned by Irving is driven from the streets by Irving's cunning ploy: drive your competitor from the market by subsidizing your own outlet in a deficit fashion until the independent merchant is no more. The result is new strength for another hydra-head of Irving. Is that free enterprise or is it instead the wringing of a chicken's neck by Goliath, who just happens to have a well stocked coin purse?

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