

News briefs

The federal and Alberta governments have agreed not to implement a January 1 oil price increase that would have added about three cents to the price of a gallon of gasoline or fuel oil. Alberta probably will receive a larger increase on July 1.

Marriages in Canada during 1977 totalled 186,787, reflecting a continuing decline for the fifth consecutive year from a record of more than 200,000 reached in 1972. The rate per 1,000 population decreased to 8 in 1977 from the 8.4 registered in 1976.

Production and shipments of newsprint increased in October as mills worked at 100 percent capacity, according to the Canadian Pulp and Paper Association. Total newsprint output stood at 855,000 tons in October, up 12.7 per cent from the September figure.

The Alberta Government has agreed to lend \$100 million, at normal commercial terms, to the Nova Scotia Government, believed to be the largest interprovincial loan in history.

New guidelines covering the staging of major national and international amateur sport events in Canada, approved recently by the federal Cabinet, call for the organizing body requesting governmental assistance to give notice of its intentions to the Fitness and Amateur Sport Branch of Health and Welfare Canada up to five years prior to the event.

Loans, surety and export credits insurance as well as foreign investment guarantees totalling \$51.55 million have been approved by the Export Development Corporation to support prospective export sales of \$130.86 million to Algeria, Barbados, Czechoslovakia, Israel, Malta, Saudi Arabia, the U.S.S.R. and Yugoslavia. Foreign investment guarantees of \$1.23 million are expected to bring bene-

fits of \$15.75 million to Canada over the next 15 years. The transactions involve such goods and services as mining equipment, forest products, telephone equipment and installation, petrochemical valves, locomotives, pulp mill equipment, trailers, mobile homes and portable buildings.

The Parti Québécois and the Quebec Liberals are running neck-and-neck in popularity, according to the results of a poll published mid-December. Each party would obtain 35 per cent of the vote if an election were held now, says the poll, conducted by the Centre de Recherches sur l'Opinion publique for the daily *La Presse*. The poll says 53 per cent of Quebecers would vote against sovereignty-association for the province in a referendum, while 31 per cent would vote in favour.

Massey-Ferguson Limited of Toronto has received an order from Saudi Arabia valued at about \$9 million (U.S.) for 800 farm tractors and 2,500 implements, bringing sales of the company's farm machinery to Saudi Arabia in 1978 to more than \$20 million (U.S.).

A bill to convert the Post Office to a Crown corporation was introduced by the Government recently. Under the legislation the position of Postmaster General would be maintained to develop national postal policy, but the Canadian Transport Commission would set postal rates after the Canada Post Corporation comes into being. Interested parties will be able to make submissions on new postal rates to the commission.

Libya has agreed to buy between 5.5 million bushels and 9.2 million bushels of Canadian western red spring wheat over three years beginning July 1. The agreement could have a value of between \$25 million and \$44 million.

A fire said to have been set deliberately caused at least \$2-million damage to the chapel and other sections of Montreal's 149-year-old Notre-Dame Church recently. Five fires have been set in the past year in the church, a landmark on the edge of the city's old financial section.

Bennett Campbell, interim leader of Prince Edward Island's ruling Liberal party since Premier Alex Campbell's recent retirement, won the leadership convention in Charlottetown December 9. The new premier, whose party won a narrow victory in an April vote, is expected to call a general election within two years.

Twenty-three-year-old Ken Read of Calgary led a Canadian conquest of the opening World Cup downhill skiing event in Schladming, Austria, recently, just ahead of Dave Murray of Abbotsford, British Columbia. Dave Irwin of Thunder Bay was seventh, Steve Podborski of Toronto ninth. Read won the opening race at Val d'Isère, France, in 1975. His time for this year's 2,800-metre course was one minute 32.11 seconds.

Both employment and unemployment rose in November, but Canada's seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate edged up to 8.3 per cent from 8.2 per cent in October. The rate in November 1977 was 8.4 per cent. The seasonally-adjusted participation rate increased to 62.8 per cent in November from 62.7 per cent in the preceding month. The employment/population ratio remained at 57.6 per cent, unchanged from the October level.

Canada and the European Space Agency signed an agreement December 9 which the Canadian Government says will lead to closer co-operation on specific projects, particularly communications satellites and earth observation satellites. The agreement may allow better opportunities for Canadian companies to provide components for European space projects, which up to now have been restricted to European suppliers. Canada will also participate in the agency's long-term study program. Until now, Canada has been only an observer in the agency, whose 11 member countries are all in Western Europe.

A gun-trafficking ring was exposed recently by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police when they seized about 2,000 weapons in simultaneous raids in Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia. Eleven people have been charged with conspiracy to sell, possess, buy, trade, transfer or deliver prohibited weapons. Much of the group's business involved buying weapons — usually legal semi-automatic rifles — from British and Belgian army surplus dealers, shipping weapons to Canada, converting them to illegal automatic rifles, then selling them to gun collectors, mainly in the United States but also in Canada.

The Newfoundland-owned Labrador Linerboard mill has been sold to Abitibi Paper Co. Ltd. which will pay the government \$43.5 million and spend an additional \$60 million to convert the plant into a newsprint mill with a capacity of 150,000 tons a year. Newsprint production is scheduled to begin early in 1981.

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