

Halifax 'hostiles' sting like hornets

by Charles Lynch

Southam News Services

OTTAWA — After my earlier gushing about how Nova Scotians are good-humored and Quebecers are dour, I ran into a hornet's nest in Halifax and returned with my tail between my legs.

As a member of a panel set up to discuss media accountability, I and my fellow panelists faced an audience so hostile we were fortunate to escape with our lives.

Some of them were media-haters, but all appeared to be Nova Scotia-firsters, opposed to any truck or trade with the pesky foreigners from away. Had a Quebec audience taken that attitude, we would have assumed that partition had already taken place, and that hostilities had broken out.

At one point in the proceedings I pleaded the immunity of a New Brunswicker, but it was to no avail. It used to be said by Englishmen that "the wogs begin at Calais" — to Nova Scotians, apparently, they begin at the Isthmus of Chignecto.

The audience was assembled by the Dalhousie University School of Business Administration, and the local enclave of the CBC, which taped the proceedings for later broadcast. The tape might well be sent to the CRTC for use in its coming probe of national and regional atrocities.

Several members of the audience said they found the proceedings tedious, the deadliest word a panelist can here. Many said they wanted to hear no more guff from outsiders, and in this they were joined by the editor of the Halifax **Chronicle-Herald**, Bill Smith, who regards visiting firemen as arsonists.

"The newspaper chains of Upper Canada shall not prevail," he chomped, implying that those who toil for the likes of Southams take all their orders from On High, whereas "I take orders from no one."

GROANS

At several points, the wrath of the audience was deflected from us visitors to Smith and the **Herald**, and we were able to draw breath while he denounced the assemblage as elitist drones, cut off from the common men and women of Nova Scotia for whom he edited his newspaper. There were groans



when he put the boots to them, and gasps of disbelief when he said that, left to himself, he would fill the paper with the poems of Edna St. Vincent Millay.

At one point, when the audience was manifesting its hostility with boos and hisses, a member of the sponsoring committee rose and asked for order, if not civility, "because our guests have come a long way to be here." The general feeling seemed to be that the audience wished we hadn't bothered, and that we weren't

baring our souls so much as our biases — the same old media cover-up when attacked.

Thus goaded, I kept baring until practically stripped to the waist,

causing animation among the Gay Liberationists who formed a vocal part of the assemblage. Finally, we got onto Quebec and the evening settled down to a solid exchange of prejudices, with what I found to be a surprisingly broad expression of support for the Quebec separatists.

SATISFIED

I recited my Canadian unionist loyalty oath amid cries of scorn, and expressions of disbelief that a journalist would so foresake his impartiality to admit to bias in favor of keeping Canada together.

When I said I wouldn't like to see a separatist bias in Southam coverage of Quebec, one woman said she would not only not trust anything I wrote again, she would never again bother to read it.

I pointed out that Smith had made this easy by throwing my column out of his paper, which caused a satisfied expression to come over the face of the **Herald** editor, who obviously wished he had it all to do again.

The CBC was attacked as a tool of Ontario food processors, out to grind down the Maritimes, and when Ron Haggart of CBC's **Fifth Estate** program protested that the CBC's constituency was the entire nation, he was hooted, with Smith leading the chorus.

Richard O'Hagan, communications adviser to Prime Minister Trudeau, was on the panel, but somehow managed to emerge unscathed, a considerable achievement in view of the prevailing mood and the fact that Halifax is not exactly Trudeau country.

When it was over we headed for the bar, only to find it closed, and we spent the better part of the night trudging the streets of Halifax, which mercifully were deserted, so we were not set upon.

I reflected that this must be a bit like medieval times, when cities were walked and visitors unwelcome.

Years ago, I told Rene Levesque that I had always felt at home in Montreal, and he said he thought he could change that, and he's trying — but he's lagging behind my beloved Halifax. Good humored? Hah!

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