

CPR - a private corporation with public grants

By J.B.M. FALCONER

Inevitably, Robert Chodos' book, *The CPR: A Century of Corporate Welfare*, invites one to compare it with Pierre Berton's opus (and hybrids thereof) on the same subject. For one thing, Mr. Chodos' book does not have nearly as many pictures; it is much shorter, a mere 178 pages in length.

Nor I might add is it as elegantly produced as Mr. Berton's book; in fact, it is quite an ugly little paperback. And, besides these drawbacks, Robert Chodos says some pretty nasty things about the CPR, perhaps even to the point of breaching propriety.

I like Mr. Chodos' book; I think it is excellent. He has written two other books on the subject of railways, and perhaps felt it was time to tackle the CPR. He does so admirably, providing a superb, if brief, expose of the CPR.

In it, he traces the CPR's growth from its well-nourished beginnings to its present corpulent state. And he makes a powerful argument for the complete nationalization of CPR and its assets. Yet, in doing so Chodos manages to maintain that rarest of balances between zeal and objectivity. In fact, on the basis of the evidence which he presents, one would have to be ill-disposed towards the CPR, even without the proposal for nationalizing it.

AN AESTHETIC GRIP

As he points out in his introduction, the CPR has a peculiarly deep-rooted hold on the Canadian mind: not simp-

ly in an economic sense, but in an aesthetic one. On one hand, the sheer physical accomplishment of its construction and the marshalling of national resources has engendered such a broad range of sympathy and fascination, that one can find Pierre Berton sharing the same spectacular dome car view as Gordon Lightfoot and E.J. Pratt. For unlike most events in Canadian history, it possesses a high level of drama and mythos.

On the other hand, beneath this aesthetically fertile soil, there lies a harsher region of economic impulse. Even a cursory acquaintance with the CPR's history will make obvious the enviable security of its operation. Why enviable? Because the government is loathe to see the CPR move even fractionally towards lesser profits. After all, its continued well-being is necessary to the country as a whole.

ECONOMIC SUBSERVIENCE

Robert Chodos points out that it is precisely this profitable intimacy with the federal government that has issued in the economic subservience of the West and the Maritimes to central Canada. Indeed, as he also demonstrates, the entire history of the West can very correctly be seen as the persistent attempt to gain some equity of treatment for its products, which had to rely on the CPR for transportation to the eastern markets.

In the same historical matrix, Chodos also indicates how the CPR was instrumental in the decline of the

flourishing industrial base of the Maritimes; indeed, today it is quite difficult to believe that at one time the Maritimes was more industrially advanced than either Quebec or Ontario. The end result of this gradual consolidation of economic authority in central Canada was due in large part to the financial interests using the CPR to assert their domination over the rest of Canada. This interlocking web of directorships in banks and large companies is greatly developed by Chodos when he turns his attention to the present day state of the CPR.

ARACHNIDIAN NATURE

One thing which is particularly excellent about this book is the lucid explication of the arachnidian nature of the Canadian directorships which find their nexus in the CPR and which are responsible for running it. In treating the CPR as it relates to the often ambiguous reticulation of the Canadian financial community, Chodos removes his subject from isolation, and is thus better able to define the subtle and infinitely complex interpenetration of government and 'private enterprise.'

One point which he constantly confronts is the mystery which veils so much of the CPR machinations.

A shocking warning

ALAMEDA, Calif. (CUP) When Richard Nixon called a military alert during the recent fighting in the Middle East, many people in the press and the government suggested that the alert was unnecessary and that Nixon called it to get people's mind off Watergate.

White House spokesmen denied the charge, of course, but the simple fact that the question was raised shows how widespread distrust of Nixon has become.

Perhaps the most shocking warning to come from anyone connected with the government was issued by Representative Fortney H. Stark (D-Cal) as he spoke to 250 supervisory personnel at the Alameda Naval Air Base.

According to the Los Angeles Times, Stark warned that Nixon might "manufacture" an international crisis in order to launch a military "coup" that would keep him in office if impeachment looked likely.

"Considering the president's irrational behaviour and the existence of a military elite in this country," Stark said "it is not inconceivable that a military takeover could be attempted."

But Stark added optimistically, "There are too many good officers who put country ahead of self and politicians." He said he thought these "good officers" would "rebel against the commander-in-chief and keep the Republic from falling into military hands."

Letters

Due to limited space please keep letters as brief as possible

Indeed, his research points to a rather strange problem: that it is simply not clear who owns the CPR. It becomes apparent that there exists a significant though often overlooked distinction between those who actually own stock and those who exercise authority in the corporation.

There are two points stressed in this book which, I think, make it an especially important one. It has been stated elsewhere by political analysts that Canadian finance is of such a nature that it is not severely threatened by the increasing shift of industrial control to the United States. That is, Canadian capitalists have their profit-making base not in the industrial realm but in that of financing and in commercial interests.

If this is correct, then the CPR assumes particular significance, since it manages to bring many of the nuances of Canadian capitalism together in one place. As Chodos demonstrates, in the CPR we have a publicly reimbursed private corporation which does not have the public's needs entirely at the centre of its policy, a private corporation which receives public money to maintain its profits at a high level.

CP INVESTMENTS

For Chodos, the really crucial history of the CPR commenced with the establishment of CP Investments: an identity designed to develop the CPR's burgeoning investment commitments in other areas, primarily in resources, communication and transportation.

Chodos provides in his appendices a highly revealing schemata which shows the broad range and percentages of investment and ownership which the CPR has in these areas. He also demonstrates that, while this CPI seems logical for a large diversified corporation, it is a more likely piece of farsighted planning against the day when the railroad will no longer be important to the CPR, or when the federal government decides to "assume" control over its operation.

On this note, Robert Chodos shows that, because of certain exquisite legal formulations, cunning in their ingenuity, CPI is somewhat separate from the CPR proper. Under government regulations, dealing with the reimbursement of aid to the railways, this manoeuvre enables the CPR to still collect the handsome sum which is afforded each year to assist the railways: after all, the profits derived from CPI are not, strictly speaking, part of those accruing from the operation of the railroad itself.

There is only one minor discouraging note heard in the entire book; and it is an implicit one, tied to Mr. Chodos' fine explication of the CPR's historical relation to the federal government.

While one cannot help but agree with his statement at the book's end, that in the event of nationalization, the long history of public subsidies must be taken into account in the assessment of a judicious indemnity, one really wonders if this would ever be done.

A discouraging note perhaps, but one which ought to be considered.

U of T grads move closer to certification

TORONTO (CUP) — Despite a lack of co-operation from the University of Toronto administration, the drive by the Graduate Assistants Association to achieve certification as a bargaining agent is one step closer to success.

Michael O'Keefe, GAA president, said the month-long effort to sign the last 200 assistants needed to apply for certification "has been totally successful."

The 200 signatures bring the GAA's membership up to about 700. The figure represents 35 per cent of the estimated 2,000 graduate assistants, enough to apply for certification with the Ontario Labour Relations Board.

"But we're pushing for more," O'Keefe said. "We'd like as close to 50 per cent as possible."

The GAA has been refused access to the master list of all graduate assistants at the university. It had formally requested the list Oct. 22 and after follow-up phone calls had not received the list by Nov. 16.

"It's clear the university is fighting us on the list," said O'Keefe, "but it's obvious it's not stopping us."

The GAA hopes to make formal application for certification in January. At that time the OLRB will subpoena the list and the GAA will have access to it.

The master list is the only way of determining the exact number of assistants working for the university. The GAA figure of 2,000 is a "maximum" estimate.

The GAA has also been trying to get back vacation pay for assistants

The provincial government ruled that graduate assistants are eligible for vacation pay but the university doesn't have to dispense vacation back pay because assistants get paid vacations.

The ruling stated the paid holidays are the two weeks during the Christmas break, one week during reading week and the last two weeks of April.

The GAA is taking the second part of the ruling, dealing with vacation back pay to the ministry of labour for appeal this week. But O'Keefe termed the ruling a "victory" because the university wanted assistants ruled ineligible for vacation pay and the government ruled assistants eligible.

The appeal will include specific cases. According to O'Keefe, the majority will be those in which assistants have to work during vacation periods.

The GAA contends that U of T assistants do more than 40 per cent of undergraduate teaching and receive an average wage of less than \$1,000 per year. Wages range from about \$500 to \$1,800 annually, "and that's frequently for the same amount of work."

By contrast, the University of Windsor association, not certified by the OLRB but recognized by the university, has won a uniform \$2,400 wage, a grievance procedure and a voice in departmental hiring committees.

Windsor association president Frank Miller told a Toronto assistants' meeting last week that U of T's drive would result in the first union of teaching assistants in Canada.

About those opinion pieces

Excalibur is always willing to print your opinions, space permitting. Unlike letters, opinion pieces are subject to tighter editorial scrutiny, not necessarily for content but for comprehension and readability.

Unsolicited opinion pieces should be kept under 500 words if possible. The writing should be tight, bright and interesting; and coherence is always a nice addition to any article.

The deadline for Thursday's paper is always the preceding Friday.

An enviable job

Travels with auntie?

By GREG GERTZ

Some people have all the luck.

How would you like to put yourself through university by escorting tour groups to all corners of the earth during your vacations? In other words, get paid to travel?

That's what York student Pete Desrochers does. He has escorted groups throughout Europe, Mexico and the Orient and is scheduled to leave soon for the Middle East and South America.

Desrochers' job, though certainly enviable, is not easy. He is responsible for solving the problems that inevitably arise during tours: lost luggage, stolen passports, missed planes, missing people. He is the one who has to be able to slash his way through the red tape by soothing governments, chartering planes and finding the discotheque where that teenage girl is probably hiding out.

It doesn't always work out smoothly, though. On more than one occasion Desrochers has found himself in jail in a country whose language he doesn't know.

And, infrequently, he has had to ward off bribes from hoteliers who offer him everything from free visits to girls if he will only forget that the tour group is being deprived of the rooms it wanted or the food it expected.

"You have to take everything in this job with a grain of salt," he explains. "It's really not a matter of talent, but rather of not being afraid to handle difficult situations."

Desrochers didn't just stumble into the job. He wrote about 15 letters to different travel companies, got one semi-affirmative reply, and kept at it until he got the job. He had no real qualifications except some public speaking abilities and a little travel experience.

His first trip with his company was to Italy in the winter of 1971, where he accompanied another escort to learn the procedures. Since then he has been on his own.

A second year political science student, Desrochers travels during the summer and at Christmas and spring breaks. He receives a little spending money and has his tuition and books paid for.

Tour companies, Desrochers says, are becoming much more contemporary, offering flexibility and handling bothersome details that can be especially time-consuming during a short trip.

He will be leading a tour over study break to Israel, and has room for 150 York students. The group will spend four days in Tel Aviv and four in Jerusalem, where there will be a choice between a religious retreat and a tour. (Desrochers can be reached for information at 667-3908 or 749-3543.)

Desrochers offers some advice for first-time travellers. Eat the local food; don't order Canadian beer and hamburgers. Get off the tourist trail and check out the out-of-the-way places. If at all possible change your money at foreign exchange offices in Canada, where you'll get a better rate.

And don't try to "bring another country back home with you." Spend the money most people waste on souvenirs to see a city you would otherwise miss or take in a special play.