



Mugwump Journal

By EDISON
STEWART

Ed's Note: Edison Stewart was the originator of Mugwump. For this, our special 125th anniversary edition he has kindly agreed to grace the pages of our paper once again.

Which will cost taxpayers more?

- a) the layoff of CBC employees in order to save us all money, or
- b) the citizens' forum on Canada's future?

The answer is (a). It will actually cost almost twice as much to pay severance to former CBC employees as the \$27 million it will cost to listen to Canadians pour out their hearts on the future of their country.

Next question: on the day both figures were announced, which issue took up more than half of the daily Commons' question period? The citizens' forum, of course. There wasn't a word about the money - saving CBC layoffs actually costing us money - nor has there been a word since.

One reason: fear of Brian Mulroney.

You might think that, at 16% in the polls, he's deadlier than a bug on a Bricklin windshield. You'd be wrong. Mulroney is planning to use national unity to ride back into power one more time and the opposition knows it. Ergo, Mulroney must not be allowed to build any credibility on the issue. Ergo, any opportunity to attack Mulroney - even indirectly, as through the citizens' forum - must be used.

The other reason the forum is a target is that Canadians have an obsession with misplaced parsimony.

Not on everything - we can spend \$25 million building Bricklins, then close shop and say, well, we tried.

But spending \$27 million on the citizens' forum strikes most of us as crazy. Admittedly, it is the most expensive royal commission in Canadian history. But so what?

One man wrote to The Toronto Star the other day that that is about the equivalent of one CF-18 jet - and God knows we've lost enough of them in accidents without going through budgetary apoplexy.

People complain that members of the commission are paid \$600 a day. Well, frankly, some of those same people simply looked the other way when Liberals on the former royal commission on the economy were earning \$700 and \$800 a day seven years ago (which is actually up to \$1000 a day in today's dollars).

Our concern with the forum's spending reflects our abiding conviction that everyone but us is wasting taxpayers' money.

I was in Saint John when the forum began its public consultations. It was surprising the number of seemingly sane, reasonable people who complained that the government was spending too much - on other people.

Cut off the ethnic groups, they said. Let them pay to keep their own culture.

Cut off business. If they can't survive on their own, tough luck.

Scrap bilingualism. Why, if it wasn't for all that money we were wasting on French, we'd eliminate the deficit in no time.

Get rid of Quebec. Heck, they're always after some grant or subsidy.

somehow, it was always the other guy who was wasting our money. No one mentioned that the New Brunswick government would be bankrupt without hundreds of millions of federal dollars. no one complained about an unemployment insurance system that allows some people to spend most of the year watching television. How about a few billion dollars to improve the Trans-Canada Highway? Hey, they owe it to us!

One of these day - and it better be soon - we have to lift our eyes from our wallets.

We have to decide if we're going to live together any more. I'm not sure that we are - going to live together, that is. I'm not even sure now that we should. I can no longer say with certainty that it wouldn't be better, in the end, to be an American. But I do not want my future decided for me because I was too cheap to make the effort.

MacWhiskers

by Jackie Webster

MacWhiskers first saw the light of day in a Brunswickan column 40 years ago. Since then he has appeared in many newspapers and periodicals. He has developed quite following. In a long free lance journalism career, Old MacWhiskers has provided a lot of bread and butter.

What to say about the changes in those 40 years? More cars. More students. More money. More student loans. More sex. Well, maybe not more. The juices flow as freely in one generation as the next. Less repression maybe, and for that I salute you.

The faces in The Bruns office today are the very faces that were there in my student days. There are many things one can do at university, but I can't think of any more rewarding than working on The Brunswickan. I can't think of many careers more rewarding than journalism. Some of us have just stumbled along, but some of us, like my friend Betty Lou Vincent Lee, have been spectacularly successful. Her writing skills were rewarded with an honorary Doctor of Laws from McMaster University last spring, and when she died she left a sizable bequest for the benefit of the gals on The Brunswickan staff.

Now if someone would just set up a bequest for the guys . . .

We have been saying all along that old MacWhiskers is no fit companion for a five year old kid. Ever since our daughter Mary, walked in, hand in paw as it were, with that old reject from the garbage can crowd, we have had nothing but trouble.

He does nothing for the neighbourhood image. One ear is completely chewed, the other has more notches on it than a western bad man's gun, one eye is closed - or gone - giving him a kind of pirate's patch effect the ladies find appealing. Not I.

"It's like exposing her to the Mafia," I tell my wife who simply laughs it off.

"Old MacWhiskers is not so bad," says she, slipping him a slice of prime rib.

"MacWhiskers? How do you know his name?" I wanted to know.

"He told Mary," said she. Now how do you argue with that kind of logic? Or the lack thereof.

"He's a bad influence. Just you wait and see," I armed her.

Well, we were right. We have the proof.

Yesterday we were called home from the office. Tragedy had struck. MacWhiskers had been done in by a passing motorist.

There was no doubt the many old renegade had used up his nine lives many times over. I was overjoyed at first, but when I got home I was torn between my own satisfaction and heartache for little Mary who, it cannot be denied, loved him.

It was a pitiful scene. There was old Mac stretched out on the porch and there was the child, her face streaked with tears. "Oh, Daddy, I loved him so," she sobbed.

I hugged her tightly. She must be comforted. In spite of my own private views, she must be comforted. But how?

"Everyone has to die sometime," I told her gently. Small comfort there. Then inspiration.

"and we'll have a little ceremony for him; a funeral. We'll line a box with satin and make it soft. You can do that. We'll make a pretty cover for it."

I groped for words. The sobbing had lessened somewhat. "Then we'll bury him out in the garden . . ."

Silence now, her head still on my shoulder. ". . . and you can have all your little friends over, and we will plant seeds on his grave and by summer, he will have bright flowers . . ."

Still groping for words, I noticed a movement. That old reprobate of a cat had moved. Like one recovering from a horrendous hangover, he was lifting his head and shaking it groggily.

"Look dear", I shouted, forgetting the personal implications of this resurrection in my job for her.

Mary raised her head and looked long and steadily at Mac as he stood up on unsteady legs.

Then she turned to me and on that small angelic face was an expression I had seen on but one other and he in front of us. Sinister. Malicious. Calculating. Conspiratorial.

"Let's kill him," she whispered.