

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

"Crude Distillations"

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Dear Peter,

Mix a little brandy with cold toes and the mental crush of Christmas coinciding with preparations to move on and this is what you get: a scarcely connected series of brief little dispatches about life in and around the capital city.

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Fast Forward

Just when Alvin Toffler's 1970s notion of "future shock" seemed to have faded into the background noise of North American culture--still rooted in our consciousness, but relegated to a cerebral shelf marked Yesterday's News--somebody hit the button again. What are the last few months of 1989 if not a blurry spectacle of accelerated history?

Exactly thirty days ago a UPI story carried in the Ottawa Citizen provided a perversely amusing list of officially acceptable names for Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu, including: "father and friend of young people," "the sacred oak of Romania's glory," "the marvellous impersonation of good," "the most clever of skippers," "the unparalleled strategist," "the titan of titans." Now, of course, Ceausescu, "the man with the morality of a saint," is cursed, dead, buried and cursed some more.

A local reporter in today's paper recounts a joke circulating among the 200 or so Romanians living in the Ottawa area that "Poland took 10 years to achieve democracy, East Germany 10 months, Czechoslovakia 10 days, and Romania 10 hours."

Perhaps the hardline Communists still controlling Albania could be persuaded to go with the flow and vacate Tirana in, say, the next ten minutes.

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Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

Do you ever get the feeling that we are living in a videotape universe, where the gods operate as cosmic manipulators of the Big Remote? They have been playing with the fast-forward button a bit much of late, and hence toying with the fate of the earth ("quick, let's skip ahead to the part where the hole in the ozone layer gets really big!"), let alone the destinies of so-called "sovereign" nations. Once in awhile one of Them hits rewind, thus effecting some stunning replays of history, like brutal crackdowns in China, and American occupations of Panama.

Canada is not experiencing the sudden, unexpected convulsions that so many other countries are these days. Still, there is a sense of confused apprehension in the air, and in the press. The fast pace of tumultuous change in distant lands is affecting the way Canadians are thinking about the many big domestic decisions (free trade with the United States is one, an effort to amend the constitution another), that have been taken seemingly all at once, without enough thought toward the long-term consequences. People readily contrast, for example, in their letters to the editor, the breaking down of the Berlin Wall with the hardening of old barriers between English and French. "Why are we going backwards," they ask, "when the rest of the world is surging ahead?"

The Prime Minister has been ridiculed for not moving fast enough to acknowledge sweeping reforms in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and also for jumping too quickly to join the Organization of American States. [See cartoons on page 8] Lacking strong, visionary leadership--even Mulroney's staunchest Conservative supporters do not credit him with vision--Canada's political destiny is seemingly out of control, rewinding and fast-forwarding willy-nilly, with no time to pause.

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### Winter Nasties

In early December, the Prescott-Russell (Ontario) Roman Catholic school board refused to discard or even discuss their earlier decision to not allow the kids from the two English schools in the district to compete with the ones from the 26 French schools. This policy had been adopted at the request of a committee of principals from the francophone schools. The group was concerned that anglophone children were not adhering to an agreement to speak French at sporting events as an extension of their French-language programs, and that too much English on the playing fields would lead to assimilation.

Parents on both sides of the issue were up in arms. The alleged discrimination struck Ontario Premier David Peterson "as not a very constructive way to build bridges," but the conflict fizzled (it was called a "misunderstanding") before any intervention by provincial education authorities took place. The kids are back to playing on the ice and snow together. A sixth

grader from St. Joseph (French) school, just down the street from Mother Theresa (English), where his sister goes, provided this summary of the unfortunate incident: "Stupid."

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For well over a month the outdoor temperature has not climbed above freezing. This is the coldest early winter in Ottawa in ten years, we are told. Yesterday it was minus 20 celsius (that's 4 below zero Fahrenheit.) With the windchill factored in the effective temperature dropped to minus 40 degrees, which is where the two measurement scales converge, and which, with the humidity at 80 percent, is frightfully cold. Ontario Hydro, the giant public utility that supplies electricity to the province, has requested that everyone cut back on their power consumption, especially in the peak-demand periods of the day. The company has interrupted power deliveries to thirty commercial customers and warns the public of potential blackouts.

Now the thought of going without power in Ottawa at this time of year is to suffer a vision of arctic hell. Peter Newman describes Canada's climate as "six months of winter followed by six months of bad sledding," and it's small wonder that Canadians consume more energy per capita than anyone else. People have been making a serious effort to comply with Hydro's requests by turning off their Christmas lights and letting dirty laundry and dishes go unwashed for several hours or another day.

Then, surprise, surprise, the utility sends a new message to the public: it wants to build three nuclear generating stations in the next 25 years, at an estimated cost of \$60 to \$85 billion (the latter figure takes insurance, inflation and interest charges into account.) Naturally, some rate-payers suspect the current shortages are more administered than seasonal, and they are reminding everyone else that Ontario Hydro played a major role in creating demand for nuclear power in the past by encouraging consumers to switch to electricity from oil and gas.

For all its attendant risks, the proponents of nuclear power argue, fuel switching is a necessary component of Canada's effort to reduce acid rain. Ontario Hydro recently committed itself to voluntarily reduce sulphur dioxide emissions to 365,000 tonnes (the extra letters signal metric) per annum, well below the government-imposed limit of 430,000 tonnes. This sounded persuasive until the newspapers reported that the provincial utility has contracted to buy up to 1,400 megawatts from American Electric Power Co. of Columbus, Ohio. Some of this imported power comes from coal-fired plants much dirtier than those in Canada; moreover, Hydro agreed to pay prices up to 70 percent higher than the cost of electricity generated at its own stations.

It's just possible that before spring arrives there will be scores of shivering, irate Ontarians left with the awful choice of sputtering expletives in the dark or praying for a bit more

energy from the pollution-belching smokestacks in the Ohio Valley.

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A Tale of Two Wimps

Joe Clark, Canada's Minister for External Affairs, having just entertained a pressing "scrum" (it's a rugby term, and an authentic Canadianism) of journalists with a pithily vague statement on foreign policy, emerges alone from the west front entrance of the Parliament building. It's a gray, chilly day. He is wearing a full-length black leather overcoat, with a fur-fringed collar; tres chic. He throws a glance across the drive to the chauffeur who has been having a chat and a smoke with several of his French Canadian pals. (Everybody's engine, I notice, has been running unattended for at least 45 minutes.) Getting the boss's message, the driver flicks his cigarette towards the gutter and rushes to the wheel of the dark blue Ford Crown Victoria sedan, apparently the limousine of choice among high officialdom here. The tires squeal as he zooms up to the waiting Minister, all of 20 yards away. Clark opens his own car door, but not the one nearest him. He chooses instead to walk around the front of the vehicle, then pauses with his gloved hand on the handle, and turns his head and torso to give a confident, meant-to-be reassuring nod to a non-existent crowd of expectant well-wishers. I mean, there is NOBODY there.

I am sitting on a stone bench over by the bored drivers, eating an apple, and Clark gives ME and some imagined multitude that certain look of a guy who entered politics as a high school student (for SERIOUS reasons) and just kept going, all the way to the top, leaving the jocks and the bookworms and the screw-offs in his proverbial dust. "Don't worry," says THE LOOK, "I've got everything under control."

Clark's recessive chin has been the butt of many jokes and the focal point of political cartoonists for a long time. He was nevertheless Prime Minister for about 9 months, back in 1979-80. Lots of Canadians called him a wimp then; now he is probably the most respected member of the Mulroney Cabinet, well known for his diligence and wit. I merely caught him committing a wimpish act, presumably out of habit.

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George Bush stands at the White House lecturn, giving the Washington press corps his version of events in Panama. There is no scrumming allowed in our system--reporters keep their distance, and wait their turn. (I am watching this on television, and can't help noticing how smashingly well-dressed the reporters are; perhaps there are Christmas parties to be attended later in the day?) The President takes great pains to use first names, and attempts to further erode the sombre formality of the situation by complaining about a pain in his

neck. He iterates the rationale for invasion. When he gets to the part about the wife of a U.S. naval officer being threatened with sexual abuse, the voice gets tougher; emotions are evident. "That was enough," he said firmly, with an expression on his face plainly indicating confidence that this was what would bring the press "on-side" and move the masses of the American public to accept Operation Just Cause as something other than just another run of the mill military intervention in Latin America.

I thought the press conference would be over right after Bush said "last question," but he kept calling people by their first names and taking more questions as he crab-walked towards the door. Finally Marlin Fitzwater stepped in to make a brief announcement concerning Christmas presents from the White House for each of the journalists in attendance.

The Panama invasion was the first occasion for Bush to demonstrate that he is not a wimp in foreign policy. Having talked to a few people, read the papers, and listened to all the sage commentators on radio and television here, I am reasonably certain that most Canadians much prefer Joe the reconstructed wimp to George who would be Macho.

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### Role Model

In Canada, "peacekeeper" does not refer to a multiple-warhead ICBM squatting in a hardened silo in Wyoming. Here the term applies to ordinary soldiers wearing blue helmets sweating out weeks, months, even years of nerve-wracking duty interposed between chronic belligerents like Israel and Syria, Iran and Iraq, and Greeks and Turks on the island state of Cyprus.

Canadian military contingents have participated in every United Nations peacekeeping operation since the Korean War. In 1956, Prime Minister Lester Pearson was awarded the Nobel Prize for his efforts to install a neutral, multinational force in the Sinai after Israel, Britain and France invaded Egypt to seize the Suez Canal. In 1988, the Nobel Committee chose to bless U.N. peacekeeping in general. In the intervening years, Canadians were active participants in various peacekeeping, truce supervision and military observer missions in the Congo, Lebanon, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, West Irian (New Guinea) and Indochina. There are military personnel and even Mounties presently monitoring the electoral process in Namibia. Over the next few months, the Canadian government intends to contribute some 40 military personnel and eight helicopters with crews and maintenance support to the United Nations Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA). If the U.N. Security Council decides to send peacekeepers to Cambodia, Canadians will no doubt be included.

Peacekeeping is said to be resonant with the Canadian political psyche, which embraces compromise, craves order, and wants to be taken seriously in international affairs. Historian Jack Granatstein suggests Canada was first attracted to peacekeeping because it smacked of independence from the United States, did not require nuclear weapons or overly expensive equipment, and involved relatively small numbers of troops. "It was the ideal role for Canada: responsible, useful, inexpensive and satisfying." Peter Newman adds this psychological twist to the rationale:

"Unable to figure out whether we were the least of the great powers or the greatest of the small powers, we decided, in the smug afterglow of the Second World War, to become something we called a 'middle power.' We sent contingents of peacekeeping soldiers into trouble spots where they would be shot at, mauled and manhandled, but not permitted to return fire or retaliate in any way. It was perfect casting."

The romance of peacekeeping has been worn down by years of experience. The job has turned out to be dirty, thankless, complicated, and neverending. Some 75 Canadians have been killed in the course of peacekeeping action out of a total of over 50,000 participants. Several of the casualties occurred in the Congo, where the communication skills of bilingual Canadian officers earned them many accolades (English and French were the two working languages of the U.N. operation that involved troops from 14 different countries), but also made them the targets of Congolese rebels, who mistook the peacekeepers for Belgian paratroopers. I listened very carefully for some public acknowledgment of these veterans on Remembrance Day, but it seems the more conventional, gargantuan traumas of the First and Second World Wars still overshadow the sacrifices made to keep small modern wars from becoming big ones. "Peacekeeping duty is just something taken for granted," says Fred Gaffen, a military historian at the Canadian War Museum.

The essential problem with peacekeeping, the experts concur, is that too often it is not followed-up by genuine peacemaking. Too many international crises remain frozen; they don't get resolved. Canadian troops have been exposed to danger and have endured all sorts of hardship in Cyprus for a quarter of a century, and there is still no hope of a thaw in relations between Greece and Turkey, who are ostensibly allies as members of NATO. "The mere stationing of interpositioning, de-fusing or disarming forces in an untenable political status quo is neither glorious nor despicable," writes Thomas Hockin, "It is merely a postponement of the major task." A sense of futility thus accompanies the Canadians who are routinely shipped into and out of the Middle East to stand between rivals who have been warring against each other for a thousand years.

Canadians have performed admirably under the United Nations flag, and despite the many hazards and frustrations of

"projecting the principle of non-violence onto the military plane" (I borrow this paradoxical phrase from former U.N. Under-Secretary Brian Urquhart), they show little proclivity for believing that the best peacemaker is a Colt '45.

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### How Partly False Identities Become More True

In a radio interview just before Christmas, Canadian Ambassador to the United States Derek Burney observed that "Americans perceive Canadians to be sour, a bit melancholy, and seemingly incapable of celebrating their successes." This struck me as only partly true. This is the way Canadians perceive themselves; we Americans seldom give them much thought at all. Burney must know this, but the Canadian habit of collective self-deprecation is so ingrained that self images are imagined to be the views held by friends and neighbors.

Perhaps this is basic social psychology. In the final week of my evening French class, the instructor asked each of us to explain what we would do if we won a million dollars in the provincial lottery. Five people said they would put the money in some sort of interest-bearing savings account. One guy said he would travel the world, which sounded expensive and a bit daring, until he added "by bicycle,"--more daring, to be sure, but it wouldn't put much of a dent in a million bucks. He said he would put the rest in savings. Canadians!

When my turn came around I told a bald-faced lie: "I would put it all in bottled water!" The obvious implication was that I was a real entrepreneur, willing to bet everything on a chance to make a killing in the rough-and-tumble world of high risk investments. Everyone else in the class already knew I was from the States; they expected this sort of thing from an American. And that, truth to tell, is the only reason I said what I said. My dishonesty was automatic, not premeditated.

(I think I would put most of it in savings, wouldn't you?)

Cheers,

*Stephen Maly*

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Cartoons from the Ottawa Citizen