

# Sheer Nonsense

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You have got to wonder what the world is coming to when the best rapper is white, the best golfer is black, and the tallest player in the NBA is Chinese. The Swiss hold the America's Cup, and the French are accusing the US of arrogance. Germany does not want to go to war, and Svend Robinson, the ring bearer, is contemplating stealing his way back into the House of Commons. Some would say it's sheer nonsense. Need I say more? Yes, I must!

### **DINGBATS AND DILETTANTES**

Here in Canada, we have a provincial premier giving out resource rebates, while the prime minister sees fit to pump money directly into Canadian voters' pockets under a newly legislated formula for spending unexpected budget surpluses. When these schemes are coupled with the recently announced energy relief package for lower income families and seniors, perhaps the country is being turned into a giant income trust, despite its inconsistent cash flow and great need for capital investment. In the meantime, the federal minister of finance is tearing his hair out trying to determine whether these kinds of investment opportunities are good for Canada or not. Given the continuing need to repay the outstanding debt so as not to burden future generations of Canadians with the mistakes we allowed politicians to make during our lifetime, and the advantages of improving the health care system, education programmes and the country's infrastructure, these politically charged handouts are absolutely nonsensical. Particularly in Alberta where most of the extra money is likely to end up being gambled away in casinos as its citizens typically wager more money each year than is the government's take of crude oil and natural gas revenues!

It is also unfortunate that our elected representatives cannot seem to get their heads around the idea that cuts in marginal tax rates change people's behaviour in ways that increase productivity. They are, themselves, a kind of investment – the revenue the government foregoes pays off in permanent increases in national output. A tax credit, by contrast, neither requires nor rewards such increased effort and investment. The government pays you the money just for being you. All the while we must wait patiently to be told of the findings and recommendations of The Gomery Commission. Why, it is exhausting just to think of it all!

One thing we do know is that when Crown corporation CEOs like David Dingwall of the Royal Canadian Mint, André Ouelett of Canada Post, Jean Pelletier of Via Rail, and others who have been appointed to high-paying patronage jobs, cross the boundary of acceptable business conduct they are simply allowed to resign, retire or are fired. However, they usually get to collect a very generous severance payment or pension, or both. By contrast, when executives in the private sector are found to have misappropriated money

or misled investors, they often have to face criminal charges and be incarcerated if found guilty. Must we continue to have a different standard of disclosure and justice for the people who run government enterprises than for the private sector? In my not so humble opinion, new rules are long overdue. For while serving time in jail may be humiliating, a society that merely winks and nudges at crime encourages more of it.

The obvious rejoinder is that without the possibility of being found guilty of committing a crime and being locked up, things are not as likely to improve. Furthermore, an offender should pay a price commensurate with the moral responsibility he bears for his actions. However, if he is allowed to remain free and charged with preaching to others about ethics, the target audience should surely be the higher-ups in the civil service and members of the House of Commons and Senate, not innocent college students as is the case with Paul Coffin, the Adscamer, who with remorseless invoicing, bilked the federal government of more than \$1.55 million and still gets to sleep in his own bed. Such is sheer nonsense!

Then again, I wonder how the dingbat who is a former minister of Public Works is getting by without charging the federal government \$747,000 in expenses as he did in 2004, including \$1.29 for a pack of mint-flavoured, breath-freshening chewing gum. A scoundrel who failed to register as a lobbyist while attempting to make a little extra dough on the side in the way of success fees when out on the town spending the taxpayers' money. Or what of the kerfuffle to do with Lord Conrad Black of Crossharbour. Though yet to be charged in Canada or the US, there is a better than even chance that the Americans will be the first to tan his hide before our justice system ever gets around to doing so. What sheer nonsense!

#### **LESSONS FROM THE WEST**

Those of you expecting me to sing Alberta's praises are advised to check out our website ([www.rapport.ca](http://www.rapport.ca)) and click onto the Our thoughts tab for an upcoming essay, *If Only The Truth Be Told*. Meanwhile, let me give you a few facts of life.

Resource revenues in the province totalled \$9.6 billion in the 2004–2005 fiscal year, the equivalent of \$3,000 per citizen. Sharing these funds across Canada would mean \$300 per taxpayer, or less than a dollar a day, not enough to cover a cup of morning coffee at Tim Hortons. If they were to double, you still could not buy a daily cappuccino at Starbucks. While expropriation of this wealth might bring Alberta's per capita GDP closer to the national average, it would hardly budge the statistic for the rest of Canada. By the bye, where were all the bleeding hearts when the province's fortunes were down and out and its social problems on the rise. As the old adage goes – it is sheer nonsense to think you can have it both ways!

For my money, Wild Rose Country would be better off in the longer run if the extra money was put toward endowing a substantial scholarship fund to help educate future generations; improving the infrastructure in the hope of making the roads safer; and perhaps even building a high-speed rail link between Edmonton and Calgary if it can be shown to be profitable on a stand-alone basis. Whatever, Canadians must realize that the recent windfall is the result of a nonrenewable resource – energy. By giving out the cash, rather than preserving the wealth through reinvestment, this asset is being sold forever. Just because the federal government chooses to squander Canada's future is no reason for Alberta, or any other province, to follow its lead. In a nutshell, one has to wonder why so many of us see fit to vote for these particular incumbent political parties when they seem to be utterly determined to fund how ever many new, inappropriate ways it takes to blow our bundle! It is sheer nonsense!

### **THE SPENDTHRIFTS SHOULD BE SHOT**

You and I both know that across the board tax cuts would be a far better tack, if for no other reason than making sure the politicians did not have the extra money in the first place to spend as they wished. If instead, they had to rely on the bond market to raise the funds necessary to pay for their pet programmes most would soon gain an appreciation of what money really costs. If they had to own a portfolio of preferred and common shares, income and royalty trust units, they might learn about the risks involved when investing in a business, be the enterprise successful, an also-ran, or a failure.

Unfortunately the law precludes them from doing so and that is sheer nonsense as far as entrepreneurs and investors are concerned. Had they to depend on investment income to get by, as many retirees do, they would know first-hand that the double taxation of dividends is unfair, and royalty and income trust distributions are taxed at a higher rate than corporate earnings. If the payouts go directly into tax-exempt investment accounts we all know, as they should, that exorbitant tax rates apply when these funds are eventually withdrawn. It should not have taken fully eighteen years since the first royalty trust ruling was granted in 1984 to come to such an understanding. As to whether or not these sort of trusts have a positive impact on the country's overall productivity and employment, the last people to be the judge are inept politicians and bureaucrats!

If the loosey-goosey ways of governments cannot be contained, and the spendthrifts cannot be brought to justice, may I suggest they be taken out to the back forty and shot before they kill us all by raising taxes yet another notch. As it now stands we spend 177 days of the year busting our ass just to pay the buggers off, and that is sheer nonsense!

### **WHEN YOU ADD IT ALL UP**

When all is said and done, it has all to do with money. Billions and billions of dollars, squeezed out of Canada's working stiffs by brutal levels of taxation, all washing about Ottawa like a tsunami and dispensed by the governing political party at its discretion, a cheque here, a grant there. Most politicians assume they can get away with anything and everything, knowing Parliament does not monitor the wrongdoing as carefully as it should. Though there is a litany of excuses, there is never an apology. Such is sheer nonsense!

In any organization as vast as our federal bureaucracy there are bound to be mistakes and foul-ups, but when nobody seems to give a damn about stemming the tide of waste, and nobody ever gets fired for cause, we and our country are in deep trouble. Doubt not that this indifference and arrogance lies at the top with the political masters. Beneath the bungling that foisted the useless gun registry upon us lies a subculture of largesse, privilege, and abuse that is close to being out of control, the result of the Liberal party's conviction that it governs by something close to divine right. Lest it need be reminded, crooks are crooks, crime is crime. There is nothing glorious about stealing a country's future. Quite to the contrary. It is sheer nonsense!

### **WHERE ARE THE CRITICS?**

Those of us who spend a lot of our waking hours thinking of Canada's future are quite disturbed by the lack of insightful debate, both in the House of Commons and the media. Why is it so many of the members of Parliament appear to be tongue-tied? Is it the result of not having done their homework so they are therefore lacking the knowledge and confidence needed to take a stand? Is it because they choose to pass the buck to others who,

in turn, also seem unwilling to tell it as it really is? When you consider how much time, money and effort we spend helping a chosen candidate get elected, few have any sway compared to the PMO once they set foot in Ottawa. It is sheer nonsense to think we live in a democracy. We do not!

The press is hardly any more effective. Though its members' remarks are often sugar coated, at least they have columns to write and deadlines to meet. While there is plenty of slipshod journalism about, it is a pity the fourth estate is not given the time to delve deeper into the topics dearest to Canadians. How is it possible the Conference Board of Canada has determined our country has fallen from third place in 2003 to twelfth place in 2005 in terms of productivity, yet a recent federal Department of Finance poll suggests fully 55 percent of Canadians believe the level remains high. Only 10 percent of respondents rated it as being low. Given that 70 percent of Canadians see improving productivity as the means of affording better social programmes, you have got to question how the media has been so far behind the eight ball in keeping Canadians in the know. It is sheer nonsense to allow triviality to overrule substance in this day and age.

It has been suggested media bias, like beauty, is often in the eyes of the beholder. A few newspapers and periodicals are slanted one way or another, and subscribers may chose from those they prefer. However, there must be a variety of voices and, in the main, they should balance each other out. For example, the *Toronto Star* is definitely left-of-centre, the *National Post* tilts to the right. Nobody can change the media except the media, and it will not do so if attacked by a partisan group. Rather, such acts usually cause it to hunker down to defend its practices. The only way for a political leader to gain the upper hand is to provide the scribes with something new to write about. Just bitching and complaining, as Stephen Harper has a tendency to do, just won't cut the mustard. Implying that an Order of Canada recognition could be in the offing if the reporter in question was to toe the incumbent government's party line does seem to do the trick, proof being the overwhelming press support the Liberals are currently enjoying, and the list of the most recent inductees. While I will not take exception with the appointment of either the past or present governor general, may I offer that the final decision should be made by Parliament and not the prime minister whomever he or she maybe in the future. Notwithstanding, it is sheer nonsense to think that our great country can realize its full potential without a number of competent critics to help level the playing field.

#### **BUILDING A BETTER CANADA**

On the touchy subject of immigration, as American universities have a wealth of scholarships to offer they more often than not get the pick of the crop of foreign students applying to study in North America. With a birth rate able to more than renew its population, the US can afford to be selective when admitting newcomers to work there and take up residence. We do not have enough in the way of scholarship money. Our fertility rate is far below the replacement level, and we are not particularly fussy about who we let into Canada. Nor have we as many interesting or high-paying jobs available once they get here. Unfortunately, many of those that have gained entry in recent years have been a drag on Canada's productivity, some needing to depend on the welfare system for assistance just to get by, which is one of the reasons why they have tended to stick together and not assimilate as most do in the United States. Though I will admit these remarks are somewhat brutal, they are nonetheless the truth!

Since education is much less expensive than ignorance, may I suggest government pork be replaced by a host of scholarships for well-rounded Canadian and foreign students; our marginal tax rates be chopped so gung-ho younger adults can more readily afford to have children; and the baby bonus increased so that either the mother or the father can stay home and raise them. If parents were to bring up their children properly in the first place, there would be fewer misfits in the classrooms and gangs on the streets than there are today. All the while we must address the myriad of problems in our school system. Not only should the curriculum be enhanced and teacher training improved, the various and sundry education boards would be well-advised to accept that those schools which encourage parent participation inevitably produce better-balanced students. Insisting they stay away is one of the reasons why teachers are having such a difficult time. Both Ontario's eye-popping dropout rate of 31 to 32 percent, up from 22 percent just a few years ago, and the fact many high-school aged students can barely read or write, is totally unacceptable. How in the world do these young people and their parents think they will ever get a decent job? Ignorance is not bliss. It is sheer nonsense!

#### **LEADING THE WAY**

David Dingwall's chewing gum caper may prove to be the *pièce de résistance*. It demonstrates the superlative sense of entitlement which led him to expense an item worth a paltry \$1.29. It reflects what great dramatists have always known, and every good opposition party has long recognized, an incidental but telling particular can seize an audience, or break the patience of an electorate. This instance of graspingness, coupled with the triviality and insignificance of the amount is, if not the straw that snaps the camel's spine, the one freebee the public will never want to forgive. It may in the end cost the man \$500,000 in farewell money – and Paul Martin and the Liberals the next federal election. We voters are no longer willing to accept the sheer nonsense that permeates the federal political system or that of most provinces and the territories.

Even so, Canadians who are craving some degree of satisfaction can take comfort in the return of the NHL under rules designed to promote speed and playmaking, not hooking, holding and fighting. Hopefully our star rookie, Sidney Crosby, will carry his compatriots on his eighteen-year-old-shoulders and shroud the fact that we have been slipping back into the status of being a sporting wasteland, knowing as we all do that the last of our teams to win the Stanley Cup was the Montreal Canadiens way back in 1993. That is sheer nonsense. After all, hockey is the national game. It defines our country and its people.

Yes, we can take pride in Steve Nash's MVP status in the NBA, Larry Walker's outstanding career in baseball, Mike Weir winning the Masters, Stephen Ames the Western Open, and J. C. Deacon, who lost on the final hole in his semi-final match for this year's US Amateur. However, the pickings have been slim in recent times. I only hope that more of us will take a greater interest in supporting up-and-coming athletes. No doubt you have your cheque book at the ready and are willing to help sponsor our Olympic team hopefuls. We have got to develop a great many more top-flight athletes to represent us in the next winter and summer games. It is sheer nonsense just to stand by and do nothing. It is our responsibility to lead the way.