The Guardian

Covers Prince Edward Island Like The Dew

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Published every week day morning (except Sundays and statutory holidays) at 165 Prince Street, Charlottetown, P.E.I., by Thomson Newspapers Ltd. Branch offices at Summerside, Montague, Alberton and Souris.

Represented nationally by Thomson Newspapers Advertising Services Toronto, 425 University Ave. Empire 3-8894; Montreal, 640 Cathcart Street, University 6-5942; Western office, 1030 West Georgia Street, Vancouver (MA 7037).

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Not over 35c per week by carrier.

$11.00 a year by mail or rural routes and areas not serviced by carrier.

$14.00 a year off Island and U.K. $20.00 per year in U.S. and elsewhere outside British Commonwealth.

Not over 7c per single copy.

Member Audit Bureau of Circulation.

"The strongest memory is weaker than the weakest ink"

The Missile Muddlers

In today's editorial page cartoon, the coming federal election is featurned as a "warhead" one, with Prime Minister Diefenbaker on the explosive end of a nuclear missile and the other party leaders clinging desperately to its flanks. It's a good illustration of the hazards involved in getting an issue of this kind off the launching pad. If it doesn't disintegrate before it gets into "the wide blue yonder," it will be a surprise to everyone.

The issue has already caused an upheaval in the Conservative government. Now it has made a cleavage in the Social Credit party. The leader, Mr. Thompson, says his platform does not rule out nuclear warheads but the party, if elected, would examine the question and "follow the advice of a non-partisan parliamentary defense committee." But his Quebec deputy, Mr. Caouette, says the answer is a straight "No, no!"

Mr. Douglas, for the New Democrats, professes to be more consistent. His party is emphatically against Canada's acquiring nuclear arms, either for its NATO forces or for NORAD. In that case, he must believe that Prime Minister Diefenbaker spoke the truth when he said Canada has not dishonored any commitments in this respect. Otherwise, as an honorable man, Mr. Douglas would be the last to suggest the course he proposes.

Both he and the Socred leaders assume that the question is still an open one, for Canada to decide. Why, then, haven't they said so? Ah, but that would be siding with Mr. Diefenbaker! And that wouldn't do since all three opposition parties voted to defeat the government on the floor of Parliament, on this issue among others.

And what of the Liberal leader himself? Plainly he doesn't know whether we should have nuclear weapons or not. But he claims we are "committed", and he's going to agree to take them now—and sign an agreement to this effect, as Washington requests. Then he will "take the matter up both in and outside Parliament" to have the agreement reconsidered.

What would happen them? Washington's mind is firmly made up on the matter, if Mr. Pearson's isn't. It would hold him to his agreement, whether it turned out to be "the best for Canada" or not; and then we would really be in trouble with our American neighbors if we backed out of it.

The best thing for all our party leaders, surely, would be to drop this silly issue before it explodes in their faces. It looked like a good anti-government play in the Commons, and served its purpose there. But it should now be left to cool off until the campaign fireworks are over.

Tax Cuts Unlikely

Recommended reading for the Canadian public at this time is the current issue of Canadian Financial Statistics, published by Wood, Gundy and Company Ltd., which makes available in concise form the annual financial statistics of the federal government, as well as of the 10 provinces and 18 of our larger Canadian cities

What we owe as Canadians surely has a bearing on what politicians have a right to promise us in their coming election appeals. Canada's net debt is given at $18,282,137,045; but this figure includes deductions for loans to and investments in crown corporations, loans to other national governments, and advances to exchange fund account. These, of course, are as safe as any investment these days, but there is no guarantee that they will be repaid. In addition, the book also points to securities issued by the Canadian National Railways and guaranteed by the government, in the sum of $1,637,100,000.

Of course, when the net debt and contingent liabilities of the provinces is added, the total mounts still higher. If we include the municipal debt, plus that of school commissions, the total becomes staggering. Not all of these statistics are covered in the Wood, Gundy book, nor does the booklet deal in terms of total debt. Its object is to give the individual picture. And the net total may well cause many folk to gasp, for it approaches $25,000,000,000.

Canada, the provinces and the municipalities face a long and continuing program of re-financing, for many of these governments are operating in a deficit position. This means an expanding debt, which in view of the amount Canadians now owe, is not a very comforting outlook. Looking to the future, there is no immediate relief in sight.

Not that we expect our politicians to agree with us on this point. If we are to judge by the last federal campaign, they will all be offering their own panaceas. But the figures, as given from the non-partisan source above quoted, should have a dampening effect on hopes for any far-reaching tax reductions.

There Is No Substitute

New Yorkers, still groping in the fog created by their newspaper strike, were in a good mood to appreciate the truth of some remarks recently made in the great American metropolis by a distinguished English visitor, Lord Francis-Williams. The theme of his lordship's speech was that neither radio nor television has proven a substitute for the press. This, he said, was equally true whether television and radio are run as a non profit making public service, like the BBC, or as a profit-making commercial services as in the U.S. and on the Independent Television channel in Britain.

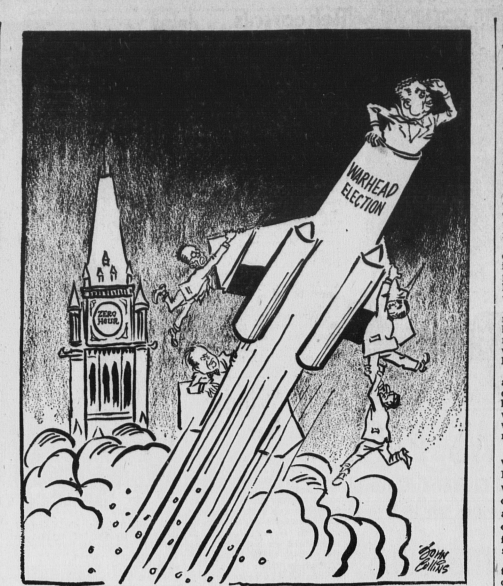
This inability to replace the printed word lies in their very nature. It arises in part from the fact that although a newspaper can be read and if necessary re-read at any hour of the twenty-four that is convenient, and at one's own pace, a radio or television program must be heard when it is transmitted. One has to be there at a particular hour of a particular day. And one has to absorb what is being offered at the rate at which it is being given. One cannot skip and one cannot turn back. It must be taken as it comes.

Broadcasting is in may ways the most pervasive means of communication in the history of the world. But it suffers one grave defect: it lacks durability. There is nothing so transient as a radio or television report, especially a report on current affairs. It must be caught on the wing or it is lost forever.

This impermanence in the means of communication is particularly important in the realm of ideas—without which civilization, particularly democratic civilization, cannot survive. The most potent ideas, like the most enduring expressions of the creative spirit, are rarely capable of being grasped in all their implications at one hearing. They need to be read and re-read, studied and restudied.

EDITORIAL NOTES

It is encouraging to note that the total value of Canadian fisheries exports reached an all-time record of $156,615,000 last year, representing an increase of approximately 9 per cent over 1961. Canada is now the third largest fish-exporting nation in the world, and ranks seventh among its fish-producing nations. Of the annual catch of 2,000 million pounds of fish and shellfish produced by her coastal and inland fisheries, approximately two-thirds are exported in fresh, frozen, canned or cured forms. More than 79,000 Canadians are commercial fishermen, and many more thousands are employed in the fish-processing industry.


WARHEAD ELECTION
ZERO HOUR
BOMB SILOS
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