

Opinion

PICKING AN OPPONENT MUST BE DONE CAREFULLY

Which Grit leader will the PM love to hate?

By DON MCGILLIVRAY
Southam News

OTTAWA — When a political party is choosing a new leader, the other party plays a game which might be called My Favorite Enemy.

The basic rule is to pick out the candidate you least want to fight and claim that's the enemy you want most of all.

You let it be known you're licking your lips at the prospect of facing this particular candidate. And you're terrified the other party will choose somebody else.

The object of the game is to persuade your opponents that there's some flaw they can't quite see in the candidate with the best chance of winning the next election. Suppose it's a Liberal leadership

contest. The object of the Tories is to get the Liberals saying to each other, "If A is so good, why do the Conservatives seem to want us to choose him?"

Obviously, the more the Liberals see A as the favorite enemy of the Tories, the less likely they are to pick him as leader.

In spying, this game is called "disinformation." It's bit like the Joel Chandler Harris story of the captured Brer Rabbit begging for death rather than the horror of being tossed into the briar patch which turns out to be, of course, his natural home.

In politics, there are a couple of refinements.

One is to have the message carried by friendly commentators. It gives it a certain arms-length credi-

bility.

That's how we know Prime Minister Brian Mulroney is rubbing his hands with glee at the prospect of a match-up with Jean Chretien.

Another is to build up candidates who are believed easier to defeat in the election. Even if these candidates don't win the leadership, they may leave the opposing party badly split, which is almost as good.

In 1984, when the Liberals chose John Turner over Chretien, Mulroney was full of support and sympathy for Chretien — "the people's candidate, a populist like me" — who had been "done in so horribly by the Liberal establishment."

Chretien doesn't get that big Mulroney build-up these days.

Now he's the patsy the PM would love to fight.

Paul Martin and Sheila Copps are getting the build-up from pro-Mulroney commentators.

The fact that Copps shares the praise of columnists who want the Tories to continue in office has a damaging implication for Martin. They obviously don't think he's strong enough to challenge Chretien.

Some of the pro-Tory writers did say Martin was "impressive" in his leadership campaign opener and had landed some stingers on Chretien's chops.

But others, who once denigrated Copps, now find her a hard-working candidate of broad vision, transformed from the rat packer of yesteryear.

There was little good news for Martin in Premier Robert Bourassa's attempt to get Premier David Peterson to join the leadership stakes.

In backing the Meech Lake accord with no changes, if necessary, Martin has taken the same stand as John Turner did. Turner found his support for Meech made no difference to the odd-couple alliance between Mulroney and Bourassa.

Now Martin's similar stand is getting him nothing but the back of Bourassa's hand.

The Mulroney-Bourassa alliance is likely to persist in the next federal election. The new Liberal leader, even if not Chretien, can't expect much help from the Liberal government of Quebec.

But Bourassa and Mulroney need

a federal Liberal leader strong enough to do the Meech Lake cause some good now but weak enough to lose the next election. It's no compliment to Peterson that he's Bourassa's choice for the role.

Role playing — theatre — is what politics is all about, according to a famous quote from Mulroney. And the prime ministerial tongue is never as much in the prime ministerial cheek as when speaking of political opponents.

That it's all part of a game is something to keep firmly in mind when we hear tell that the Tories prefer this candidate or that.

What they want above all is somebody they can beat in 1992. And they're not above using guile to nudge the Liberals toward that somebody.

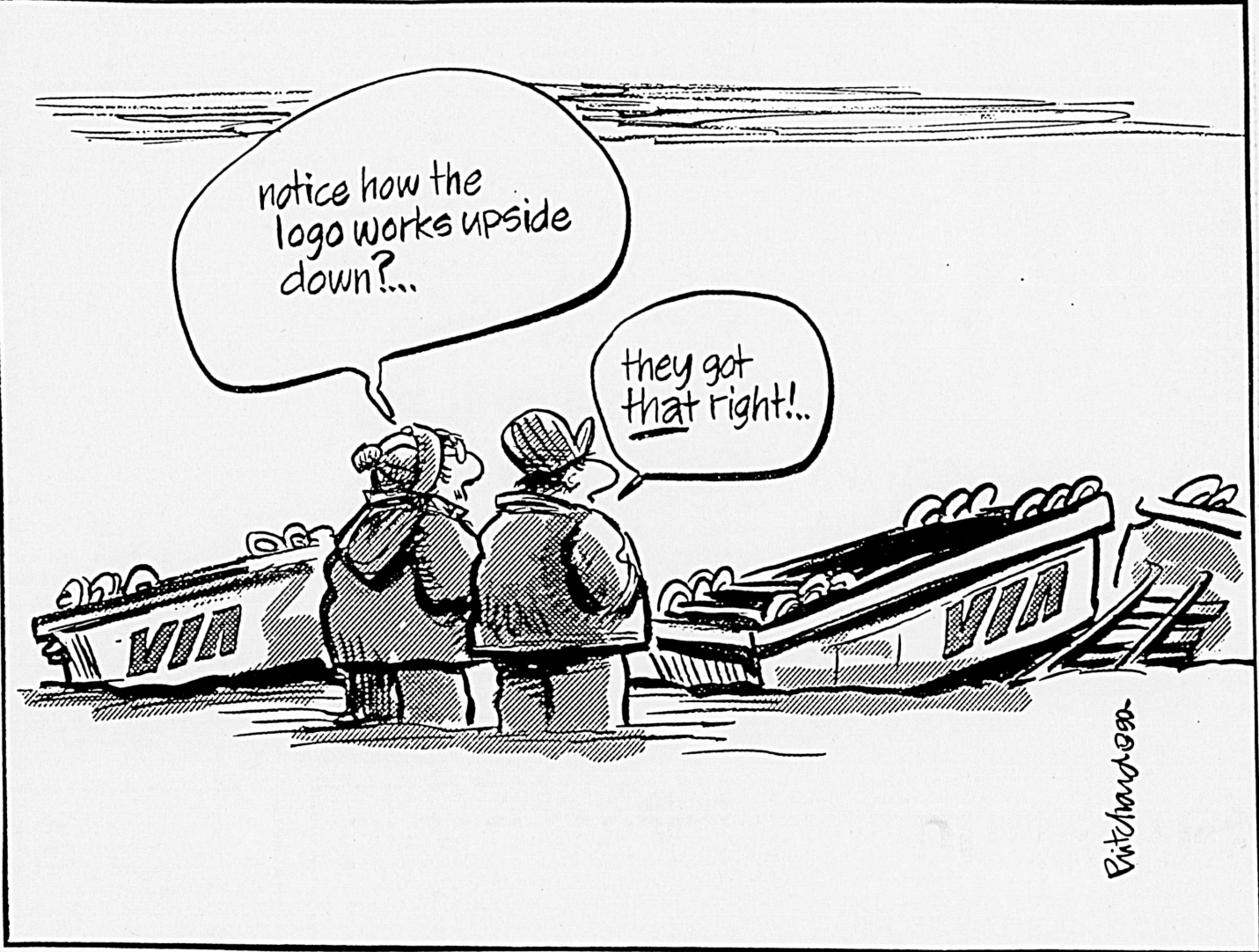
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Cause to smile?

Talk about conflict of interest. . .

Michael Wilson, one of the most astute as well as one of the most devious finance ministers this nation has had, must have mixed feelings these days when he talks about the state of the economy.

Wilson has been virtually silent on the possibility of a recession until the past week, when, obviously heartened by brighter economic predictions, he finally came out and said he doesn't see much likelihood of a recession this year.

Of course, he has his reasons for being optimistic.

He needs a healthy economy to launch a two-pronged attack on his government's deficit — action any responsible finance minister should do.

Wilson not only has to cut government spending, but has to enact his goods and services tax as well as use any other means possible to extract more taxes to cover the \$350-billion accumulated debt.

It would be hard to sell such increased levels of taxation and cuts in services if the economy was faltering, and perhaps the real question is whether Wilson would concede the possibility of a recession if one was on the horizon.

But with the next federal election as much as four years in the future, the one thing we can count on is that Wilson will use this spring's budget to bleed taxpayers for as much money as the economy can stand — and maybe just a little bit more.

Freedom's price

Edmonton Journal

If Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev was looking for a middle ground in Lithuania, he didn't find it. Lithuanians used his visit to forcefully press their case for independence, while Gorbachev warned just as firmly that the result could be "a tragedy." The standoff continues.

Still, there is cause for relief in the vexing situation. Gorbachev indicated many times that the solution, if it comes, will be a political one. In this winter of economic discontent and tensions among the nationalities, he remains loyal to the "new political thinking" that views military solutions as a thing of the past. Lithuanians are surely heartened.

This is not to say that the independence sought by most Lithuanians is just around the corner. Gorbachev made the trip not only to gauge the sentiment for independence — which is high — but also to warn of the consequences and preach restraint. Lithuanians, he insisted, cannot decide the question on their own. The preconditions for independence must first be worked out by Soviet legislators. People who assumed the process would be easy were listening to "Russian fairy tales and Lithuanian fairy tales."

Gorbachev's dilemma is extreme. Lithuania and its sister Baltic states of Latvia and Estonia are in the vanguard of demands for independence among several Soviet republics. Gains by one republic soon echo in the others. The Kremlin, with justification, fears that the granting of independence to even the tiny Baltic republics will cause the demands of the larger republics to snowball.

The tenseness of the nationalities question was demonstrated elsewhere in the Soviet Union even as Gorbachev spoke to the Lithuanians. Azerbaijanis were in open revolt in their longstanding battle with neighboring Armenia over the possession of a disputed territory. Georgians outside Tbilisi took over government offices and demanded independence. On the Iranian border last week, Soviet Muslims tore down fences and installations separating the Soviet Union and Iran.

In the Baltic states, the emphasis is on peaceful demands which permit Gorbachev to contemplate peaceful solutions. The distinction between peaceful nationalist protests and violent ones may become crucial if violent protests continue in some republics, inviting repressive measures that Moscow can justify on civil grounds.

In a peaceful fashion, Lithuanians will make critical political choices in elections next month. The stage has already been set for a strong nationalist message by Lithuania's decision to permit multi-party elections and by the local Communist party's decision to cut ties with Moscow. The outcome — a vote for Sajudis, the nationalist movement — seems predictable.

Gorbachev continues to meet these challenges to Moscow's authority with pleas for dialogue and promises of political change, particularly of greater autonomy for the local republics. His hope seems to be that a middle ground can yet be found, giving autonomy to the republics within a new federal framework. In Lithuania's case, though, the middle ground of agreement continues to elude him.

(Distributed by Southam News.)

HE CAN DANCE, BUT CAN HE HIDE?

Broadbent bobs on Meech

OTTAWA — Sometimes, even the most cynical of political observers (me) gets confused.

Nobody has ever accused this correspondent of having high expectations for our political leaders.

Even so, I periodically underestimate their ability to be disingenuous.

Take Ed Broadbent, for example. The former NDP leader, as you know, is just about to step into a Tory patronage plum as head of an international human rights group.

Some people thought this was rather hypocritical of Broadbent, given his historical stance against patronage, either Liberal or Tory.

This double standard seems particularly unsavory in light of that party's historic, but bogus claim, that it exercises a higher moral tone than the two oldline parties.

But Audrey McLaughlin, the party's new leader, didn't seem at all disturbed by this matter.

Indeed, she saw the appointment of Broadbent as a great choice by Brian Mulroney. Nobody is more qualified than Broadbent for such a post she said, completely sidestepping the ethical question. Nobody questioned his credentials. It's his ethics which were being questioned.

However, given McLaughlin's position, one can only assume that the NDP's policy on patronage is that it is bad unless the job goes to a New Democrat. Then it's good.

Anyway, back to Broadbent.

During the three years leading up to the NDP leadership conven-

tion in Winnipeg, he steadfastly supported the Meech Lake Accord, wars and all.

In fact, he openly threatened some members of his caucus who disagreed with Meech Lake, and punished one who wouldn't succumb by taking away his critic's post.

Broadbent said Meech must be approved, period.

That was before Winnipeg.

Meech Lake was the topic there of Broadbent's last public utterance as NDP leader.

He walked up to the floor microphone during debate on the issue and this is what he said:

"Ever since founding our Party we have accepted our idea that Quebec is not a province like the others, it is a distinct society.

"We called for changes but accepted the Accord, with difficulty, because we believed we had to welcome Quebec.

"But there have been changes in the past two years. We have an

impasse that must be faced.

"So federal council wrote a resolution calling on the people of Canada to work now for changes . . .

"I would like to underline that both the motion and the referral say 'yes' to Quebec, the two propose improvements, but the objective is to break the impasse.

"As a Party we must make it clear to those in power in Canada that we the NDP want Quebec to be welcome in confederation but we believe very strongly that some changes are necessary and must be made now."

It is difficult to misconstrue that as anything but a break from Broadbent's previously-held view that Meech had to be accepted, wars and all.

And so it was assumed by everybody who heard Broadbent, to the consternation of many and the joy of some, that the longtime socialist hero had changed his view on Meech Lake.

But now we see this same man pop up on the weekend at a workshop on Meech Lake at Montreal's McGill University.

Broadbent is listed along with a series of "supporters" of Meech Lake, such as Dickie Hatfield and Bob Stanfield.

One of the methods suggested by the Meech backers is to send Quebec anglophones across the country to explain to English Canada why they are supporting the Accord.

Asked about that in an interview, Broadbent said, "It would be a

very useful thing for the English majority in the rest of Canada to hear why the English minority in Quebec are supporting the accord."

What are we to conclude from all this?

Does Broadbent support Meech, or does he want changes?

Surely his apparent retreat from his new-found position at Winnipeg wouldn't have anything to do with the fact he'll soon be living directly off the avails of Tory patronage?

Or is that just too cynical? Tell us it ain't so, Ed.

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