

OUR MAYOR SAYS

**COLUMNS FROM THE *WESTMOUNT EXAMINER*
1991 - 2001**

**EDITORIALS FROM *THE GAZETTE*
1996 – 2001**

**LETTERS TO CITIZENS
2000 - 2001**

Peter F. Trent

November 8, 1991

SETTLING IN

First-time visitors to Mayor Cutler's office invariably did a double-take on seeing a score of World-War II helmets festooning the upper walls. They were all lined up - in good military fashion - creating a kind of knobby fascia. One had to look closely to realize what they were.

While rummaging around in the City Hall attic, May came across these helmets, which were originally issued to air-raid wardens.

With the stand-off between her and the rest of council still going on, she felt these helmets provided a perfect visual metaphor for a mayor under siege. I think she was also making some artistic statement in using these "objets trouvés", but it was in a language quite foreign to me, at least.

I remember one budget night we all paraded into the council chamber with these helmets perched on our heads.

The tin hats were the first to go when I "took possession" of the mayor's office. I might have to take arms against a sea of troubles, but a divided council is thankfully not one of them.

As I settled in last week, I felt a familiar feeling: a mild exhilaration mixed with a twinge of solitariness. It was a similar sensation I felt while president of my firm for all those years.

Along with the leadership role comes the realization of being just a bit alone: the buck indeed stops here. I can imagine the solitude May must have felt during that schism of council.

Being a mayor is not the same as being a company president. Especially with the superb team of new councillors with me, there is a certain collegiality that leads to group decisions. The dynamics are subtle, and take a little time to master before things start to get done. Even May had some problems with this *primus inter pares* concept at first. In fact, in England, the mayor is often chosen from among the councillors, not by suffrage.

As far as I am concerned, I didn't take on this job just to run another organisation. As mayor, I shall be myself: if people don't like what they see, then I won't be in the running next time. And that's a promise.

December 5, 1991

DESTRUCTION BY FIRE

I got the call at 1:00 a.m.: there's a fire at 4469 St. Catherine, will you go? Luckily, I was up - at a neighbour's in fact, just about to leave. The fire probably started in the restaurant, and by the time I got there it had also totally engulfed the upstairs apartment.

There is really not much a mayor can do at a fire. I talked to the now-homeless tenants: what can you say to a mother and daughter who were watching their home being destroyed? Their keepsakes, family photos, and carefully-chosen comforts of living, now eradicated in a space of minutes. And a cat still up there.

Like most people, I am decidedly uncomfortable in the presence of violence, and fire is probably one of the most violent and indiscriminate forces imaginable.

In the early 60's, our family lived in a town that had a volunteer fire department. An air-raid siren was used to summon the men. My father, who served in the artillery during the London blitz, would turn white at this sound, thinking of those far-off nights in 1940.

The blitz brought out the best in the English. Likewise, in last week's fire and during the fire on Rosemount Crescent three years ago, the same kind of camaraderie formed. Faced with the implacable violence of fire, we allow our humanity to emerge as a kind of counterbalance.

Bruce St. Louis, our Operations Manager, stayed on until five o'clock. Cold, wet, and smelling of smoke, I left about 2:30 a.m. and walked home. At least I had a home to go to.

The reassuring sight of our firetrucks coming from a station only one-half a mile away reminded me of the impending loss of our MUC police station. Over the next few weeks, your Council will be deciding what strategy to adopt in reaction to what is as yet a carefully-leaked rumour.

Anyone who can say with a straight face that 14 police stations across the Island can provide the same service as 24 must be the same sort of person who can blithely increase MUC spending some 14% in two years, while a recession is on. Enough is enough.

December 12, 1991

MODERN-AGE SCHOLASTICISM

Last Tuesday night, M. Racicot, the genial Director of the MUC Evaluation Department, was sharing with a dutifully-attentive Westmount audience the arcana of his trade. With the enthusiasm of a medieval Scholastic, he revealed the rigorous logic of our property valuation system - the scaffolding surrounding the edifice of "market value".

Once you accepted the notion of property market values as a reasonable basis for municipal taxation, why, then everything just fell into place. Or nearly. One has to overlook a few dialectical lapses that would have pained his spiritual forerunners.

For example, if there were not enough vacant land sales in Westmount to establish land values, never mind: just extrapolate the value from cases where people bought property and demolished the house. Add the demolition cost to the purchase price, and hey presto!, out comes the land value. Even if the rarity of the occurrence means the sample size would be too small for even a sloppy researcher to accept, never mind: it's not an *exact* science. M. Racicot even jokes about having to use tweezers to get his data.

While listening to M. Racicot drone on, my thoughts started to wander. If property value is such a fair way to charge for government services, why not pay for highways by being charged a tax based on the value of vehicles? The more expensive the car or truck, the more tax you would pay.

The degree to which one *used* the roads would be irrelevant, so vehicle weight, size or odometer readings would not be a factor in computing your tax. Assessors would visit your car from time to time to determine its present value. If you replaced your windows, stretched your limousine, or put a new kitchen in your trailer - up goes your evaluation. Well-paid functionaries would roam the city, muttering about valuation techniques such as replacement cost, income generation, or purchase price, as they cast an appraising eye on people's cars.

A ridiculous idea? Well, that's the way we charge for municipal services. Not by use, or by personal income, but by property value.

In another column, I shall continue my exegesis of the property tax system. If you nod off, I'll understand.

December 19, 1991

CHRISTMASTIDE IN CAMELOT

*This demesne, this Camelot, this bejewelled isle
Rises from the noxious and plebeian vapours
Of engirdling Montreal, whose pestilential water
Is Westmount required to purchase at ruinous price.
Centred in this happy Island, a castle
Is found, with battlements strong and lofty tower,
Which local vassals clepe their City Hall,
Bedecked with ivy in Summer, at Yuletide
Bespangled with magick faerie lights.*

The above is a mercifully-short excerpt from a mock-epic poem (or epic mock-poem) that I wrote last year.

I (bashfully) quote from it because of the "magick faerie lights" of City Hall. The family of one of our councillors has made it quite clear to me that we should dispense with the white Xmas lights outlining our local castle in Harrods' style, and return to the centrally-placed lighted tree. I of course shall not reveal who these staunch traditionalists are, except to say their surname begins with a "W".

Now, I rather like the new lighting arrangement: it makes things look a bit more like Camelot. The unnamed family probably thinks it looks like a used-car lot.

Another critic plumps for *more* lights. She wants us to detail every nook and crenellation.

Our Westmount Xmas cards still depict a huge decorated tree front and centre of City Hall. It does look handsome, I must admit. We now have to content ourselves with a naturally-growing tree, apologetically stuck off to one side. At least we no longer have to chop down a tree each year.

The new lighting scheme gave us the excuse to have a lighting ceremony - now with a menorah added - whereby your chief magistrate gives the signal and the Light and Power Department "trips the light fantastic". This year, the E.C.S. choir sang beautifully.

While still on this rather light subject, I cannot help but notice the mayor's lamp standards are still not up yet. Maybe I'll get them for Christmas.

To all of you I offer my best wishes of the season, and the hope of a joyful 1992.

January 9, 1992

BUDGETARY BLUES

January was the Roman month consecrated to Janus, that two-headed god of doorways and beginnings. Being bicephalous, Janus could quite conveniently look both forward and backward. His blessing was sought at the beginning of every day, month, and year.

Old Janus would be balefully eyeing the year ahead as we start it off with a particularly tough municipal budget.

Our only spending increases are a result of upped payroll contributions to Ottawa/Quebec, greater MUC spending, and Ryan's "reform".

With a detachment that can only be described as Olympian, Claude Ryan has shuffled off some \$375 million of transit subsidies. The MUC in turn has dumped its share on its member cities without so much as a by your leave. And we so quickly forget the \$320 million school tax grab that started in 1990.

Now, you would think that the MUC would pare down its own costs, considering: a) the recession and b) the Ryan cuts. Not so. Before finance expenses, the MUC has increased its own spending *50% in five years!*

Ryan did leave us an out. After years of disallowing a variable tax rate, Quebec will now permit us to use a surtax on non-residential property.

Now, the commercial sector in Westmount has been paying less and less of the tax burden, and the homeowner more and more - *in spite of* increased commercial floor space. The total of commercial 1991 tax rates charged by Westmount was 45% of that of Montreal, the city that surrounds us on all fronts. With the new surtax, this will go to about 60% - the same as the residential rate differential between Westmount and Montreal. (Yes, our tax rate is only 60% of Montreal's.)

Our society's laws and regulations have become almost pathologically complex. Tax laws, in an attempt to be fair - and raise more money - are positively Byzantine. Simplicity in taxation is not just a virtue, it should be a requirement.

Ryan's "reform" brings with it the usual overwrought trappings acquired through political compromise: the option of keeping the old business tax (three - count them - three taxes!), an horrendously complex and costly abatement mechanism for vacancies, and the optional phasing-in of valuation increases.

All these well-meaning attempts to ease the short-term pain must fail, since they are poorly understood and cost a fortune to administer.

Janus gave man the knowledge of civil law. He should have stayed in the doorway business.

January 16, 1992

LIVING OFF OUR CAPITAL - PART I

I always make a point of going in the front door of City Hall. I try to avoid that mean little door around the back. My silent protests notwithstanding, the campaign for dignified entry has been lost ever since the reception desk was hustled off downstairs.

Anyway, as you enter the back door you are confronted with a panel listing all the City departments and their many addresses...Bethune, The Glen, Stanton, St Catherine, Sherbrooke. It reads like a Lovell's directory of Westmount.

We have nearly two dozen municipal buildings scattered all over our 1,000 acre city.

Now, while we have been pretty prolific in creating buildings, we have mostly left them to fend for themselves. And that's the subject of this and next week's column.

Fact: the average age of a public building in Westmount is about 60 years old. The last time we did a thorough (though questionable) renovation anywhere in the city took place over 25 years ago, when City Hall was just about gutted.

Take our Fire Station. Please. The original 1896 building is now overlaid by a series of jerry-built modifications. The apparatus room that was designed for horse-drawn equipment is still there. We only buy those trucks that can fit through our doors. You want to go to the fire prevention office? No problem. It's upstairs, past the showers and beds of the firemen's dormitory.

Our greenhouses, built in 1927, are so neglected that the wood framing is rotted, the cheap terrazzo cracked, the plastic glazing cupped. Even the little stone frogs that spouted water into our tiled pool are no more.

In common with most Westmount buildings, the roof of Victoria Hall leaks. It has no air conditioning, or proper audio system, or decent chairs. The heating system is tempermental. The kitchens are unappetizing. The dressing rooms are in fluorescent-lit early Arborite. This theme is continued in the stair wells with their windowsills of real wood-grain Formica.

In a desultory attempt to fix up Victoria Hall some years ago, we stuck down vinyl-asbestos floor tiles that are impossible to keep clean. They are already curling from water damage. We did improve the lighting in the main hall a little bit, but elsewhere it is dark and uninviting.

If you're still with me, this doleful litany will continue next week with a tour of the library and other buildings. And then I'll talk about what we should do about this not-so-benign neglect.

January 23, 1992

LIVING OFF OUR CAPITAL - PART II

Westmount used to build solid yet delightful buildings like City Hall, the Library, and the Conservatory. In the 50s and 60s, we renovated and annexed buildings with scant regard for historical integrity. We built some uninspired things like the City Hall and Library annexes. Ever since, we have patched here and there -slipping repairs almost apologetically into the budget. Our capital budgets have been dominated by civil engineering works.

Actually, the City Hall itself, in spite of the "sixties"-flavoured renovations, has got by in fairly good shape. One has to overlook, however, the patchwork decoration. The interior of City Hall is rather like a museum of the recent decorative arts, with each room dedicated to a different style and time.

Our Library has not fared so well. While the Library was added to more than four times since it was first built in 1899, it was (again) the 50s and 60s that were terribly unkind to this, our most-used facility.

1959 saw that rather pedestrian-looking Library annex with its inhospitable stacks. That year, we also partitioned off the delightful former Childrens' Library into dreary little offices and corridors. Acoustic tile and gyproc took the place of delicate detailing.

In 1967, we inexplicably allowed the double-sided fireplace in the Library reference room to be demolished.

At some point, the slate roof tiles of the old Library were replaced with nice modern asphalt shingles. They cost a lot less, last one-quarter as long, and look it.

Shortly, we will be the proud owner of a 1907 train station that is in not much better shape than our 1902 Lawn Bowling clubhouse. (While the latter is nearly literally falling down, I hope we don't gentrify it to the point it loses its ramshackle charm.)

The less said about the shape of our parks, the better.

In the 1958 arena, there is a daily battle going on between the heaters blowing directly on the ice, and the refrigeration unit manfully trying to keep the ice frozen. The building itself looks like a rejected military drill hall.

Next week, I'll give some ideas of how we can deal with this regrettable state of affairs, given the necessarily tight economic constraints.

January 30, 1992

LIVING OFF OUR CAPITAL (PART III)

A favourite notion of mine is to regard Westmount taxpayers as both shareholders and clients of our municipal corporation.

As shareholders, we have a considerable stake in our city. With 120 acres of parks and 140 acres of streets, public land - one-quarter of all Westmount land area - is worth about \$400 million. Adding about \$100 million for buildings, pavement, and equipment, the total value of the city's assets tot up to around \$500 million - or \$25,000 for each citizen.

Now, doesn't that make you feel a little bit wealthier?

There is not much we have to do about our investment in land. As I have been on about in my last two columns, it's our stake in the city's bricks and mortar that has me concerned.

If we were to start from scratch, I've calculated it would cost about \$75 million to replace our two major non-land assets: \$25 million for buildings and \$50 million for roads. It turns out that we must totally replace ('reconstruct') a road every 50 years. Assuming the life of a building before major renovation is also 50 years, then - in the simplest terms - we should be spending \$1.0 million a year reconstructing roads, and half that for buildings.

How are we doing? Well, we are spending a good sight more than \$1.0 million a year on road reconstruction because of 'catch-up', but very little on buildings. In fact, for the period 1990-1994, our projected spending on roads is about \$2.2 million per year, and only 10% of that on buildings - not counting any Library renovation.

Why this seeming reluctance to keep up our ageing buildings? Is it diffident politicians who are squeamish about publicly spending on bricks and mortar, but not on concrete and asphalt? Afraid of committing a Doré? Perhaps. Or perhaps the general feeling is that buildings are immutable, they are just always *there*. It is easier to notice potholes than to contemplate the slow erosion of our architecture. Road reconstruction is simple, visible, and uncontroversial.

I am not necessarily advocating spending more on capital works, just a redeployment.

Aside from any Library renovation - and that will be the subject of a poll - I would like to see capital spending, on average, to respect the 2:1 ratio of our two major assets.

If we let a road go too long before reconstruction, the only possible damage is to a few cars. If we don't restore buildings, or if we restore on the cheap, not only are we shortchanging our clientele with second-rate facilities, but the buildings themselves eventually have to be torn down. We are wasting a resource.

Westmount has heritage buildings but no heritage pavements.

February 6, 1992

ALEA IACTA EST

Sent on their way with a carefully-worded letter from your chief magistrate, the 1992 tax bills went out last Thursday. Given the finality of that act, I thought the appropriate phrase - a Caesarean selection - would be: "the die is cast" (*alea iacta est*, or perhaps more aptly, *ratio emissa est* - the reckoning is sent).

These bills are the progeny resulting from the forced and unnatural coupling of Westmount's husbandry and the MUC's profligacy. The gestation period was long: we started working on the budget back in May.

The letter that accompanied the bills took a good deal of time to compose ("craft" as a verb is a neologism we don't need). I got some valuable help from Councillor John Lehnert and the Administration. After all, it was my "coming-out" letter as Mayor. And what a cocktail of fiscal woes it contained!

I tried to forestall some of the negative reaction by anticipating the major irritants: 1) for many taxpayers, there was some nasty news about huge evaluation hikes; 2) for the commercial sector, rates were upped considerably, because of its ever-diminishing share of the total tax burden; and, 3) as the bill collector for spiralling MUC costs, Westmount becomes the potential victim of a shoot-the-messenger syndrome.

We are in thrall to the MUC: whatever they decide to spend, we have to pay. We have 1% of the population of the MUC, and I have 1% of the vote as Mayor, yet we pay nearly 3% of the costs of this body. Costs are charged out by total evaluation, not by use of services.

This brings me back full circle to the inequity of using evaluations as a means of charging for government services. The faithful reader - notice I used the singular - will remember I talked about this subject in a column in December.

The MUC provides mass transit (39% of total MUC costs), police services (35%), and sewage treatment (16%).

The use of mass transit has nothing to do with the evaluation of a taxpayer's property. It's about as relevant as tying it to the value of one's furniture or stamp collection.

Sewage treatment demand is likewise a function of population, not evaluation.

Some argue that tying police services to evaluation has merit in that more expensive residences need more police protection. This is not in fact true. The break-and-entry rate in Westmount is lower than in St. Henri. Intuitive justice requires that the average Westmouter pay a greater share of MUC services than, say, the average St. Henriite. But how to go about it? Evaluation is patently no measure of service *use*, but I question whether it is even a fair measure of capacity to pay. Anyway, should municipalities be in the business of wealth transfer? More on this next week.

February 13, 1992

OUR ADDLED-VALUE TAX

Charging for municipal services by property evaluation is regressive, capricious, and unnecessarily complicated. It bears no relationship with the *consumption* of such services, nor is it even a valid measure of one's ability to pay. It is a feudal hold-over, harking back to the days when real property ownership *was* a measure of wealth (and only male landowners could vote). Even as late as turn-of-the-century England, only 10% of the population owned their own houses.

Taxation by property value is a fiscal appendix serving no modern purpose. Today, it is, in effect, a tax on unrealized capital gains - a practice even our rapacious Revenue Canada finds unfair. In other words, it is a tax on *potential* wealth.

The usual argument trotted out in favour of using real property as a tax base is that people with more expensive properties should pay more tax, as if there were some relationship between one's ability to pay and the value of one's house. If this were true, surely Ottawa could simplify our income tax system by taxing us only on the value of our property.

Let's posit for a moment that house values had something to do with ability to pay. Since it is generally accepted that the fairest way to measure "ability to pay" is through income, one would expect a one-to-one relationship with property values and income. Not so. In Westmount, the average dwelling is evaluated at \$122,000 per capita. Across the MUC, the equivalent value is \$35,000. We should therefore see that the average Westmount income run about 3.5 times the equivalent for the MUC. According to Statistics Canada, the average Westmounter earns only twice the MUC average.

And all this assumes, of course, that we could reach the evaluator's nirvana where one's evaluation had a passing resemblance to its real and actual value.

Because of rent control, apartment buildings are artificially under-evaluated, and substantially so. Tenants are indirectly paying a fraction of the taxes they would pay in a free market. The resultant tax break has sometimes little to do with the ability to pay, and certainly nothing to do with the use of services. *If* we are going to tax according to use of services, we should charge based on population for MUC services, and by "tarification" for local services. If we are going to tax based on capacity to pay, we'll have to find a more meaningful measure than property evaluation. And a municipal income tax is too centralizing and cumbersome.

February 20, 1992

OUR ADDLED-VALUE TAX (PART II)

Municipal taxation. Those two words can cause a) eyes to glaze over, or b) blood pressures to go ballistic. The intensity of the reaction is affected by: 1) the time of year (tax bills go out January 31); 2) an arbitrary increase in evaluation (is there any other kind?); and, 3) home ownership (the trickling-down of taxes through apartment rents tends to dilute their impact; besides, homeowners on average pay over six times as much tax as tenants).

The reaction of most commercial property owners is, at the time of writing, unprintable. Still, over the last two years, commercial taxes have increased 15% - far less than in most MUC cities. And over the past 15 years, the commercial sector in Westmount has doubled in size, yet has seen its share of the total tax burden actually drop.

Anyway, back to evaluating our property tax system.

There are at least two fundamentally different ways you can look at municipal taxation. Since taxes are simply a way of paying for services, they could either be tied to one's *use* of those services, or to one's *ability to pay*. As I attempted to argue in last week's column, taxation by evaluation does a poor job of reflecting the ability to pay, and has little to do with use of services. And the term "accurate evaluations" is as oxymoronic as "MUC frugality".

Taxation by evaluation has a number of undesirable by-products. To start with, it serves as a strong disincentive to improve or renovate properties. Not surprisingly, it also results in a lot of construction without building permits.

There is another subtly corrosive effect on the urban landscape.

Since it is easier to evaluate land as compared to buildings, the disproportionately high taxes on land have driven owners over the years to sell off green space. This is especially true in Westmount, an already densely-built city. Shorn of the land needed to set them off, older houses look ungainly and out-of-place. Newer infill houses (usually of some alien and narcissistic design) are shoehorned in between them. Gardens disappear that were part of the original composition.

Now, nearly two-thirds of MUC households are rented (over three-quarters in Montreal). This is one of the highest rates in North America. Instead of encouraging families to buy houses in the MUC, the tax system forces them off the island to Laval and the South Shore. By washing his hands of transit subsidies, Ryan has just exacerbated this trend - the so-called 'doughnut effect'.

The core of the MUC is more and more made up of the poor, the elderly, and the immigrant. The middle classes are fleeing Montreal. The population of the City of Montreal has dropped by one-quarter in the last two decades.

Result: a hugely-expensive infrastructure serving fewer people. Laval and the South Shore have grown like Topsy. New schools are built off-island:

they are closing down all over the MUC.

February 27, 1992

THE REFORMATION ACCORDING TO RYAN

Every five years or so, something deep within the distinct Quebec psyche wells up, triggering a demand for municipal tax reform. There was the Fiscal Reform of 1980, the Parizeau Report of 1986 (that called for a surtax to replace the business tax), and then came the infamous Ryan "reform" that was imposed on municipalities in 1991.

1980 Fiscal Reform reinforced the principle that wealth transfer was the purview of "higher" levels of government. We should tax according to the benefit received and not capacity to pay. Municipalities were not to be in the business of income redistribution.

Quebec would no longer share sales taxes with the municipalities, but gave us free rein in the property tax field by virtually wiping out school taxes. (It didn't take long for Ryan to renege on *that* deal!)

Recognizing that evaluation had little to do with service use, the 1980 Fiscal Reform paved the way for subsequent laws allowing for "tarification" of services, be they police, fire, or garbage. It contemplated taxes based on square footage and on height. It even allowed for a poll tax.

In spite of this clear message of user-pay, the MUC plodded along, sticking to its grossly unfair cost sharing system. We vote by population, we get services by population, but we pay by evaluation. Hardly a recipe for thrifty management of the MUC.

Montreal North pays about the same as Westmount to the MUC, yet has nearly *five times* our population!

Whenever someone starts mucking about with the tax system without thinking things through, you get a lot of side-effects. Ryan's 1991 "reform" is no exception. By wiping out Quebec operating subsidies for mass transit, Ryan (unwittingly, we assume) shook one of the basic underpinnings of municipal taxation: that we should charge based on *use* not on ability to pay.

Ryan's "reform" turned this principle on its ear. Why? Well, as long as Quebec was picking up the tab for a good portion of mass transit, it was possible to argue the remainder could be charged out by *use*. The "social costs" of mass transit were covered by Quebec. Higher levels of government all over the world do not leave it up to the cities to pay for what amounts to guaranteeing a minimum standard of living and reducing pollution.

Now we have the full burden of transit operating costs, it is much harder to ask the poorer municipalities to kick in just based on population. Certainly, we can't ask the poor and the elderly who use mass transit to pay any more. Ryan's changes dragged municipalities into the income redistribution game, whether they wanted it or not. We have become reluctant agents of wealth transfer.

Paradoxically, Ryan's original proposals allowed for the MUC to charge out to the member municipalities based on population or mass transit mileage, ridership, or hours of service! This provision was quietly removed six months later under pressure from the most populous cities who would

have the most to lose (and who make up most of the power structure of the MUC).

The MUC Suburban mayors hit upon a formula some years ago of using 50% population, 50% evaluation for their shared costs and those of the Waste Management Board (the Régie). The MUC would do well to adopt this compromise. Next week, I'll put forward another method.

March 5, 1992

HOW TO CUT OUR TAX BILLS BY ONE-QUARTER

In the last few columns, I have described the congenital defects in our system of municipal taxation based on property value:

- 1) Valuation is no measure of *use* of services (it's about as sensible as charging for the use of our highways based on the value of one's car);
- 2) Valuations rarely reflect true market value. It's like trying to zero in on a moving immovable target;
- 3) While valuations might sometimes be a reflection of one's wealth, they have only a tenuous relationship with the ability to pay;
- 4) This tax discourages home renovation and eats away at private green space.

As a long-time critic of both the MUC and the tax system, what do I suggest?

First of all, MUC costs should be charged out 50% on *ability to pay* and 50% on *use*.

The best measure of ability to pay is income. So why not charge out based on the aggregate personal income in each municipality? This data is readily available from Revenue Canada. And the best measure of use is, of course, population.

This way, residential shared costs could be set yearly with a few computer keystrokes.

Commercial *ability to pay* could continue to be charged by evaluation, although a much easier, and pretty accurate measure would be simple square footage of floor area. There is a good argument that corporate income generating ability is related to the size of office, plant, or retail assets. Floor area is also an excellent indicator of commercial *use* of MUC services, as the number of employees and clients increases with an increase in floor area. Unlike residents, corporations can't tolerate unproductive space. Government buildings would be treated the same way. Vacant land would be taxed on floor area potential.

Under this scheme, Westmount would see its apportionment drop from its current 2.7% to (very roughly) 1.6%:

Ability to pay:

Share of total MUC personal income	2.2%
Share of total MUC non-residential area	1.5%

Use:

Share of total MUC population	1.1%
Share of total MUC non-residential area	1.5%

Average of all four criteria	<u>1.6%</u>
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Your tax bill would be slashed by *one-quarter*!

You will note I am suggesting that two of the four criteria be tied to commercial/governmental assets. Currently, the MUC charges out based on what it pleases them to call "fiscal potential" (essentially, evaluation). One-half of this fiscal potential comes from the commercial and governmental sector.

It is clear that *any* of these criteria would result in a precipitous drop in our MUC apportionment - proof that the current system is decidedly unfair. Structurally, I would like to see radical changes in the MUC. The MUCTC, a self-administered body, could easily be removed from the MUC and form, with Laval and the South Shore, a truly regional transit system. Costs would be shared as above.

Voting at the MUC should be by contribution, not population - with a cap on spending tied to the spending of contributing cities.

Next week: My ideas for a new local taxation method. Then a respite from all this technical tax stuff.

March 12, 1992

TAXING BY SQUARE FEET

In the early Forties, the City of Montreal availed itself of a rich banquet of taxes. Property taxes represented one-half of revenues. But Montreal also managed to tax water, amusements, utilities, telephones, radios (at \$2 a year), cars (\$5 a year), and even insurance premiums. A municipal income tax was also in force. They taxed anything that moved, breathed, communicated, or just passively sheltered.

Compared to this, even the English tax on windows (1697-1851) doesn't seem so bizarre.

Every so often, we have to change the way we tax. In my view, it's high time we dumped property taxation by evaluation. Last week, I proposed that MUC costs be charged out 50% by *ability to pay* and 50% by *use*. This could be done by charging according to population, global personal income, and commercial floor space.

Some of these "macro" methods don't lend themselves to local taxation: a municipal income tax is too centralising, and taxing by population is, in effect, a poll tax. (The latin term for a poll tax - *capitation* - sounds even dangerous to one's health.) Besides, trying to keep track of the comings and goings of citizens would be impossible. Even an occupancy tax is pretty brutal.

I don't think we should get stuck on the idea that MUC costs must be charged to the cities in the same manner that people are taxed locally. When it comes to taxing Westmounters, the fairest compromise among 1) ability to pay, 2) use of services, and 3) consumption of resources is to *tax gross floor area, both commercial and residential*. "Floor area" would be all enclosed space. Land area would be taxed at a reduced rate.

This would eliminate the \$23 million it costs to run the MUC Evaluation Department (\$80 per Westmount house per year), and get rid of the interminable valuation contestations. A tape measure (wielded by a *local* building inspector) would determine taxes to be paid.

This would mean no penalty for renovation, but any extension would attract more tax.

Preservation of green space would be encouraged, depending on the rate set on land.

Some more good news: existing laws might even allow for such a tax system.

Before we arrived at the costs to be taxed on area, we should "tarify" certain services -an ecologically sane approach. Non-recyclable garbage would be charged by weight, and water metered.

Your faithful mayoral servant has worked out that we could raise the same amount of taxes as at present with the following yearly rates:

	<u>Residential</u>	<u>Commercial</u> (incl. surtax)
Gross floor area	\$1.00/ft ²	\$2.24/ft ²
Unbuilt land area	\$0.20/ft ²	\$0.45/ft ²

Mirabile dictu, the share of the existing tax burden would change very little among classes of property, except that taxes on large apartments would rise, with a drop for houses.

I would be very interested in your reaction to this idea.

March 19, 1992

RAISING MY STANDARDS

For as long as anyone remembers, Westmount mayors got a brace of black Victorian lampposts to grace the outside their houses. They were usually transplanted the moment he (in 1987: she) took the oath of office. The lights were summarily uprooted once a new mayor took over.

While Don MacCallum was mayor, the lampposts even held guard over his particular entrance to 4300 De Maisonneuve: their ornate charm contrasted just a little with the severe bulk of that apartment building.

Right after my acclamation in October, a city worker started busily laying conduit for the lamps. He noticed my wife trimming the hedge. Later that day, he saw her sweeping the path. When he came back to install the bases, Francine was washing the outside of our living room windows. Finally, he came up and asked her how long she had been with *le patron*.

"Oh, about 20 years," said Francine. He then asked, "Do you live in the same house?". Puzzled, my wife nodded. When he asked whether she "stayed here all the time", it finally dawned on her that he thought she was the maid.

For many months thereafter, stubby orange cones marked the spot in the snow where our lights should go. Meanwhile, the aging lampposts - now over 60 - had gone to wherever old lights go to get rejuvenated. It turned out that the lamps had rusted through, and the poles were on their last legs, so to speak. A hybrid was created by replicating the lamps and joining them with a couple of old poles from Murray Park. I am sure the marriage will be an enduring one. They certainly make a handsome, old-fashioned pair.

(I must have a thing about old lampposts. In 1981, Westmount wanted to replace the remaining traditional streetlights with nasty 30 ft. "cobra heads" throughout the city. I led the movement to stop it. We won.)

The mayor's lampposts were finally installed a few weeks ago. One problem. Our Light and Power people had the bright idea of replacing the old incandescent bulb with metal halide. This light source lasts much longer and uses a lot less power - all without having to go to the peachy tones of sodium lights. Makes all kinds of good sense, eh? The trouble is they are, shall we say, a little on the bright side. One neighbour calls them lurid. Air passengers approaching Dorval can pick them out at 5,000 feet. (I'm just kidding, Bruce.)

I am told the light, like many things, dims a bit with age.

April 9, 1992

STEERING BY THE REAR-VIEW MIRROR

It is often said that today's generals are fighting yesterday's battles. The annual meetings of the Union of Quebec Municipalities (UMQ) and the Conference of Suburban Mayors (CSM) are *exempla* of how people can just watch as events unfold, while brooding over past injustices.

Last year, for example, the CSM dedicated its meeting to housekeeping matters while ignoring the Ryan "reform" battle being waged outside. This year, the UMQ served up its standard fare of workshops on environment, police, and transport. The predictable resolutions were passed, calling for "concertation" with Quebec on many issues Ryan had already put behind him. In fact, an ex-president told me the UMQ is forever reacting to Ryan and is not influencing him at the formative stages.

The usual boisterous convention atmosphere enveloped last weekend's UMQ annual meeting: people squinting at name-tags to decide if the bearer was worth talking to; some collecting city lapel pins like boys trading baseball cards; and the mandatory trade show and hospitality suites dispensing free booze, hoping to germinate the requisite bonhomie and, with luck, a few clients. (Rye'n'reform, anyone?)

Of course, some serious problems were discussed: the private nursing home tax exemptions, the wiping out of amusement taxes, and the possibility that Ryan would now turn a covetous eye on the welcome tax. (Will that man *totally* strip us of revenue sources?) Some 40 resolutions were passed. I somehow don't think Ryan will stay up late poring over these laboriously-worded statements.

What floored me, though, was that there was no discussion on Ryan having dropped the biggest bomb of all: his stated intention to reduce substantially the 122 cities making up the Greater Montreal Area. Ryan feels that this agglomeration, being the economic motor of Quebec, cannot run on 122 cylinders. He looks with favour on the six-cylinder model in Toronto.

Ryan even called a press conference during the UMQ meeting to give the names of who will make up the committee to recommend such changes - or to ratify his decisions, like as not. Predictably, the 12-member committee has six academics. No businessman or current municipal politician is on it!

The lumbering pace and the diffuseness of the UMQ meeting is proof the Ryan is partially right: there are far too many municipalities in Quebec. 1,200 cities and towns out of a total of 1,500 have an average population of only 2,000.

You can be certain that your Council will pull out all the stops to ensure that Westmount does not get on the endangered species list. We have a temptingly large fiscal potential. We have no debt. We could be a succulent morsel for Montreal to want to gobble up in some misguided notion of "rationalisation".

I am going to need help and some financial resources to wage this battle. It will be the kind of battle won or lost behind the scenes, but not by looking at the rear-view mirror.

April 16, 1992

THINKING GLOBALLY....

With Earth Day coming up, a few people have asked me to write something about local environmental issues. With your indulgence, I thought I might start with the larger picture, and then work my way down to ecological problems closer to home.

In tracing the cause of our present environmental mess, let's start at the beginning. The Book of Genesis. Our treatment of the planet as our personal utility is so deeply ingrained in our collective psyche that it forms part of Western religious heritage. Both Adam and, later, Noah got the same instructions: be fruitful and multiply. It was also made clear to Adam that man had dominion over all the earth, and Noah was told that "the dread of you shall be upon every beast".

Well, we descendants of Noah have followed these directives to the letter. We went forward and did we multiply! We have overrun the world to the point of its exhaustion. And like rabbits in Australia and cockroaches in the Bronx, we have had no predators except our clever selves. If any other species had been as successful, we would have called it a pestilence.

This way of thinking is known as anthropocentrism (or at least to those happy few for whom a pedantry of mind is matched by an agility of tongue).

But our human-eye view of the world and our unchecked propagation are wiping out innumerable species who were fellow-travellers on this earth. We have perhaps irreversibly polluted the planet. The fecundity that was so necessary for our early survival has now turned against us. We, too, might someday pay the price of extinction. But probably not before we manage to eradicate tigers, grey whales, gorillas, and a myriad of other endangered species.

In my view, much of the cause of society's ills - not just pollution - is a direct result of pathological overpopulation. We equate quantity with success. Canada is seen as a place to be 'filled up', if for no other reason than to pay for our pension cheques a few decades ahead.

Even if our climate forces the majority of Canadians to live in a densely-populated 50-mile strip of land that hugs the U.S. border, we talk of desperately needing people. If Canada is so empty, why aren't people flocking northward? Can't we shake off this fixation on numbers and start improving urban conditions and leave our fragile Northern environment alone? Should we be really trying to stuff our species into every nook and cranny of this world?

Of course, the capitalistic system feeds on increases in population. More people, more customers. But the sociological and ecological chain letter will have to be dealt with - by future generations.

For example, the world has one billion cows grazing on one-quarter of the land area whose only role is to feed (mostly) the developed world. Rain forests are cleared for more pasture. We have all heard this and other ecological horror stories, but we cleave to the idea that, yes, there are far too

many people in developing countries, but we're O.K. It is my belief that there are too many in the developed countries, too.

Next week: our worship of technology.

April 23, 1992

PROMETHEAN FIRE

If one had to devise a formula for pollution, it would be the product of at least two factors: population and technology. Last week, I wrote about anthropocentrism - the view that man is the centre of everything - and how it has led to a world overrun with our species, to the exclusion and even extinction of others.

This attitude has also led us to believe in the infallibility of our technology.

Prometheus made man and gave him the gift of fire. Yet Pandora, out of curiosity, opened up a box in which Prometheus had tried to seal up all the evils of mankind.

The advance of technology is littered with the detritus of past mistakes. Who could have predicted the degree of PCB toxicity 30 years ago? DDT problems 40 years ago? Remember Thalidomide? Yet in our technological cockiness and our implicit belief in the chimera of "progress", we assume that any slip-ups can be rectified, and perhaps even justified.

Technology has always been a bane and a blessing. As the Industrial Age dawned, its glories were far from untarnished. Growing cities, factories, and mines spewed out smoke, filth and dust. One thinks of Blake's "dark Satanic mills". Air and water pollution was born 200 years ago in Britain.

In those days, pollution, like the mechanical technology that created it, was pretty unsophisticated by today's standards. Both the symptoms and the cures were obvious. But, in the same way as we blinker ourselves to the dark side of today's technology, our forefathers were no different.

We are quick to exploit the benefits of technology, but are slow to reckon with its by-product, pollution. Yet I am no latter-day Luddite: I believe we can harness technology safely, but it will require a sea change in our worldwide management of it.

After twenty years of playing around with polymers, patents, and production techniques, I have felt first-hand the seduction of technology. I came to treat it with respect. It's like a power tool - very effective if used with precision and precaution; otherwise, it damages both the workpiece and the operator.

Another by-product of our infatuation with technology is the ascendancy of the "expert". Generalists are out, specialists are in. Politicians and managers alike abdicate their responsibilities by relying on expert opinion. The problem is that pollution does not respect these rigidly-defined boundaries.

As much as technical people get irritated by environmentalists, many of whom are non-technical, we should realise it will not be the scientists who will blow the whistle on their own activities. As the Romans said: who will guard the guards themselves?

To misquote G.B. Shaw, if all the environmentalists were laid end-to-end, they would not reach a conclusion. Well, this lack of agreement in a new field should not deter us from adopting careful policies. We should be ware of ecological witch-hunts based on emotion without logic. But, equally, we

24

should not let our love affair with technology lull us into comfortable inaction.

Next week: Acting locally.

April 30, 1992

SOUNDING OFF ABOUT NOISE

"The amount of noise which anyone can bear undisturbed stands in inverse proportion to his mental capacity." (Schopenhauer)

This is the first of a series of columns about local environmental issues. While casting about for a way to begin, my Muse was sent packing - thanks to a noise I hadn't heard since last autumn: the peevish whine of the dread leaf-blower. Out of irritation created by this needless annoyance, I decided to write about noise.

We should regard noise as a kind of air pollutant. It is the one environmental problem totally within the jurisdiction of municipalities. It is also a pollutant that can be controlled quite easily. For example, motorcycles once threatened Westmount's nighttime tranquillity. One motorcycle going up the mountain at 3:00 a.m. could wake literally thousands of citizens. Five or six years ago we closed certain streets to through motor-cycle traffic, and that has helped the problem quite a bit.

But the winner of the most unnecessary noise award - in the category of inventions we didn't need - just *has* to go to those infernal leaf blowers. You know the machines I'm talking about - a small gasoline engine strapped to one's back creating compressed air that comes out through a "wand" (*wand*, if you please!) to blow leaves, dirt, and my mind. Not only do these contraptions create noise, they also create dust and fumes. Both the city and private contractors seem to have been smitten by the doubtful charms of these noisemakers. They certainly don't do the job any faster than, say, a rake.

Whatever happened to those twiggy brooms that our gardeners used to use? They're called besoms (really!). Ex-Westmounter Leonard Cohen even wrote about them in one of his novels: "They called to one another as they swept, their brooms made out of wire-bound branches. It must be nice to use something that real".

If I had enough support, I would love to ban leaf blowers outright. After all, one of the roles of Council is to ensure citizen's peaceful enjoyment of their residences - especially for those of us who are around during the day.

My hatred of noise (commensurate with my mental capacity, according to Schopenhauer) is such that I am half-seriously considering getting a push mower for our lawn. The rhythmic snickersnack of the blades and the smell of newly-cut grass would be comforting and even a touch nostalgic. Plus, it would help keep me in shape. Begone the noisy, smelly, and dangerous power mower! Besides, rotary mowers tear the grass to cut it, while a sharp reel mower snips at it like scissors. Mind you, I'm a little afraid my good intentions would evaporate in the summer sun, and I would be stuck with one more gardening implement rusting in the garage.

If you can stand it, more on noise next week.

May 7, 1992

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE RACKET CLUB

Last week, I wrote about how our enjoyment of parks and gardens - already constrained by our subpolar climate - has been further cut back by the howl of the Briggs and Stratton engines powering that most useless of gadgets, the leaf blower. (The power lawn edger comes a close second.)

Our romance with technology at the expense of peace and quiet is also evident with the overuse of power tools in general. Carpenters building those ubiquitous decks invariably reach for a chain saw to cut a two-by-four.

But let's not forget that granddaddy of all power tools, whose stentorian roar puts to shame all other machines: the jackhammer. Why is it that a society so technologically developed can't find a way to muffle that beast? Or perhaps more to the point, why on earth do we persist on burying wires, pipes, and other city paraphernalia under a foot of solid concrete, as if to protect them undisturbed for at least a millennium, and then a few summers later, out come the jackhammers, the backhoes, and the 36" diamond-bladed concrete saw. This doughty bunch then proceeds to get at all that buried treasure. The whole process not only costs a fortune, and creates sites for future frost heaving, but constitutes one of the most formidable assaults on our eardrums ever devised.

The whole technique of installing and getting at city services such as power lines and traffic signals, and those of Bell Canada, Gaz Metropolitan, and Montreal waterworks, smacks more of Fred Flintstone than the fibre-optics world we live in. We treat the road surface as a repairable fabric. Some repair. Some fabric. Why can't we place such services under the sidewalk in trenches, and then cover the trenches with removable stone slabs? In Europe, large paving stones last for hundreds of years. And it would make ecological sense.

Speaking of noise, I do like to impress upon City workers that this is a residential community, and not some industrial park. They may work here, but we live here. And what government genius required that all trucks have back-up beepers that can be heard a block away?

The whole vexing question of traffic noise will have to wait for some other column.

Ventilators and suchlike can also be a source of noise pollution. When central air conditioners and heat pumps are first installed, they are pretty silent. After a while, their bearings wear, and their fan blades get out-of-balance. An irritating whine results. If you have an apparatus like this, you should have it serviced regularly out of consideration for your neighbour.

How about dog barking? The instinct that mothers have to wake up when their baby is softly crying, must work in reverse for some dog owners. Many a summer's night have we been subjected to - and even kept awake by - barking dogs, while their owners blithely ignore what to them is probably a comforting background hum. It reminds me of a saying: he who sleeps in continuous noise is wakened by silence.

Next week, no more on noise: I'll talk about other local environmental issues.

May 14, 1992

TALKING TRASH

As you sit there, innocently reading your Examiner, think on this: after 15 years of loyal subscription to this Hansard of Westmount's follies and foibles, one tree will have been consumed in the making of newsprint for your personal delectation.

Assuming you had the stomach for it and a mailbox large enough, only seven years of the Suburban would suffice to use up another tree. But these weeklies are pikers when it comes to the gargantuan appetite of the dailies. If you read the Gazette, you should have industrial-strength guilt pang: only six months of the Gazoo is equal to one tree.

One-third of our garbage is paper, and two-thirds of that is newsprint.

It seems to me that the issue of household garbage and what we do with it is *not* a question of pollution, but a question of limited planetary resources. The two major exceptions are toxic domestic waste (such as batteries and paints) and biodegradables such as table scraps. The latter, if landfilled, produce methane and carbon dioxide. Methane gas contributes to the greenhouse effect, and 5 to 20% of all methane released worldwide comes from landfill sites. (Cows are also big in the methane production department, but that's another story.)

One of the reasons I am so keen on domestic toxic waste collection is that for very little effort, we can rid the waste stream of serious pollutants. Toxic materials represent less than 1% of all domestic waste. This is why I have been pressing our Administration to set up a depot for used batteries - the heavy metals in household batteries are toxic, whether incinerated or landfilled. Yet it is so easy to remove them from our garbage. Batteries are a minuscule fraction of our waste, but contribute mightily to pollution.

Most of our other rubbish is pretty inert and unharmed. In fact, the very items we recycle - glass, metal, plastic - are mostly inoffensive even if we did landfill them. Construction waste is particularly inert. But the natural gas needed to make glass, the electricity to make aluminium, the oil to make plastics, are all resources we save when we recycle, or, better yet, reduce.

Indeed, in the global scheme of things, municipal waste management is far from the most pressing environmental problem. One reason that municipal garbage handling is so high on the ecologist's hit list is thanks to the accountability of municipal bodies. We are approachable, close to the citizen, and within a limited sphere of action, can get things done. Of course, the plan to put in an incinerator, no matter how safe, browns off many environmentalists.

But I think another reason garbage looms so large as an issue is because of the guilt and shame of dumping our waste products into our mother planet. Aesthetically, we are offended by the smell, the wheeling seagulls, and the story of the New York garbage scow searching for a place to offload its

stinking, rotting freight. We also feel guilty - as we should -about dumping our excrement in the St. Lawrence, and most citizens don't begrudge the MUC taking on the enormous cost of treating our sewage.

More on waste next week.

May 21, 1992

OUR GARBAGE PROBLEMS TURNED INTO HOT STUFF

It is a sobering thought that each of us will generate some 75 tons of solid waste over our lifetime. 1,000 times our body weight. The Miron quarry dump is a reminder that the world is too much with us, with its 32 *million* tons of accumulated living.

In 1994, the Miron dump will close, and we will have to find something else to do with our garbage. This is why a Waste Management Board (la Régie intermunicipale de gestion des déchets sur l'île de Montréal, known for obvious reasons as the "Régie"), was formed in 1985. It comprises all the Island cities except Montreal and Montreal North. Members of the Régie produce some 600,000 tons of garbage each year. The Régie's plan is to recycle 20%, compost 10%, and burn 70%. The recycling contribution rate to date is less than 10%.

The incinerator will produce electricity while burning our trash, and will have extremely tough emission controls - some of the best in the world. Is that good enough? Well, let's put it this way. Whatever ecological dangers are attendant to the incinerator, they are minuscule compared to those implicit in industrial activity producing consumer goods that made the incinerator necessary in the first place. And *cars* produce infinitely more pollution.

The incinerator will operate at over 1,000°C, a temperature at which many organic compounds are broken down into CO₂ and water. The potentially toxic by-products of the incinerator are fly ash - 2.5% of the incoming garbage - and gaseous emissions such as oxides of nitrogen and sulphur. According to Environment Canada, it is "possible to almost eliminate most pollutants", using today's technology, and "capture up to 1,000 times more of toxic compounds such as dioxins", when compared to conventional incinerators.

If we rid the waste stream of toxic materials such as batteries, there are really few sources of dangerous by-products of combustion. It should be remembered that landfills produce toxic stuff by the ton, both in the form of leachate, and in the gas emitted as the organic waste putrefies. (Talking trash is so much fun!)

One argument against the incinerator that is often bandied about is that its tremendous appetite will act as a disincentive to other means of waste management - recycling, reduction, composting, re-use. The incinerator, it is said, has a fixed throughput - a maw that must be fed. Well, I for one do hope that it will eventually become superfluous, or at least run on only one-half its design capacity. Meanwhile, there is a strong incentive to reduce - it costs us some \$55 per ton just to collect and transport garbage, before it is even disposed of.

It used to cost only \$2.75 per ton to dump our garbage at Miron in 1980.

Today, it's \$38.50! In Toronto, dumping costs went from \$10 to \$150 a ton during the same period, mostly to subsidise recycling. Incineration should cost about \$80-100 per ton.

More garbage next week.

May 28, 1992

MORE THROW-AWAY LINES

We are not a consumer society. We actually *consume* very little. We are a converter society - converting raw materials into more complex and unnatural products that are devilishly hard to put back into the natural world.

The former and present City Councils have unanimously supported the Régie's waste management plan to recycle, compost and incinerate. We held our noses, figuratively speaking, while approving the incinerator part. (Literally holding the nose is common in garbage circles.) We really had no other choice. If all the cities in the Régie were as ecologically advanced as Westmount, *perhaps* something like intensive recycling would be an option. But given the antediluvian attitude of some of the members, it is just not on.

It is simply not realistic to think that, in two year's time, all the cities could reduce, recycle and compost most of their garbage. In fact, some of the Régie's cities are worried that the capacity of the incinerator is too small!

In Japan, where 73% of waste is burned, they have around 2,000 incinerators. Japan, incidentally, produces nearly one-half as much garbage per person as we do. In fact, Canadians win the booby prize worldwide in the volume of garbage we spew out.

For me, the incinerator is a necessary way station towards the goal of getting people to use wiser ways of waste management, through education and financial persuasion.

The reason I got on the Régie's waste reduction committee is my conviction that reduction is by far the best approach to waste management. You not only save the incineration cost, but also collection and transport costs. Recycling is very costly, averaging out at \$140 per ton. Re-use isn't cheap, too. And washing bottles, for example, uses energy and detergents.

To encourage waste reduction, and to share the tax burden more equitably, I would like to see metering of garbage. While many cities in the U.S. meter by volume, i.e., so many dollars per bag, I would like to look at metering by weight. It has been tried in Seattle.

Meanwhile, let's not say we haven't made progress. Westmount is subsidising garden composters, and will shortly put in place a used battery collection system. The city is composting nearly 500 tons of leaves and Xmas trees. The Westmount Healthy Cities group has started in-home waste-reduction workshops. We now allow recycling of magazines, cardboard egg cartons, and laundry detergent boxes.

Westmount is doing much better than most cities in the unofficial recycling race, but we've still a long way to go.

June 4, 1992

AUTO-PHILIA

When I think back, I hardly recognise myself. When I was 22, I drove a scarlet Ford Galaxie 500XL (where *did* they get those names?), and, a couple of years later, I was tooling around town in a Firebird that put out 360 horsepower.

Yet I never really liked driving all that much. I suppose I reckoned at the time that a fully-loaded car would somehow make it more interesting.

In retrospect, my choice of cars seems pretty flash.

Later, I quietened down, got married, and bought a staid Volvo 164. I got rid of the Volvo in 1977 and became carless - culminating a kind of automotive Pilgrim's Progress. I've never been tempted to get another car since. For a while, during my plutocratic period, I had a driver. Now, I take the metro, a taxi, or a walk.

It would be tempting to wrap myself in a green flag, and smugly let slip that, yes, out of principle, you know, I made a "lifestyle" choice and took a stand. But, in reality, I find owning a car just a plain bother.

If the word autophilia did exist, it would appropriately mean self-love. Our car-caring culture has been the cause of many urban environmental problems, including air and noise pollution, along with urban sprawl.

The treeless suburbs where billboards and illuminated signs garnish all thoroughfares as if required by zoning laws - these are a product of the car. Suburban shopping malls that exude a dreary sameness are plunked down in a desert of dusty asphalt, all for the greater convenience of the car driver. And people in far-flung reaches of slurburbia happily pay \$7,000 a year per car for every member of the family, and this in order to "save" \$5,000 per year of additional mortgage payments on a house closer to downtown and public transit.

Shareholders of General Motors should include Beaver Asphalt, Lafarge Cement, and Claude Neon.

Back to pollution. 80% of the air pollution in the MUC can be traced to vehicles. While catalytic converters on car exhausts have improved things quite a bit, 30% of these devices are not operative.

Smog is essentially carbon monoxide, particles, and ozone. Smog is actually created in the air. It comes from a chemical stew so complex that scientists can only crudely simulate the results, not just in the lab, but even using computers!

Smog is like having a gigantic chemical reactor operating right over our heads. The most dangerous reaction product is low-level ozone. Nitric oxide and organic compounds from car exhausts combine in the presence of sunlight to form tons of ozone. Ozone hampers lung performance and stunts plant growth. (The 'good' ozone is found in the upper atmosphere where it helps protect us from the sun's rays.)

I'm a member of the MUC Environment Commission. Come to our public meeting on June 11 to hear more about air pollution. Perhaps you can give me a lift down there.

June 11, 1992

OF BUILDINGS AND BIKES

For years, I had thought that the Houses of Parliament in London were built of a dark grey stone. A few years ago, they were cleaned of 140 years of grime. The walls have now been revealed to be made of a warm buff-coloured limestone. Imagine what this muck did for Londoner's lungs. Since the virtual ban on coal-burning fireplaces and other such measures, smog in London is now pretty rare.

The curse of air pollution has shifted to other cities: Los Angeles, Mexico City, and Athens.

In Athens, the pollution is so bad that much of the remaining Acropolis carving has been taken indoors out of the (acid) rain. The delightful stone maidens called caryatids that served as columns have been replaced with fibreglas copies. Lord Elgin prefigured this act by nearly 200 years. (He made off with one of them, which he later sold to the British Museum, along with most of the Parthenon sculptures.)

Whatever marble glories the Turks could not destroy in 1687 when they turned the Parthenon into a powderkeg, acid rain from car exhausts has efficiently finished the job.

In Mexico City, schoolgirls wear facemasks against the health-threatening smog - mostly low-level ozone, 75% of which is generated from cars. And the air *inside* the cars is even worse. Mexico City is generally regarded as being the world's most polluted city.

Back in Canada, companies like Inco and Noranda are slowly curbing their sulphur dioxide emissions. Quebec's output of this pollutant - which turns into sulphuric/-ous acid - has dropped from 1.5 million tons in 1970 to 0.4 in 1990. Inco alone produced 0.6 million tons last year, but is supposed to halve that in three years. So industry is doing its bit.

The trouble is that a lot of Canada's air pollution is imported (duty-free) from the U.S., as their effluvium wafts northward. 80% of Canadians are huddled in a 200 km. band that hugs the U.S. The mephitic exhalations of this not so jolly nor so green giant were certainly not part of the free trade agreement.

Last Sunday I watched the 45,000 bicyclists peacefully glide by Westmount. No pollution was created. I hope a lot of goodwill was. The same number of cars would have spewed out 20 *tons* of nitric oxide and organic compounds that together create low-level ozone. In Holland 30% of all trips are by bike. In North America, it's only 1%.

Isn't it time for a change?

June 18, 1992

WHAT'S A DECENT WAGE?

It was a strange *mélange à trois*. Here I was on a French radio phone-in programme with André Nadon of the Canadian Police Association, along with the hostess Monique Simard.

Simard favours separation, unionism, and women's rights. I favour federalism, merit pay, and equal rights. I expected a virago; I think she expected some Westmount nabob, complete with top hat and white mustache, like the little man on the Monopoly board. In the event, I liked her and found her very balanced and gracious.

The topic we discussed was the lavish 9.4% two-year increase in MUC police salaries. This largesse comes after eight years of settlements above the rate of inflation, and against a background of the 1992 salary freeze going on in Quebec, and one hopes, in Westmount.

Just before the show, I asked Nadon if he truly felt that \$51,400 a year - nearly \$70,000 with benefits - for a constable with five years' experience made sense. He responded by saying he would love to know how much *I* made. I challenged him to ask me that question live. He never did. However he did ask me, on air, what the politician's pension benefits cost the city of Westmount, and I was happy to respond, "not a cent!". He mumbled something like, "well, you rich Westmounters don't need the money" and quickly went on to something else.

Cut to our February Council meeting. Paul Creighton quite reasonably asked why we spent \$500 each for five garbage cans. He then asked whether we would opt into the elected official's pension fund. To the latter question, we said no. Just about unique on the Island, we refuse this perk that would cost the city some \$15,000 *per year* (\$25,000 if we paid ourselves more normal salaries). My fellow mayors think we're nuts, but this is Westmount. Did this make headlines? Not on your nelly. But we got a picture, a story, and a cartoon on the \$2,500-worth of garbage cans. Oh well, pensions are not very sexy. (It would appear that garbage cans are - in Westmount at least.)

The *Gazette* has recently been going on about mayors' salaries, pointing out that Jean Doré pulls down some \$116,000 a year. And that the mayor of Hull (pop.: 61,000) is paid \$99,000!

Let me answer the question that M. Nadon was afraid to ask. I make \$30,000 a year as Mayor. The average salary paid to mayors of MUC cities with similar budgets to Westmount's is over \$50,000 including pension costs.

We all get \$5,000 as members of the MUC, plus another \$5,000 for those of us on various committees. Plus pensions, except Westmount.

So, MUC mayors (except Westmount's) make on average about the same as a policeman, "all in", as they say. The policeman's lot is a much happier

one, however, as he can earn this amount while still in his twenties.

Yet a policeman's job is probably the most stressful one in our society, and that would include air traffic controllers. But there are compensations. Quite a few. They have gold-plated job security and a unsurpassed early retirement package.

A mayor faces an abrupt early retirement every four years at election time. And we're not exactly strangers to stress.

Who do *you* think is well-treated?

August 6, 1992

COLUMNAR THOUGHTS

May Cutler used to bang out a column in this newspaper the same way most of us would dash off a note to a friend. For her, writing was a piece of cake. No matter what the subject, the results were always a good read. What you got was undiluted, unvarnished May Cutler. (May, I think, subscribed to the dictum: "if you can't annoy *somebody*, there's little point in writing".)

I just wish *I* could string words together so effortlessly.

Anyway, here I am back after a hiatus of six weeks. Back at my computer keyboard, trying to cobble together this column.

I fire up my computer, waiting while a short sonata of peeps and crackles is followed by what sounds like a clearing of computer catarrh. I call up WordPerfect and ask (politely) for my COLUMN file. While I hold PgDn, it riffles through my entire opus of Examiner columns, landing on my last one in a microsecond. So much of my toil. So quickly got through.

I am still fascinated by my power to choreograph the dancing dots of photons on my computer screen. I can even make errors (and, early on, files) disappear. I can move phalanxes of paragraphs at a single keystroke.

For twenty years, I had a secretary record my every word. When I quit running my firm - more than three years ago now - the first thing I did was to teach myself WordPerfect and Lotus. At home. I now find it almost liberating to go hunting and pecking by myself. Believe me, it makes for a concise writing style. My staccato two-fingered Morse Code rhythm is embarrassingly slow compared to my secretary's lush ten-fingered chords, but I soldier on.

* * * *

Unlike my predecessor, I try to stay away from political matters outside of my bailiwick. But I would like to offer some light comment on my fellow Examiner columnist, Richard Holden.

Last week, the Examiner had a monosyllabic editorial - "QUIT" - following Holden's (to me) unsurprising confessions as to his separatist enthusiasms. Does this mean his will be regarded as a fifth column henceforth? Will his apostasy be countenanced? Will Holden stop rubbing editorial shoulders with the rest of us columnists, and be banished to wherever Westmount politicians in bad odour are sent?

Some of you may recall the fall from grace of Kevin Drummond, who seemed to succumb to earlier PQ blandishments. For a while, his column of "Our MNA Says" was followed by John Sancton's pithy comment: "nothing"!

If there is any good coming out of Holden's undoubtedly quixotic new directions, it is that French Quebec, as Pierre Gravel of La Presse pointed out, can now longer regard Anglo Quebec as some homogeneous, indigestible lump. Holden has at least broadened the Anglo political spectrum, as seen through Francophone eyes, and made it, shall we say, more colourful.

Oh well, maybe Holden's motto is: "if you can't annoy *everybody*, there's little point in running".

August 13, 1992

FREE AGENTS VS. FEATHER-BEDDING

We're sometimes taken to task for hiring too many consultants: architects, traffic engineers, public relations mavens, computer systems boffins, executive recruiters. The list goes on.

The City of Montreal hires few consultants. They have in-house all the expertise they need. Whether they need it or not.

In case I ever doubt just how bureaucratic a city can get, I keep a business card I got from a Montreal employee. He is just not any employee, though. He is a "chargé de mission". His card goes on to tell us that he works for the "Service de la planification et de la concertation" of the "Division des relations extramunicipales". I am not making this up.

I offer this illustration of bureaucracy run wild to show what can happen if you *don't* hire consultants. I'm sure Pierre Le Francois, Montreal's Secretary-General, along with his three Assistant Secretaries-General all agree it's better to have on staff the expertise one needs to do odd jobs as they come up, rather than having to (ouch) publicly approve engaging consultants on an as-needed basis. You can always find *something* for the *chargés de mission* to do, especially if you give them a woolly-enough title.

Back at home in Westmount, we use consultants. Why? Well, if we were hiring these people simply to bolster a decision already made, then criticism would be justified. We should be using freelancers only when we have no in-house expertise, or when faced with a temporary overflow of work.

I get more exercised about our \$16 million payroll, rather than the \$100,000 or so Westmount spends on consultants each year. Yet we have been steadily cutting the number of positions at City Hall. But this implies *some* consultants, and some outside contractors. Everybody applauds "contracting out", yet if engage a "consultant", we run the risk of groans from Council-watchers. Sometimes only semantics separates the two.

The deft and judicious use of outside consultants is just good management in private industry. There is even more reason to use it in public administrations, as it gives flexibility to a rigid structure. It prevents accretions of people building up over the years - people hired for tasks long-ago completed.

After all, does it make sense to keep an expert in police matters (say) on permanent staff, when the need for this expertise comes up (thankfully) every five years or so when the MUC gets it into their heads to wipe out our police station? And then we need to put together a technical brief to them, explaining why their superstition/ministation idea won't work? Just saying to the MUC brass, "don't take away our station" won't cut the mustard.

But if we had a Planning and Co-operation Department which would be part of our Extramunicipal Relations Division, we would just ask one of their *chargés de mission* to prepare a brief and argue the case. At \$60,000 a year. Every year.

August 20, 1992

MS. EDITOR: I BEG TO DIFFER

So. The editorialist on the left side of the column you're reading feels I'm coming "dangerously close to abusing my privileges as Mayor" by getting "the problem of noise pollution on the city agenda"! Why? Well, according to the Examiner, I am spurred on by less than altruistic motives, as I *personally* have been upset by chainsaws and leaf blowers, especially since I joined the ranks of those who slum around at home during the day.

To stay on the good (right?) side of the editorialist, I'd better not do anything about high property taxes, either. You see, it's not altruistic. If there's anything that sets my teeth on edge more than jackhammers and chainsaws, it's getting my own tax bill.

When I demonstrated that City power tools exceed not just our own norms, but those of the National Research Council, I would have expected perhaps a censorious editorial about lax City practices.

But no. The Examiner went on to state that "no one has raised the issue of noise pollution in the time that Mr Trent has been Mayor". I guess that the six people who wrote me - one of whom even sent a *tape* on leaf blowers - are nobodies. Thanks for nothing, folks!

So "noise pollution is a hobbyhorse of his foisted upon" the City. Boy. Next thing you know, I'll be pushing to have streets named after me, like that indulgent ex-Mayor, Sam Elkas. Today, it's an Anti-Noise Code; tomorrow, it's Trent Road.

"It will be a test to see if he can muster sympathy for someone with a problem outside his sphere". Really? Allow me just one example. Since 1985, I have been keeping a watching brief on the Glen Yards and even rezoned it, all to ensure the fabric of that fragile neighbourhood to the north is buffered from the CP development. Hardly in my backyard. Hardly inside my sphere.

By raising the issue of noise pollution, I have provoked a number of people living in the Clandeboye-Hallowell area to reiterate their demand for a noise barrier. They have to bear an incredibly wearisome daily drone of traffic. But it is a condition that did, for most of them, exist at the time of purchase of their houses. Unlike the residents north of the Glen Yards, there is no threatened *diminution* of the quality of life.

This does not mean we can't see what we can do to alleviate the noise.

Unlike the control of power tools, a noise barrier is a very expensive proposition. A twelve foot barrier mounted on the highway from Clandeboye to Blenheim - about 4500 feet - would easily cost over one million dollars. The good news is that Quebec might pay one-half. The issue that has divided other cities like TMR and Anjou is: should you make all of Westmount pay, or use a local improvement tax? A vexing question. Perhaps some kind of mixed cost sharing is the answer.

The people in Ward 8 can be assured that John Bridgman and I will keep working on it. At least it's clearly outside my sphere!

August 27, 1992

PAY-AS-YOU-THROW (PART I)

The week before last was a slow news week. The only things coming out of Westmount had to do with Holden and garbage. Once the media had exhausted the former - and separate - subject, they bestirred themselves to take an uncommon interest in my suggestions for "garbage metering".

An article in the Examiner was picked up by the Gazette, which led to interviews on CJAD, CKVL, and then Newswatch. The typical media food chain.

"Garbage metering?" some of my friends snorted. Trent's been out in the summer sun too long. The term conjures up images of those fanciful contraptions designed by Rube Goldberg (or by Heath Robinson to my British readers). Was it something that would macerate household garbage in order to pump it through some kind of flowmeter? Not really.

Generator-pay garbage systems are already used in dozens of U.S. cities. They either charge by the can, or require a pre-paid bag or tag.

There are ecological and economical reasons for charging by the amount of trash put out.

Right now, garbage removal costs are hidden in your property tax, and increasing much faster than most other costs. Today, they represent about 4 cents on our mill rate of \$1.07, or about \$200 per year for the average house.

If you are a homeowner, the amount you pay for garbage removal is determined by the valuation on your house, not your output. With garbage metering, there is a proven incentive to reduce. In fact, total taxes went *down* in cities that charge by amount of garbage produced.

It's a kind of polluter pay system.

In cities like Seattle that have had generator-pay systems in place for some time, the total amount of garbage has dropped dramatically. When you are rewarded for smart garbage management, you buy less packaging and recycle more. The environment and your bank balance are the winners.

Let me hasten to add that we are a long way away from any such system here in Westmount. What I am proposing is a pilot project to try it out. Metering would have to be proven simple, fair, and foolproof before Council would consider it. Actually, I favour a weight-based system that would mean for the average taxpayer no change in the way he/she handles the garbage. The only difference would be an extra charge on your Light and Power bill, and a concomitant reduction in your yearly taxes. Recyclables would continue to be free.

Next week, I'll talk about how a weight-based system could work, along with some potential drawbacks to the whole idea of garbage metering.

September 3, 1992

PAY-AS-YOU-THROW (PART II)

Mayor Vera Danyluk stuck to her guns. When TMR went to one regular garbage collection per week, *and* stopped back-of-house collection, she got tons of flack. Citizens railed about standards dropping in the Town. Well, they're still down to one regular with one recyclable collection, and the sky over TMR hasn't fallen.

TMR will save a couple of hundred thousand dollars a year with these changes - mainly because of curbside collection. Their savings in the reduced collection frequency is probably around ten percent.

The real reason to cut frequency was to encourage recycling.

If the WMA survey is any guide, should Westmount switch to curbside collection, citizens would probably string me up on one of my beloved Washingtonian lampstandards. There was much more amenability to reduced pickups, however.

There might be a better way than simply cutting collection frequency.

Charging for garbage by the amount thrown out is not only fairer than basing it on an arbitrary value on one's house, but it's the best method known to encourage recycling and reduction.

The following objections have been put forward against generator-pay garbage systems: 1) it would lead to illegal dumping (this has not happened in Seattle, which has totally converted to user-pay, except for apartments); 2) it can't work in apartment buildings (bills would go to the owner and then pro-rated, losing the incentive advantage); 3) implementation costs (these are more than offset by savings due to total garbage reduction, usually over 50%, and in Westmount we have a Light and Power billing system in place); 4) it's a way of increasing tax revenue (in fact, total costs to the homeowner actually drop).

Other objections related to mechanical compacting or overstuffing - cramming trash in the can or bag until densities approaching that of lead are reached - can be overcome by a weight-based system, or just having a per bag weight limit, as in Seattle.

If reliable, I favour a weight-based method that Oakville is looking at, and Seattle has tried in a pilot project. Metering by weight uses a truck equipped with load cells to measure small weight differences "on the fly" as each load is dumped into a skip on the truck. The weight thus measured is fed to an on-board computer, while client details are concurrently inputted by means of a scanning gun reading a bar code affixed to the trash can. Identification can also be made by radio frequency scanners reading a tag on the can. Pretty high-tech, eh? It's supposed to be accurate to plus-or-minus one pound.

The idea is to treat garbage like any other utility, to create no extra trouble for the homeowner, and to reward garbage reduction.

If we can get a grant, perhaps we persuade a small section of Westmount to try out garbage metering next year. By volume or by weight.

September 10, 1992

THINGS THAT GO DOWN THE DRAIN

Don't read this column if you're eating. It could ruin your appetite. In fact, my subject has to do with the end result of all the food we eat - what happens to it once our body is through with it.

I went to witness the fate of the unmentionable products of the loo, the plug-'ole, even the kitchen sink.

All this stuff - and more - gurgles down our drains, thence to sewers, collectors, and interceptors. It arrives in a thankfully-diluted putrescent soup at the MUC Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Since gravity is the moving force behind this noxious flow, it takes about an hour in transit, coming into the plant's pumping station 100 feet below ground. There, what amounts to Brobdingnagian sump pumps move the volume of a swimming pool in one second.

I think the most nauseous section in the plant was where giant screens fish out any items over an inch - clots of rags, lots of bits of indefinable plastic that once had some personal hygienic role. The used condoms clinging to the screen nearly made me gag.

It was depressing to be faced with all these sad residues of mass human activity.

I asked one of the (numerous) operators why there was, next to their computer console, an aquarium with two big turtles in it. I knew the answer before it got past their lips: these creatures actually made it alive through that torrent of sewage. I thought of flowers pushing through cracks in concrete. I felt a bit better.

After the screens, the sewage goes to huge sedimentation basins. The flocculation is helped along by chemicals. Wheeling gulls pick out anything comestible (to them!) and spit out any errant condoms onto the wet aluminium catwalks. Scum is collected on top, and sludge is pumped to a dewatering station, after which it is incinerated.

On entering the dewatering building, you are forcefully reminded of what materials this plant is dealing with. The unmistakable stench of human faecal matter permeates the area. This is all the more surprising, as, when walking about this sprawling operation, you are often lulled into a sense that this is some kind of antiseptic food factory, or a hospital physical plant.

Why did I visit? As a member of the MUC Environment Commission, I wanted to see for myself how we are spending \$170 million a year. We are still only treating 55% of our wastewater - the southern interceptor is not yet operational - so we are looking at \$210m a year by the time 100% is treated in 1995.

The report card: only one-half of the coliform bacteria is removed, 70% of the phosphates and 80% of suspended matter.

At least we no longer dump our waste untreated into the St Lawrence.

September 17, 1992

POLICE STATION BLUES

Quick. What's the first thing you think of whenever the subject of municipal services come up? Probably police. Police services are the foundation of the modern city structure.

Police as a word in today's sense came into use in 1716. The French had a police force well before Sir Robert Peel created the London police force in 1829. Peel's constables were nicknamed after him: "bobbies" or "peelers".

Bobbies were paid £50 a year and superintendents got £200 a year.

Today's MUC constables make about \$50,000 a year. Directors don't make \$200,000.

Peel's "principles of policing" are as valid today as the day they were written: "the police are the public and the public are the police, the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen". This is Community Policing at its finest!

Under the guise of Community Policing, the MUC wants to close our police station, and offers by way of a consolation prize, a "mini-station". In other words, a large sentry-box.

The MUC has been trying to "consolidate" police stations for years - to "improve service and save money". And I've got a bridge over the St. Lawrence I want to sell you.

The proposal to tart up the station closing plan with the introduction of mini-stations was a work of marketing genius. It certainly won over most mayors, and even earned editorial praise from the Gazette - not known for a paper that looks kindly on the MUC.

The promoters of the plan could say with nearly a straight face that the number of stations was increasing. But how do you define a station? Is a post with two or three people in it a station?

It's as if the MUC public transit announced a plan to increase the number of metro trains, but two-thirds of all trains henceforth would have only one car. The remaining trains would be twice as long as the platform.

The good news is: there will be eight more police stations on the Island. The bad news is that 60% of *all* stations will not have room to swing a cat.

Yes, we need more stations. We need more *full-service* stations, with districts carved out based on demography, not on administrative convenience.

The MUCPD, in their dog and pony shows around the Island, have also promised to double the number of patrols. The fact that only about 150 patrollers would be liberated in their plan, or less than 10% of the total, seemed to bother them not one whit.

Next week, I'll talk about the real motivation behind this misbegotten plan. Meanwhile, please mark 7:30, September 24 in your diary - the date of our public meeting.

September 24, 1992

POLICE STATION BLUES - PART II

The party line coming out of the MUC is that there will be more police stations under the new plan. What they are proposing, however, is to reduce the number of full-service stations from 24 to 14.

Most cities will have to content themselves with a mini-station. (Read: micro-station?) *All told*, the 20 new mini-stations will have 20% of the manpower of one regular station!

Now you know why they call them "storefront" stations. It's because of the window-dressing. In Westmount, they would leave us with a mini-station as a kind of memento. Big deal. Oh, they also promise to double our patrols. But they can't guarantee it.

The plan is to be phased in over eight years, with the West Island to lose a station next year, and good old Westmount in 1994.

Why are they doing this? Well, its really not to improve service. It's supposed to save money. Yet even by their own figures, the amount the MUC will save will not even offset the salary increases the police recently won.

But let's look at what really is going on over there in the MUC tower. They have been keeping a lid on police spending up till now, yet giving generously to other departments. Because police costs dominate MUC spending, the net result has not been so alarming. But why should the police costs be held down while all other services go uncontrolled?

And how have the MUC managed to keep police costs under control, with wage settlements well above the rate of inflation? Simple. They've cut the force by 20%.

Over the years, many services have attached themselves to the MUC like barnacles to a boat's hull. The degree of spending freedom afforded these services, unfettered by direct citizen influence, allowed them to grow and flourish. The MUC is one level removed from the irate taxpayer when the bills come out. These excrescences, while perhaps necessary in themselves, have obscured the primary reason for the MUC's existence: to provide police services.

These various services (evaluation, Conseil des Arts, regional parks, etc.) have increased 120% *after* inflation over the last 17 years. I am not including the costs of sewage treatment in these figures. (17 years ago we dumped our sewage directly into the river.)

I think it's about time the MUC told its citizens just how much the police has been cut back, and not to cloud the issue with vain measures like the present plan. They might be surprised. Maybe people would pay *more* for police services.

October 1, 1992

POLICE STATION BLUES - PART III

This is a note of thanks to all who came out last Thursday for the meeting about the new police plan. Our guests were Police Chief St-Germain and Commission chairman Peter Yeomans.

I was proud to be a Westmounter that night. Here we had some 500 people each of whom was upset about the loss of our station. They could have blasted our guests with invective. Instead, those who came to the mike ever so skilfully peeled off the meretricious wrapping on the MUC's police plan. They revealed it for what it is: a well-meaning but insubstantial confection that violates its own stated purpose of "community policing".

Alain St-Germain, a very decent and hard-working man, has brought real change to the MUCPD. He has taken a stand against racism. Forced into a budgetary strait-jacket, he has come up with this plan. I think that he genuinely does not understand why we are looking at his gift horse in the mouth.

What makes me a bit sad is that M. St-Germain may not also understand what makes a community. He seems not to grasp quite what we are telling him. Westmounters are quick to denounce this one-size-fits-all, policing-at-a-distance concept of a police station because they intuitively know what makes Westmount so precious to them. Communities are elusive, vague things that respond poorly to brusque knocking about.

When Claude Ryan formed a task force to look into a restructuring of municipalities, I had a hand in starting up a committee of the Conference of Suburban Mayors to try to influence the Ryan group. Our committee is attempting to come up with a vision of just what a new Montreal Region could look like.

During our meetings - we are now up to 10-20 hours per week - I find myself constantly returning to the question of what actually is a city. I happen to like the quirky patchwork of communities that comprise the Island of Montreal and whose number and variety so irritates the neatness-freak Quebec bureaucrats. They admire the homogeneous sterility of Toronto - a city I was glad to leave.

The MUCPD likewise wishes to ape Detroit, Houston and Philadelphia, with their mini-stations that were formed to combat problems often caused by the very lack of community that we should so carefully preserve. When I briefly lived in Philadelphia in the 60's, I was given a map of where *not* to go.

We've got some good things going for us on the Island of Montreal. Let's not toss them out in an attempt to copy certain charmless and violent North American cities.

October 8, 1992

THE TALE OF A TRAIL

Many of you may not have noticed a new path that hugs the road on the north side of Summit Circle. This little gravel path meanders for about one-third of a mile, and is palisaded by newly-planted bushes and trees.

You might be interested in how this came to be. This whole path, along with landscaping of two "chicanes" - or sharp curves in the road to slow speeders - cost no more than the concrete sidewalk that was slated to go there in the first place.

In 1990, I came up with a bit of a wild plan: why not demolish the north side of Summit Circle, thereby increasing the size of Summit Park by 50%? This also would have eliminated nearly an acre of little-used blacktop, and stopped speeding around the Summit. We were in the process of rehabilitating Summit Park, so it was then or never.

Most of the people who use the park don't live in the area, and they liked the idea. In a public meeting in April 1991, I was told by most local residents they thought my idea stank. Quickly changing gears, I proposed a walking path and landscaped permanent "chicanes" instead. That went over well, as long as it would be "bucolic".

Next, I walked that section of road with Ruth Dynbort, citizen and landscape designer. She suggested some trees to barricade the walker from the road, and bushes on the cliff side to give a sense of containment.

Then the city administration took over.

Architect Amita Marjara designed the path and the wood bollards. Horticulturist Claudette Savaria chose the shrubs, along with the sumach, oak, maple, and birch - all indigenous plants. And very bucolic.

The guard rail was moved closer to the road to get an extra few feet for walking. The simple but brilliant idea of growing ivy on the guard rail was Claudette's. At each "chicane", large rocks replace the concrete barriers, and encase a little garden that looks as if it has been there forever. Westmount-issue benches in grey-green and black livery have been recently installed.

* * * * *

Some of the Westmounters who live near the Ville-Marie expressway and who want a noise barrier feel we've done enough on the top of the mountain, and now it's their turn. They're right.

Now is the time to use this same formula of citizen input and imaginative administration to tackle a much more challenging problem.

October 15, 1992

NOISE BARRIERS

WYSIWYG. That's computerspeak for What You See Is What You Get. It's pronounced wisiwig. When it comes to this column, I wish I could invoke WYSIWIT: What You See Is What I Typed. I don't mind the odd typo, but seeing my prose amputated is mildly irritating, especially as it is already far from being deathless.

Last week, some lines were removed from my piece about the new path on Summit Circle. The first rule of journalism is: all the news that's printed to fit. I understand. But since it's on today's topic, and out of orneriness, I am going to stick them in here:

"Some of the Westmounters who live near the Ville-Marie expressway and who want a noise barrier feel we've done enough on the top of the mountain, and now it's their turn. They're right.

Now is the time to use this same formula of citizen input and imaginative administration to tackle a much more challenging problem."

This barrier issue was raised during the last election, and again when I was on about controlling useless noise like leafblowers. People in Ward 8 reminded me that the expressway is a founding member of the racket club.

As I see it, it is essentially a financial question - and how the costs should be shared. Even the barrier's efficacy and aesthetics are matters of cost. How high and thick does it have to be to shield noise effectively? Can it be stuck on the highway's parapet, or does it have to be free-standing because of weight or turning moments caused by wind loads?

Highway noise is about 90 decibels at source, or about 70-75 decibels by the time it gets to our residents (my guess). With a barrier, anything higher than 60 decibels would not be worth the candle. This could cost \$2 million, with Quebec picking up a half.

Some cities use local improvement taxes for such things, rather than having all the citizens pay for what amounts to a benefit to a specific area.

At the risk of giving the pro-barrier group some ammunition, I did a little digging as to what happened when the expressway was built. When Quebec expropriated some land on Selby Street and the City Yards in 1965 and 1970, we got what amounts to the cost of the barrier in 1992 dollars. One could argue that this money should have been used to reduce the environmental impact of the highway.

Yet the affected residents should be aware that convincing Council is not enough: their Waterloo could come if the whole city votes down the loan by-law, as they did in TMR.

October 22, 1992

WHERE HAVE ALL THE LEADERS GONE?

I have lived in Canada for over 35 years, and I don't recall a period of greater national despondency and lassitude. We are sleepwalking through a recession we can't shake off, while trying to thread our way through a political miasma that only Canada could create. We have lost our moral compass. We mistrust our leaders. Will a referendum alone show the way out?

On Monday, it is not just a question of whether we vote yes or no, but that we vote. A *yes* vote or a *no* vote can be interpreted as a sign of concern. Not voting at all sends a message that we just don't give a damn. The referendum is not a report card on Mulroney, or on Bourassa. It is a report card on our whole political system. Politicians are the distillate of our entire society, and are representative of it - sometimes to our profound embarrassment. Our politicians were not transported here from the planet Zorg.

If our politicians are rudderless, it's because we are rudderless. We vote them in because they say what we want to hear, and vote them out because they can't deliver. The oratory that might have fired us up at election time now seems smarmy and hollow. But who's really at fault? We want leaders, but we don't want to hear what true leaders would tell us. We vote for packaging not product.

Now, where are all those successful, principled business people we are always clamouring for - as election fodder? Let me tell you, they're pretty scarce. And most would have too much dignity to subject themselves to the circus of getting elected.

And who would want to pay the price? Our hockey players make millions a year. Our captains of industry likewise - with golden parachutes that make politician's pensions look fit for paupers. Presidents of companies stack their boards with cronies who rubber-stamp cushy salaries while the company loses scads of money.

Politicians are no more mercenary, no more megalomaniac than their cousins in business. They are simply more visible.

If the media are doing such a good job, why then do we have such politicians? Would *you* have a thick enough carapace to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous journalists, safe in their comfy bunkers? Politicians are fair game, they say. Is it fair? Are they game?

I hope these dyspeptic ramblings might get a few more of you out to vote next Monday. Let's tell them we *do* care.

October 29, 1992

PRESSURE GROUPS

One of the most vexatious things about being on City Council is how to deal fairly with pressure groups. Are they squeaky wheels or are they just missing a cog? Whom do they represent and are they representative? Will we steer off-course needlessly, or are they the tip of the iceberg of a real problem?

Lobbyists, advocates, and supplicants have been part of society forever.

Wat Tyler in late medieval England led a rather determined pressure group of peasants who didn't like the poll tax and went to see the king to tell him so. Things turned nasty, and Tyler's mob beheaded the architects of the tax and stuck their heads up on poles. Tyler and his friends in turn lost their heads, but the poll tax was abolished. One presumes that a head tax would have been fiscally rewarding that day. Or a pole tax.

Today, there are more civilised ways to get ahead politically.

Ottawa has been turned into a ritualised clearing-house for pressure groups. Our politicians govern by joining the dots between each special-interest group. Councillor Herb Berkovitz is fond of saying that each of us belongs to the smallest minority in the world - a minority of one. But the pleas of the average citizen are drowned out by the discordant din of these one-issue activists.

Meanwhile, back at City Hall, we are sometimes tempted to cave in too quickly when faced with a small but determined group who invoke the rallying-cry of democracy. What we might be dealing with is an oligocracy - if I may be permitted to mint a word. (Oligo means few.)

Don't get me wrong: pressure groups are a vital part of the process. They should even be encouraged. And many times they're right. My only point - and it is a long time coming - is that it is the role of Council to filter out the heat and try to see the light. We must think of those who might have a different view, or who might be indirectly affected by what the group is proposing.

We are often lulled into thinking there is only one position possible on an issue. We are often tripped up by the political equivalent of Newton's Third Law of Motion: for every political action there is an unequal and opposite reaction.

In physics, one often conveniently ignores friction. In politics, friction is a source, not a suppressor, of energy!

November 5, 1992

A RECKONING

Tuesday marked the anniversary of the election of this City Council. It's time to take stock, to tot up what's been done. Think of this as my report to the shareholders - the citizens of Westmount.

I am going to run down a list of things I promised at election time, along with an (admittedly biased) *compte rendu*.

- Preserve the physical ambience of Westmount: We are working on an overall heritage policy. The city is being divided up into 38 character areas in order that we can control building construction, demolition, or modification in a more rational and prescriptive way. Getting a building permit will no longer resemble entering a Masonic Order.

Also, I have initiated a financial policy that deals with our shameful neglect of city buildings. We can't just live off our capital.

- See through the Library Renovation Project: Letters to all residents will go out soon describing what we propose to do with the library and how much it will cost the average taxpayer. It's time to reset and polish this jewel in Westmount's crown, but the people who pick up the tab will have the final say.

- Push for air and noise pollution controls: I became a member of the MUC Environment Commission. Since 80% of all air pollution in our area is caused by vehicles, we are looking at how to cut back on the smog created and the resultant low-level ozone that has become quite a health menace.

Westmount is working on a noise by-law that will control useless sources of noise, like City equipment and the dread leafblower.

- Extend the recycling program to apartments: This will begin in the early part of 1993. Since reduction is even better than costly recycling, I hope to see Westmount spearhead "pay-as-you-throw" garbage metering systems as a direct encouragement to reduction.

- Continue to battle the MUC bureaucracy: For the first time in over five years, the MUC is weighing in with a budget well under the rate of inflation. And, while we lost a battle to keep our police station, we are still waging the war to have proper police presence.

I have also advanced a new system of MUC cost sharing and taxation method.

- Continue to reduce Westmount's own spending: Our local spending has actually *dropped nearly 15%* since 1988, once inflation is taken into account.

■ Increase our clout at the MUC and in Quebec: To paraphrase John Donne: no city is an island, entire of itself. Westmount ignores at its peril whatever is happening in that greater world outside our community. But it means trashing that quaint idea of a part-time mayor. To run Westmount is possibly a part-time job, but not once you add involvement in the MUC, the Regie, and the Suburban Mayors.

■ Fight Quebec's centralizing mentality: In a rare fit of prescience, I said a year ago that "having 27 messy little cities in the MUC probably offends Quebec City's sense of neatness". Four months later, Ryan dropped his bomb about municipal amalgamations. Reacting to this, I helped set up a small group of mayors whose job is to present a comprehensive municipal vision to Ryan's task force.

There are many things holding back the development of the Greater Montreal Area, but the number of cities in it is not one of them.

As you can see, I have not been inactive.

November 12, 1992

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM

WESTMOUNT. Remembrance Day Ceremonies, 1992. The assembled group thinks one collective thought for one hushed minute. Traffic is stopped, and silence wraps around us. We become part of a shared memory stretching back into time. To 1918. To 1945.

Flags snap sharply in the wind like rifle shots. The grey granite monument broods over the dead, whose names are slowly eroding on stone tablets. One by one the wreaths are laid. Old soldiers stumble a bit, but salute smartly after setting down a little ring of green plastic flowers. At each corner of the cenotaph, four young soldiers stand stock-still with rifles reversed.

During the march past, there were lots of cadets out of step. My short spell in the militia taught me that it is a fallacy to think you can be either a) in step, or b) out of step. There seems to be an infinite range of possibilities in between. Then there's the soldier who swings the left arm with the left leg, contented in getting the appendages in his field of vision in step.

Before the ceremony begins each year, military types and local notables mill around inside City Hall, drinking coffee. At my first Remembrance Day ten years ago, there was a retired army officer resplendent in khaki, Sam Browne belt, and spit-and-polish brown boots. No more. Now all you see is the 7-up delivery-man uniform that came about when Hellyer unified the forces. Out with officers' pips, in with U.S.-style gold bars. Out with the open-handed salute, in with the U.S. horizontal eye-shader. We chucked out British military traditions and accoutrements, only to adopt American ways. And this is a country that defines itself by not being American!

This year, I delayed the ceremony because of an unknown dog.

Just before we were supposed to start things off, Colonel George Javornik said, "Peter, there's some excess baggage on your shoes". Looking down, I saw some brownish ooze. I rushed to the toilet to wash it off. On arrival, as they say, my nose made a positive identification. Dog poo. Under both shoes. I must have stepped in it outside my house.

While I scraped off this malodorous gunk, 250 soldiers were waiting for me to emerge. I went through a roll of paper towels. Then the toilet blocked. Giving up in disgust, I stalked out of the bathroom, stuck my chain of office on, and went out with dignitaries in tow, shit on my shoes.

The men we were remembering would have had a bit of a chuckle.

December 10, 1992

MONTREAL AND ITS REGION

The attentive reader will, after duly noting that redundancy, remember my references to the task force on reorganising the Montreal region that Claude Ryan set up this spring. There were, at the time, loud off-stage noises about merging many of our Island cities in a curious and uncharacteristic attempt to ape Toronto.

You might also remember that a few mayors and I got together to present to Ryan's group *our* vision as to how we see the region of Montreal unfolding. To head him off at the pass, so to speak. We have been working at it 10-20 hours a week since June. A number of citizens have asked me what is happening.

A synopsis of our first brief and those of other groups will not be made public until early next year, but I can share with you some personal thoughts.

- Like all suburbs, we have a symbiotic relationship with Montreal. If it goes down the tubes, so do we. If it prospers, so do we. I was happy to see Montreal take itself in hand with their last budget, but they have a hard row to hoe.

We also have to help out a city that has become a social dumping ground, exacerbated by the middle-class flight to off-island cities. But as long as 75% of Montreal voters are tenants who pay 15 to 20% of the taxes, there will always be the threat of bread and circuses à la Drapeau. How to help, and not be taken for a financial ride: that is the question.

- Decisions are being made by mandarins in Quebec City who have no knowledge of the real problems of Montreal. We should start moving some key government departments to Montreal from Quebec: Industry, Municipal and Cultural Affairs, Immigration: the list goes on. In an ideal world, the entire parliamentary and governmental apparatus would be moved. *This* is something we can copy from Toronto!

- Urban sprawl is at the root of our municipal problems, not the number of cities. This phenomenon is caused by unchecked highway construction, fiscal unbalance, and fears for personal security.

- Economic goals must be the moving forces behind in any reorganisation. Residential communities can play a part in this. The first thing potential investors do when scouting out new plant sites is to spend quite a few (sometimes furtive) hours looking at where they will *live*, not work. Closeness to downtown, good schools, and a sense of community will often weigh more heavily than purely business factors such as a good labour pool, access to markets, and so on.

December 17, 1992

MONTREAL AND ITS REGION - PART II

Any restructuring of the Montreal Region has to deal head-on with our base problem - urban sprawl and its atrophying effect on the central core.

Make no mistake about it: merging MUC municipalities won't help urban sprawl, it will worsen it. If amalgamations were such a panacea, the city of Montreal - a gargantuan product of many mergers - would be a shining example. Instead, it's the emptying of Montreal and the attendant fiscal maladies that caused Claude Ryan to look into restructuring in the first place.

In the same way that the railway building boom created the bedroom communities and garden cities at the turn of the century, it's the concrete tentacles of the highway that now determine where tract housing flourishes. One difference. We don't have the population growth to justify it. While we are spreading out like ink on blotting-paper, we really don't *need* all this new space.

The expansiveness of the 60s is the expensive mess of the 90s.

We don't have many more people in the Montreal Region since 1974, but the number of cars has gone up by one-half! In fact, 25% of people walked and 40% drove to their destinations in 1970, now 15% walk and 60% drive.

Once the private car established a bridgehead (so to speak) on the North and South shores, next came houses, then shops, and finally business - and jobs. In 1971, the MUC had 90% of all regional jobs. It's down to 75% and dropping.

We have to rid ourselves of the North American notion that land is expendable, and great hunks of it are needed to surround each building like moats. The suburban dream house was gently mocked in that song: "little boxes, on the hillside, all made of ticky-tacky and they all look just the same".

Once, highways were used just for inter-city travel. Now, many are used for commuting. Yet we cling to the fiction that highways are a strictly Provincial responsibility. Meanwhile, MUC taxpayers pay twice: both for the metro (local taxes) *and* for the expressways (income taxes). So Laval, for example, has its main arteries paid for by all Quebecers, while we have to foot the metro bill alone.

In a future column, I'll give my ideas for a new Regional structure to replace the MUC. Policing would be local, except support services. But any transport commission should be regional, and include responsibility for expressways. Economic development and environmental services should likewise be regional.

December 23, 1992

CHRISTMAS PASSED

Warning: this column has nothing to do with Westmount. It has everything to do with indulging in personal reminiscences of Christmases past. If you have no tolerance for mawkish ramblings, don't read any further.

Recent Xmas'es fade quickly from my memory banks. In common with most people, it's my early memories that have staying power.

Most of my childhood was spent in a rambling old Regency house in a fashionable area of south London; that is, fashionable when the house was built in the 1820s. The district was getting decidedly down-at-the-heels by the time the Trents moved in, but the house still had a faint air of gentility.

Our back garden, surrounded in the English manner with a 10-foot brick wall topped with broken glass, included a cricket pitch, some scraggly pear trees, and a nice lawn. We rarely saw snow at Christmas-time. When it did snow, I would put on my grey jersey, navy mac, and Wellington boots and squelch out mazy patterns on the white lawn. I would then admire my handiwork from my bedroom window.

As Christmas neared, we would make chains by pasting strips of coloured paper together. The schoolroom would be heavy with the smell of flour-and-water paste and wet paper.

For reasons not clear to me even today, my parents would wait until Christmas Eve before putting up the tree and hanging silver garlands all over the walls in the downstairs rooms. They would work during the night to put a pillowcase full of presents at the foot of each of our beds. How they groaned when we children got up at six in the morning to tear apart the wrappings!

One Xmas, I woke to find an electric train set. My father had installed it on an old door stuck on trestles. I barely got a chance to play with it that morning, as he was busy with the timing of the points, and worrying about whether the slow goods train would crash into the Flying Scotsman.

Christmas pudding was filled with coins. The possibility of chipped teeth seemed remote compared to the real risk of my sisters getting more pelf. We retrieved sixpences, shillings, and three-penny bits (pronounced thruppenny-bit, with the same dactylic beat as the tuppenny-ha'penny stamp).

With coals glowing in the hearth, and cryptic crosswords half-done, people settled in for an after-dinner snooze. Christmases were so delightfully predictable then.

* * * * *

Happy Christmas and Chanukah to all!

January 7, 1993

YOU SAY YOU WANT A RESOLUTION

Still suffused with the glow of Holiday goodwill, I have decided to write New Year's resolutions, not just for me, but for a whole raft of others. A potpourri of other people's promises. I am sure my generous gesture will be repaid in full if not in kind.

For Federal politicians:

To take all the bumf on the constitution and stick it in a (large) time capsule...to be opened when people realise that a country is not held together just by reams of paper.

For Post Office clerks:

To crack a smile at least once an hour. Surliness is not part of your job description. Just because you're now a Crown Corporation, that doesn't make you "uncivil servants".

For the Westmount City Council:

To have the wisdom to make decisions based on what is fair for most citizens, not just what a vocal few would have us do. That includes the mayor.

For the editor of the Examiner:

To write at least one editorial favourable to this Council. We can't be doing all *that* badly.

For cliché-mongers:

To swear off terms such as: *leading-edge*, *basically*, *state-of-the-art*, *life-style*, *time-frame*, and other such excrescences of the 80s.

For verbal faddists:

To avoid becoming a member of the former group by easing off on vogue words such as *excellence* (everybody and his dog seem to be pursuing it), *sense* (as in "Mr Mulroney, do you have the sense that..."), *gender* (a grammatical term. The right word is usually sex. But don't quote me.), *craft* (verb), and *empower*.

For contract gardeners:

To turn over a new leaf...with a rake, not a noisy, polluting blower. And to stop sending garden detritus into the road.

For some city employees:

To realise that your ultimate allegiance is not to the Director-General or to Council: it is to the taxpayers. They are your collective client and paymaster, and, in the latter capacity, they treat *you* very well.

For the Public Works Department:

To get Bombardier to make a sidewalk snowplough with a narrower track, to avoid flailing off great hunks of turf bordering our sidewalks. (It would also help if our drivers obeyed some kind of sidewalk speed limit.)

For smokers:

To quit.

For me:

To refrain from telling other people what to do.

January 14, 1993

MONTREAL AND ITS REGION - PART III

I got a call from a neighbour, Don Newman. Would I like to go up in his twin-engined Cessna and see Westmount from the air? Don is the U.S. Minister to ICAO. He is a laconic, quietly confident Yank who once taught B-17 pilots how to fly.

In maps, the Montreal region is carefully carved up into cities. But once again I was struck by the seamlessness of our region when seen from the air. Natural features, roads and buildings orient the viewer, not dotted lines. Westmount, dear Westmount, was not at first discernable. I had to find that spiky wall of towers - Alexis-Nihon, No. 1 Wood, and Westmount Square - in order to place my city.

Which brings me to the point of this piece.

The most obvious natural features are the rivers that define, and used to isolate, the Island of Montreal. But for the purposes of intermunicipal services, do these natural divisions make sense any longer? Why should the MUC be delimited by a body of water? Laval and most of the South Shore are closer to the centre of the MUC than, say, Beaconsfield.

Much of Montreal's middle class have decamped to the North and South Shores, where property taxes are 50 to 70% of those in Montreal. Thanks to an orgy of bridge-building and highway construction, the agent of change - the car - is no longer penned in on the Island

And all this largesse came from Quebec and Ottawa, who are therefore partially responsible for urban sprawl. If off-Island communities had to pay the true cost of their infrastructure, their taxes would be higher, and the centrifugal forces much weaker.

What to do with the MUC? First, we have to decide whether the MUC is another level of government, or is simply a service co-operative. If the MUC is a full-fledged government, then it has to be opened up more to the electorate. But we already live in one of the most over-governed countries in the world, partially because of the difficulty in keeping a thin ribbon of a country together.

If we rid the MUC of the one activity that should be primarily local - police - all that remains is mass transit and water treatment as big-ticket items. These functions could be administered as service organisations, not as governments - even if the geographical boundaries were expanded to include Laval and the South Shore.

Most cities around the world have *regional* transportation authorities, and the MUC's huge water treatment capacity can handle off-Island needs with much less investment.

And we can't just leave things up in the air.

January 21, 1993

SIGNS OF THINGS TO COME?

Ah, the realities of living in Quebec. Last week, Ryan's task force released their interim report on the future of Greater Montreal. This report is an important signpost on the road to urban reform or possible amalgamations. What should our cities look like at the end of the millennium?

I got one reporter calling me on that topic.

But I got four calls from the media about - guess what? - stop signs. That perennial linguistic red flag.

It seems we will no longer have to pull out all the stops.

Write *stop*. Write *arrêt*. Who cares? You could write in double Dutch and people would know what a red octagon meant. Can we please get on to more intellectually nourishing subjects than what a ruddy stop sign should say?

I suppose my problem is that I could never get very exercised over the whole sign issue anyway. I can't quite go along with the thin-edge-of-the-wedgers who say: today it's store signs; tomorrow it's the eradication of English as we know it.

On the other hand, francophones did look a little silly banning a perfectly good French word. A stop sign in France is a *panneau stop*. In fact, as a command, *stop* is grammatically correct. *Arrêt* isn't. *Arrêt* is a noun.

Back to the Task Force report. It contained no surprises. But, like ancient priests examining steaming bird entrails, we mayors will be trying to divine what this document holds for our future.

The authors were quite coy when using the A-word. Amalgamations. One gets the feeling they have really not decided as yet to plump for the homogeneity of the Toronto model of urban blandness born in the 1960s.

It is worrisome, though, when they cast admiring glances at Laval - a city recently created through forced mergers. *Of course* Laval is doing well. Like the post-war brain drain from Europe, they have benefitted from the middle-class flight from Montreal to greener pastures.

Actually, I was impressed with the thoroughness and insight of the Task Force. I am moved to make such a magnanimous evaluation as they have covered many of the issues that have been on *my* hit list. I particularly like the mention of the car as the culprit in urban sprawl, how the rivers don't have to delimit the MUC, that our Provincial government is too centralised, that we have a symbiosis with Montreal, and other such themes that may ring a bell with some readers.

January 28, 1993

MERGER MANIA

I telephoned Vera Danyluk, Mayor of TMR and president of the Suburban Mayors. It was 7:30 a.m. last Wednesday morning.

For me to call *anybody* at that hour meant I was upset about something. In a Gazette article that morning, Mrs Danyluk was quoted as saying that rising costs and Government pressure could force many municipalities to merge. She allegedly suggested that TMR might merge with Outremont or St Laurent, going on to speculate about the possible dismemberment of Montreal and NDG joining Montreal West.

Vera was quick to tell me she was quoted quite out of context.

This mass merger mania continued in French on Thursday. La Presse had immediately got on the blower with Jean Pomminville, Mayor of Outremont and Vera's presumptive betrothed. Jean picked up the spluttering torch and went on about how the suburbs should not be annexed to Montreal; but rather, Montreal, a poorly-run city, should be chopped up and some pieces grafted on to suburban cities. He ungallantly rejected any marriage with TMR.

The same day, Mayor Frank Zampino was being questioned on the radio about the joining of St Michel district with his city, St Leonard.

To finish off this municipal marriage-go-round, a rather puzzled Mayor Doré expressed his surprise in La Presse Friday "about the appetite of the Suburban Mayors". He went on to say that when he had met with a small group of us, no such ideas were bandied about. He was right. I was there.

What happened?

Well, first of all, it would be a lie to say that there has never been speculation about Montreal being carved up: some suggest that the unwieldy size of Montreal is the very reason they are in trouble. Indeed, most indicators clearly prove that the suburban cities are far better run than Montreal. And in spite of Mrs Danyluk's alleged comments, most small cities can weather much harder financial buffets than can Montreal.

But our basic position is that mergers or scissions will not really solve any of the major problems facing the region. The whole subject is great media fodder but hardly helpful in forging a vision of the future.

Vera Danyluk is the most principled and candid mayor around. She got hoist with her own petard. Ditto Jean Pomminville. In trying to be open and thorough, they strayed into the hypothetical and got burned. The press only cherrypick those morsels they know would make their readers sit up and take notice. Which, I suppose, is their job. Or is it?

February 4, 1993

METRO T.O.: WAY TO GO?

Toronto. High-rise heaven. Here I was to see how T.O. had dealt with the problems of urban sprawl and regional government. While Quebec muses about how cities should be structured, Toronto has boldly gone where few cities have dared venture: they have created a true second level of municipal government called "Metro". (Mind you, there's not much left of the first level, but more on that next week.)

This was the first time I was looking at Toronto through mayor's eyes. For a long ten years, I had lived there. I had also witnessed my little town get swallowed up by Toronto in the "rationalisation" of the sixties.

The Ryan task force on the Montreal region seem to be quite struck with the Toronto model of government. They had all recently visited the Queen City. I hope they were not taken in by what they saw. Yet by any standards, Toronto's answer to the MUC is impressive.

Starting with its brand-new headquarters - Metro Hall.

Goethe called architecture "frozen music". Toronto, like most North American cities, seems to be made up of Musak on ice. So when Metro was casting about for its first real home after 40 years of existence, it naturally chose the high-rise idiom.

The recent bankruptcy in architectural ideation means all things important have to be tall. Architects of the second half of our century have become exterior decorators of building shapes set by developers and engineers. Architecture is egocentric, misanthropic, and, above all, vertical.

I found it strange to have a Council chamber topped with a 27-storey tower, built expressly and exclusively for 2,000 cosseted Metro bureaucrats. One million square feet of space. Soft-blue carpeted corridors, wide enough for whole regiments to march through, led to innumerable meeting rooms. There was liberal use of stainless-steel and marble.

It seemed almost incongruous - as if civil servants were serving Mammon and actually making money, not spending it. Functionaries masquerading as businessmen.

And to think that Montrealers got upset over a measly window and marble toilets.

The MUC's rented premises in Complex Desjardins have a dog-eared early-70s flavour. The furniture is covered in nubby, earth-toned fabrics. Lots of orange and bilious brown. And the ventilation is atrocious.

A far cry from the splendour of Metro Hall.

Please don't show this column to Michel Hamelin. He might get ideas.

February 11, 1993

TORONTO THE GOOD?

(This column was finished just before I was knocked flat by a seven-day flu. I wrote about my gut reaction to the Toronto form of local government. I shall not dwell on my gut's reaction to TO's over-friendly microbes.)

Two weeks ago, I visited the new 27-storey Metro Hall - that opulent monument to centralized local government rising out of downtown Toronto. (Metro is their answer to the MUC.) I trailed my fingers over the desks in the mahogany-trimmed Council chamber, each desk housing a computer terminal for voting.

Ringed around these sumptuous digs are private offices for each of the 28 directly-elected Metro councillors. Each councillor has two assistants. Sprinkled among them are the empty offices of the six Metro mayors - empty because the mayors are busy running their home cities of half-a-million citizens.

Toronto-area mayors are effectively neutered from any real input into Metro. And Metro has subsumed many of their former powers. Mayors are reduced to a sullen rump. Before 1988, Metro was structured a bit like the MUC, with no direct elections. Now, the 28 councillors, whose districts contain 80,000-odd voters, are trying to get their arms around a \$3.3 billion budget. Metro is run by the bureaucrats.

Some friends I stayed with there told me that they "had given up on Metro". That's how Metro officials could get away with putting up this one-million-square-foot edifice without so much as a whimper from taxpayers. Joyce Trimmer, the mayor of Scarborough, told us that Metro is "out of control".

This homogenized and inflexible government is precisely what Canada's "ethnopolis" *doesn't* need. With 80% of all Canadian immigrants eventually settling in Toronto, there is a real danger of urban allegiance by race alone.

Metro offers no help in injecting a traditional sense of small community to this ethnic jumble. Just the opposite. With 30,000 bureaucrats and only 34 elected people, it is an automaton that only Toronto could devise. It can't give a soul to the new multi-ethnic city.

Metro handles all the things the MUC does - and more: welfare, homes for the aged, ambulances, a zoo, golf courses, main roads, the CNE, waste disposal... the list goes on. Not much left for the cities to do!

I just hope Ryan's task force is not taken in by the uniform sterility of the Toronto model of local government. Ontario was wealthy in spite of, not because of, such excesses as Metro. And the boom-time party is over.

March 4, 1993

A STATIONARY TARGET

This is a follow-up on our embattled MUC police station. The MUC voted last October in favour of the new police map, over the objections of Westmount and Outremont - cities that together have only 2% of the vote. Our station is scheduled to disappear next year.

I have been following at least two strategies to preserve a police presence in Westmount: firstly, to see if we can have a "superstation" in Westmount; and, secondly, to try and convince the Island mayors to push for a local constabulary. More on that anon.

When the MUC launched their campaign to sell the idea of reducing the number of stations from 24 to 14, they invoked that nice, comforting, and redundant slogan of "community policing".

How can cutting out neighbourhood stations square with the concept of "community policing", you might well ask? Well, they justified this little gem of Newspeak because of their idea of importing the mini-station concept from Detroit - the city all of us are dying to emulate. Westmount would get a two-man mini-station as a consolation prize for losing our full-service station.

It's really a case of the Devil citing scripture for his purpose. The term "community policing" was given wide currency because of an influential report called "Police-Challenge 2000" written in 1990. This report, as the title would suggest, is replete with clichés about pursuing excellence (as opposed to mediocrity?), but it does manage to make some good points. The MUCPD obviously chose to ignore the following observation on page 137. Or perhaps they didn't get that far:

"The impersonal style of policing in patrol cars, of rotating officers continuously in a beat, and of dismantling neighbourhood police stations in favour of lavish centralized quarters certainly contributes to the sense of isolation from the police felt by many citizens".

Anyway, short of barricading our Station 23 front door with my body, there's not much hope of keeping the *status quo*. This is why I've been negotiating with the MUC to see if the "superstation" combining Westmount and downtown could be in eastern Westmount. We would give them land as an incentive.

The station would be built in such a way that if we ever got back local police, the Westmount portion could easily be split off. Any deal would be subject to citizen approval.

Watch this space for details on the local constabulary idea. And what we should do with our existing station.

March 11, 1993

THE THIN BLUE LINE

The desire of some suburban mayors (including this one) to return to a degree of locally-controlled policing is not just a hankering for the good old pre-MUC days.

And we are not just trying to bolster our respective bailiwicks. (Although some mayoral Cassandras in the U.S. told us: "lose your police...eventually, you'll lose your city".)

There is a dissatisfaction about the level of MUC police services, and a real fear that it will get worse with the reduction in the number of stations from 24 to 14.

Some supramunicipal services like transport just cry out to be regionalised.

But many services, such as police, are better delivered locally. The Suburban Mayors have promoted the idea of a *gendarmerie locale*, or local constabulary, three times in the last decade. I have been trying to revive it. Under this concept, all specialised services and investigation would be centralised - say, for the entire region or even for the province. Traffic squads, patrols, and prevention would be local; that is, by municipality.

The current paramilitary structure of the police does not lend itself all that well to being flexible for local conditions. They have a "uniform" approach: uniform training, uniform salaries, uniform stations, uniform management levels. (And uniform uniforms!)

Ideally, local police would get to know our kids, watch them grow up, and be sensitive to the needs of the elderly and ethnic communities. To do this, they must stay in one place. All this is pretty boring stuff for some young officers. But maybe that's part of the problem. Policing is not just about driving cars at speed and brandishing guns.

The Canadian Urban Institute in Toronto has some interesting views about "disentanglement", or the unravelling of the responsibilities now shared by Ontario and its municipalities.

This group - which is also in favour of cities without cars, incidentally - feels the delivery of *all* services should be pushed down to the local cities. Policies, standards, and planning should be the purview of higher levels of government. We should invert the inverted pyramid, if you see my point.

Last weekend, the Conference of Suburban Mayors had their annual public meeting. With my prodding, the Conference has agreed to a special levy of members to finance a study on the local constabulary idea.

March 18, 1993

A DIFFICULT DECISION

Until a month ago, I prided myself in my openness and candour with citizens - as indeed did all members of Council. But on February 17, we were faced with the letting go of the Chief Librarian.

Because of legal implications, and because we wanted to mitigate the potential hurt to the former Chief Librarian, we have been forced to be circumspect in talking about, for example, her lack of ability to take on a new position. By weighing our words so carefully, we have shut down the open political process we were so careful to nurture.

In delicate matters such as personnel, where one cannot reveal all the aspects leading up to a decision, Council is at a distinct disadvantage when explaining things to citizens.

First, a little background.

Last September, the city announced a management restructuring plan to eliminate one level of city management. The implementation was going well until we got to the library. This is because the application of the plan resulted in the abolition of the position of Chief Librarian, yet creating a new position with a lot broader responsibilities. This is a position one step closer to the Director General, and will be filled by a professional librarian with good management skills.

With four layers of management in the library itself (for twenty full-time people), it was impossible to keep both the new and the old positions.

The former Chief Librarian, Rosemary Lydon, was offered a generous severance package. She has decided to decline the offer.

With all my heart, I wish things could have been done differently. We are *not* insensitive and callous. And this was *not* a precipitate decision. However, I have become increasingly uncomfortable about the consequences of these library changes. And I have had no small amount of mail to help concentrate my mind. In my view, the *concept* of reducing a management layer cannot be faulted, but its *application* has been admittedly difficult for Miss Lydon.

City Council and the Administration have, up until now, done things by the book. But the law is a very blunt instrument. I find I can no longer countenance the damage the present confrontational approach can cause to our City, our Library, and - since she has decided not to settle - to Miss Lydon.

I am therefore willing, on behalf of Council, to sit down with Miss Lydon and her advisors to try to break this logjam.

There has been a lot of misunderstanding about what this restructuring involves.

We are not changing the present authority of the Library Committee, which has total intellectual control over the library. In fact, they are involved in the

selection process for the new manager, who will be a professional librarian.

We are committed to an ambitious \$7.5 million library expansion. We have pushed for the automation of the Library - now underway at long last. The new manager responsible for the library will report directly to the Director General. These are not the actions of a Council determined to somehow downgrade the library!

Every one of us on Council and on the Library Committee loves our library as much as any Westmouter does. We have not spent all these years of preparation on the library renewal for nothing.

And, reports to the contrary, we are *not* merging the Recreation Department with the Library. That would be patently ridiculous. The Director of Recreation remains in place.

These misconceptions have been compounded by the feeling of many library users that there is nothing wrong with the library management. They are saying, "I like the way I get treated at the library, why change it?". Why indeed? The problem is, we need a manager to handle much wider responsibilities, along with the expertise to handle the expanded and automated library. And we can't go ahead if we don't have this restructuring to put a qualified manager in place. The former Chief Librarian cannot fulfil that role.

Just a few words on the library renewal project itself.

The Library Committee has sent out an invitation to over 40 professional librarians living in Westmount to meet as a focus group. We need their ideas on the operating layout of the renewed library. Also at this meeting will be members of Council and the six professional librarians that work at our library.

From this focus group we will form a small working committee to give advice to the architect and Council. In this connection, I assure you that both I and Council are determined that the architect will not run the show, and that our primary concern is to build a functional, accessible, and welcoming library.

* * * * *

The fact that Miss Lydon has a special place in the hearts of many Westmouters made all these decisions doubly difficult. For us to have approved this politically-unpopular change should give you an idea of how much we felt it had to be done.

In the interests of the city and Miss Lydon, I hope this problem can be sorted out. I accept full responsibility. I ask for your understanding and support.

March 23, 1993

THICK AND THIN SKIN

I used to read my Examiner the moment it crossed my desk or was stuffed in my mailbox. I also used to leaf through my daily mail with something akin to a mild pleasure. Even calling back people listed on those little pink notes was not really a chore.

In the last few weeks, I've been putting aside our local paper for a later read. And the temperature of my 'in' basket has gone up quite a bit of late because of a flood of pretty uncomplimentary letters and phone messages, all to do with Council's decision about the library management. I have never received such mail in all my life.

I'm not too sure how much last week's column will help: it's always harder to explain after the fact, and to have to choose one's words so carefully. But I am trying to resolve this stalemate, and I think there's desire on both sides to work out a *modus vivendi*.

I always felt that one of my biggest political weaknesses was my thin skin. (Thin? It had to be measured with a micrometer.) I always wondered whether I could take the buffets and broadsides that are a politician's lot. I have been watching my reaction to all this with a certain detached fascination. The last few weeks have put my hide through a most efficient tannery.

But politicians who have *too* thick a skin are insensitive both ways - they can't be hurt, but they equally don't understand the worries and fears of others. And certainly it's the former Chief Librarian who has had the most difficult time in all this, not me.

The treatment I've got in the last little while is mild compared to what our returning resident, Brian Mulroney, has had to bear. Mulroney is not known for his delicate dermis. But the recent Aislin cartoon that *seemed* to depict someone walking away after shooting him was really a little over the top.

To say it was Trudeau with a walking stick and not a stranger with a gun stretches one's visual credulity just a bit too far - especially given the drawing skills of such a brilliant cartoonist as Terry Mosher.

We have enough violent images in our society without having the editorial page contributing its share, even ambiguously.

Given the information available to the writers, I might well have deserved the censure expressed in those letters to me. Mulroney, on the news of his stepping down and coming home, does not deserve suggestions of violence to his person. No matter what you think of him.

April 8, 1993

SLEEPING GIANT

It looks like the sleepyheads have woken up. A year ago, I was ready to recommend we pull out of the Conference of Montreal Suburban Mayors. Originally set up to counterbalance the overweening City of Montreal, it had become a kind of somnolent Senate rubber-stamping everything the MUC did.

In my column of a year ago, I said the Conference was driving by the rear-view mirror. I referred to it as a bunch of sleepyheads. A few mayors took mild offence at this remark, although many admitted it was true. With no Director-General and little leadership, the Conference did seem to be overdosed on Nytol.

Things have changed: we have a dedicated, principled president in Vera Danyluk. Vera (and your humble servant) has been wanting to rein in the MUC's spending for years. The Conference also has a Director-General whose energy level has to be measured in gigawatts.

I was moved to make those comments last year as it seemed the Conference was going to do very little in the face of a potential threat to the very survival of its member cities: the Ryan Task Force on Greater Montreal.

This group had been set up at the request of a cash-strapped Montreal to look into how a seemingly-disparate bunch of cities could come together to create a regional spirit - and maybe help out Montreal into the bargain.

Most of the municipal mandarins in Quebec have been pushing for amalgamations for years, and such a task force could be just the ticket to get this done. Our variety and number upsets their sense of neatness.

There was a lot of hand-wringing about how terrible it was to have 136 municipalities in the Greater Region. Nobody stopped to figure out that the number of cities in the contiguous urban portion - and 75% of the total population - was only 36. The other 100 towns make up a huge thinly-populated penumbra surrounding this core - including such remote hamlets as St Téléphore (pop.: 772).

As an atonement for my unkind remarks, and because of my interest in the subject, I got together with a few other mayors nearly a year ago to put together our vision for the future of the Montreal region.

We have each put in over 500 hours of brainstorming, testing hypotheses, and, mostly, reading a mountain of publications and clippings. We have met people from all over North America, and have had a number of sessions with Jean Doré, and other regional mayors from Laval and the North/South Shores.

Next week: what did we say to the Task Force?

April 15, 1993

THE RYAN TASK FORCE HEARINGS

A couple of weeks ago, a few of us representing the Conference of Suburban Mayors made our final presentation to the Ryan Task Force on the Greater Montreal Region. The few readers I have left will be no doubt cheered by this, as this signals an end to my many turgid columns on the subject.

Our presentation was divided into three themes: how to develop a regional vision and then a regional structure; how to reorganize the MUC; and, finally, how to improve local and regional taxation.

We started off by saying that sustainable economic development is the leitmotif of any regional vision. Since cities control a number of major economic levers - mass transit, zoning, industrial development, and the like - it only made sense that we be players in economic development planning.

We suggested a phased process of refining the regional vision, starting with the Island of Montreal and ending with the entire region of 3.2 million people. A minister must be named for the region. In governmentalese, this minister must ensure "horizontal" and "vertical" co-operation. That is, a minister to make sure all *other* government departments respect regional policies - no more Hôtel Dieu fiascos, for example. The minister would also co-ordinate the three levels of government.

Right now, the very government that wants some sort of a regional spirit has arbitrarily carved up the whole region into five administrative districts.

The permanent but light regional structure would *not* deliver services, but be a planning, co-ordinating body.

The MUC should be treated as a service corporation, dispensing services to local cities. My *personal* feeling is that, eventually, mass transit and highways will be gathered up in a Regional Transport Board, and police will become far more decentralised. There would then be little left of the MUC as we now know it. That is, unless it evolves into a regional service.

The Conference will commission a study to look at the nuts and bolts of how a return to local policing could work.

Fiscally, user fees must be used to reduce an unhealthy dependence on property taxes, both at the MUC and local levels.

We also proposed a \$143 increase in car registration fees across Quebec to wipe out mass transit deficits that Quebec so unceremoniously forced on us two years ago. On-Island, this would be a net gain to most taxpayers. And help reduce the dread surtax.

April 22, 1993

"SETTLEMENT REACHED"

I hesitate in writing anything to do with the recent library contretemps. Yet I feel I owe you a sort of epilogue to this unhappy story.

Referring to our last Council meeting, *The Gazette* headline said: "Librarian's dismissal will stand". According to the *Examiner*, "Trent apologises". You did *not* see a headline: "Settlement reached". In my mind, that was the real story.

The first headline made us look intransigent; the second made us look penitent. While the latter was closer to the mark, I would have thought the fact we managed to reach a mutually-satisfactory arrangement was headline material. But what do I know?

I apologised on behalf of Council and the Administration about the way this matter was initially handled. We should have also apologised for something else. Naiveté. I suppose in a rather ill-defined and fuzzy way, we thought that with the relative popularity and trust we then enjoyed - and is probably ours no longer - the public would accept our judgment in such delicate matters. We thought we would not have to spell things out, in the best interests of those concerned.

Of course, that's not how it works. No matter how much Westmounters might trust their politicians - an unstable condition at best - we cannot expect you to give us carte blanche.

In fact, the whole thing was seen by some as an example of political hubris. We misread the temper of our citizens. Our actions also became the rallying point of related causes: those who were against the Library Renewal Project, librarians who felt the new layout was faulty, and citizens who disliked the choice of architect.

The following measures will, I think, go a long way in addressing the concerns of those many people who wrote and signed petitions.

To those who felt the new position diluted the library function: we have told the Administration to re-examine the whole management structure and have the Director of Recreation report elsewhere than to the new manager responsible for the Library.

All design work on the Renewal Project has been put on hold until the new manager - a professional librarian - is hired.

The settlement does address those petitioners who wanted us to take advantage of the former Chief Librarian's knowledge and experience during the relocation. She has agreed to a two-year consulting contract.

This is why I felt the settlement was news. Good news.

May 6, 1993

WHAT HAPPENED TO EARTH DAY?

For the first time in some years, Earth Day came and went in Westmount with scarcely a sign of recognition. Yet, as I'm constantly reminded by the likes of Don Wedge, Westmount has a good deal of citizens who are worried about ecological issues.

Don, by the way, had the conviction and the stamina to sit through endless environmental hearings on the Waste Management Board's proposals for the treatment of the Island's waste. And that is no picnic. (Garbage is *never* a picnic. Unless you're a seagull.)

But Don Wedge is not alone in his passionate dedication to environmental causes. Take, for example, that supremely-likeable dynamo of a woman, Esther Goldenberg. Esther, who in a prior life was an artist, just about single-handedly started up a series of lectures at Concordia on ecotoxicology. She wants to see a world where pesticides are used far more responsibly.

Esther is the kind of citizen that only Westmount could produce. (Sally Aitken is also, but that's another story.)

A few months ago, Esther invited me over to a breakfast with David Suzuki - a citizen only Canada could produce. Suzuki was in town to garner support for his Foundation.

Suzuki is somehow more *substantial* than he appears on television. And I don't just mean that figuratively. He is also very engaging, drawing you ineluctably into his train of thought.

In my bumbling way, I managed at the outset to tick him off. I was trying to make a point about how the environmental movement, in order to win the day, has to become more mainstream, to be viewed as less of a collection of fringe groups. "Fringe groups?" said Suzuki, bristling. "Well," I said, "you also have to convince the shirt-and-tie crowd." David was not wearing a tie.

Once we moved on to subjects like man's pathological overpopulation of the earth - for me, the root cause of all environmental problems - we got on like a house on fire.

Let me end this with a moving quote from Suzuki: "Humans have become so numerous and our tools so powerful that we have driven our fellow creatures to extinction, dammed the great rivers, torn down ancient forests, poisoned the earth, rain, and wind, and ripped holes in the sky."

May 12, 1993

A HOBSON'S CHOICE?

In the days of Good Queen Bess, one Thomas Hobson rented out horses. He permitted a client to take only the horse that was nearest the stable door. The term "Hobson's choice" is therefore really no choice at all - or, at best, a take-it-or-leave-it choice.

Fast forward four centuries. The suburban Waste Management Board (the "Régie") says we have no choice but go with the waste management programme (recycling, composting, incineration) they have worked on for eight years. Are they right?

The Régie was created because the Miron landfill was supposed to close its doors in 1994. Actually, landfills don't simply "close their doors". This third-largest landfill in North America would keep on digesting the putrefied remains of our garbage, burping up biogas for decades to come.

Now it looks as if Miron - bought by Montreal in 1988 - can keep on scoffing down garbage for another 10-15 years or so. However, residents in the area wish immediate closure. Living near Miron is no bed of roses, visually or olfactorily. The biogas is potentially explosive if anything over 2% air is present. Burning biogas can create toxins - our old friends, dioxins and furans.

You probably have read some pretty negative things about the Régie of late, as it is being subjected to gruelling environmental hearings. The media have described in painful detail the way many groups have trashed the Régie's plans, as they one by one paraded before the hearings.

I would be less than candid with you if I said I have no doubts about the most controversial part of the Régie's plans - incineration. My reservations have little to do with the trace emissions from the stack - *cars* create infinitely more pollution - but it is the inflexibility of its capacity that is its biggest drawback. And this has both ecological and financial implications.

Why burn, anyway? Well, burning reduces volume by 90%. It eliminates biogas. It is sanitary. It creates electricity from the stored-up energy in the non-recyclable garbage. If we can fish out the toxic materials going in - such as the heavy metals in batteries - the ash is pretty much inert.

The \$316 million question is how much will really be needed to burn after reducing, recycling, and composting? More next week.

May 19, 1993

EARTH AND FIRE

Incineration is better for the environment than burying our garbage in landfills. Intuitively, we feel that statement cannot be true. But it is. Yet is incineration so much better that we should pay a lot more for it?

Garden-variety landfills (if you'll excuse the choice of words) are charging \$30 a ton for burial of waste. They have few safeguards. But even with stringent controls, with biogas collectors and liners to stop the leachate polluting the groundwater, landfills can be cheaper than incineration. Possibly \$70 a ton versus \$120 for incineration.

We have always introduced the Waste Management Board's (Régie's) plan with a prologue: "the Miron landfill will close in 1994 and we have to find some way of getting rid of our garbage." Well, Miron may not close soon. It has not been filling up at the rate predicted, because Régie cities have been using the cheaper off-Island landfills, and Montreal has been incinerating.

When Miron fills up we can either burn garbage or continue to cart it off-Island. The Régie has always maintained we should not "export" garbage. But surely garbage that is landfilled inside the Greater Montreal Region is not "exporting" it? There is enough capacity within a \$10/ton hauling range to landfill all the region's garbage for the next 25-30 years! If these landfills were upgraded, might they be an alternative?

The problem with an incinerator is that you can only turn it on or off - there is no dimmer switch. Landfills can take garbage at whatever rate you wish. This means there is no disincentive to reduce or recycle. The catch is the disintegration process goes on for years - not in one second of burning.

If you listen to the U.S. activist, Dr Paul Connett, all we have to do is reduce, recycle, and compost the rest. Things that cannot be turned into fertilizer can still be composted to rid them of biogas potential, and *then* landfilled.

Another approach is "destructive distillation". Waste is not burned, but heated anaerobically to break it down. Westmount could have its own plant - they are that small. This saves in transport, and we wouldn't need a centralised Régie. While I think we should have an Island-wide waste plan, I am always loath to give over powers to the Régie *or* to the MUC. To be continued.

May 26, 1993

WHAT'S THE RUSH?

I remember the rag-and-bone man. He would ply the streets with his horse and cart, sullenly ringing his bell. As a child, I always imagined his title described the man himself, not the trade he dealt in. He would pick up old clothes, furniture, and various metals. The rag-and-bone man was an early form of curbside recycling.

Matter is neither created or destroyed. We are only borrowing the things we acquire. The act of buying should carry with it the responsibility for proper disposal. If man proposes, man disposes.

This moral responsibility devolves upon your friendly neighbourhood municipality, which, with increasing reluctance, removes your muck - both liquid (sewerage) and solid (garbage). Sic transit detritus mundi.

On to more pressing matters. What should we do about the Waste Management Board's plan to burn 70%, recycle 20% and compost 10% of our garbage?

As well as decrying its secretiveness, I have long complained of the Régie's lack of emphasis on reduction. Rather than take our existing trash output and extrapolate its volume into the future, we should have *started* with a comprehensive reduction programme using education and user-fees. Then we would have had a much better idea as to exactly how much would be left to incinerate. For all of us - both Régie detractors and supporters - incineration was meant to be a way of treating the *residuum* of our garbage.

Recycling - while a crucial part of any waste management plan - is very costly and uses a lot of energy - both in transport and in reconversion. Glass, for example, has to be heated to 1400°C in order to be recycled. Reduction costs nothing and expends no energy - except the mental energy required to decide to buy fewer over-packaged goods.

In spite of certain misgivings, then, the prior and the present Councils have supported the Régie's plan. *Something* had to be done with our garbage once the Miron Dump closed in 1994. Well, it apparently won't happen.

I think, therefore, that Westmount should formally ask the Régie some tough questions:

1. What's the rush now?
2. Why can't we co-operate with Montreal?
3. Shouldn't the Régie's loan by-laws require popular ratification?
4. Shouldn't the Régie be run as openly as our own cities?

June 3, 1993

WE'RE PAYING TOO MUCH

According to a recent report, municipal employees are the best-paid workers in Quebec. By far. They earn 26% more than all other public sector workers, who, in turn, make 8% more than their private sector equivalents

These numbers factor in fringe benefits and hours worked, comparing cities of over 25,000 people with firms of over 200 employees.

As well as being so well paid, most unionized city employees have the inestimable advantage of job security. It wasn't so long ago when civil servants made *less* than the private sector. But they had job security. Now they have the best of both worlds.

Cities don't have massive lay-offs. Cities don't close their doors. Municipal employees are made impervious to the financial hazards of the private sector.

This is why I would like to avail ourselves of the two-year wage freeze provided for in Bill 102. This would freeze all salaries of unionized staff, management, and elected officials. It also slices off 1% in holidays.

A few weeks ago, The Examiner published the salaries of our management personnel. I got a few raised eyebrows from people who thought they were pretty generous, especially the salary of the Director General. They had not realised that our current D.G., Manley Schultz, was hired on a three-year contract, and his salary in no way reflects the normal salary for this position.

Bruce St. Louis will be replacing Mr Schultz at the end of the month. Mr St. Louis's ultimate salary will be in the mid-90s. Is this too much money to run the city? When this Council took office, we asked the same question. That is why we have decided to base management salaries on both private and public sector remuneration.

We use the Hay system that quantifies the degree of job difficulty for accurate salary comparisons within and without the city.

In fact, our high-end management salaries are significantly lower than their private sector equivalents.

Management positions represent only 10% of our workforce. Would that all the other employees agreed to accept salaries tied to those in the private sector!

A Westmount firefighter makes \$48,000, a labourer \$33,000, and a building inspector \$39,000 (for a 35-hour week). Is it totally out of line to pay senior management double these numbers for a longer work week and far more responsibility?

All told, though, we need a freeze on *all* these salaries. With no automatic defrost.

June 10, 1993

ANTI-FREEZE AND ANTI-PASTA

There are few things so personal as one's salary. In most organizations, management goes out of its way to keep salaries confidential.

The City of Westmount has been very open about its salaries, at least in recent times. Still, it must be a bit unnerving to see one's salary bared for all to see in the local paper.

I think that a public servant's salary *should* be public. They should be revealed to the people who are ultimately the paymasters.

I also happen to think that those almost obscene salaries made by some private-sector CEOs should also be revealed in company annual reports, as they are in the U.S.

Those lucky few get a cushy stipend regardless of performance. As Galbraith said: "the salary of the chief executive of a large corporation is not a market award for achievement. It is frequently in the nature of a warm personal gesture by the individual to himself".

Back home in Westmount, the salary spectrum is pretty monochromatic. The average 1993 salary of a manager is \$59,302. The average 1992 salary of unionized fire personnel is \$48,453; the average blue collar worker gets \$39,286; a white-collar worker earns \$36,186 (for a 35-hour week).

The shocking thing is that municipal employees make 26% more than in the rest of the Quebec public sector! This is why we must freeze all salaries.

Predictably, our unions don't want to hear of a salary freeze. Reasons given so far range from: "Westmount is a rich city" to "why don't they (the council) cut other expenses, like their own extravagant functions and catering before meetings?"

The latter, rather scatter-shot, riposte is a reference to our 30-minute pasta dinners between our 5 o'clock committee meeting and our 8 o'clock public meeting. That, plus working lunches, costs all of \$10,000 a year.

Our functions represent 0.1% of the city's budget - about the cost to the taxpayer *if* we paid ourselves the pension benefits to which we are entitled, and which just about all cities in the MUC give to their elected officials. (Or about the cost of putting my own salary a little closer to reality?)

Our management restructuring will save us the salaries of our two highest-paid employees. But with total remuneration running about \$16 million, it'll take more than cutting suppers to make further progress!

June 25, 1993

STIMULATING DEBATE

MUC meetings are held in the cavernous interior of Montreal's council chamber. This huge box of a room appears to be designed for the sole purpose of producing echoes. Its builders seemed to favour noise over light - a preference seemingly emulated by today's politicians.

Mercury vapour light fixtures give off a desultory greenish glow that is so weak that reading glasses are mandatory equipment, even for people like me who are denying advancing age.

The media and other visitors are placed in a gallery a good 20-30 feet above the floor. From this eyrie in the gods, they look down on their politicians in the pits.

The meetings of the Waste Management Board (the Régie) are held in the concert hall of the Town of Mount Royal. This hall is - a little incongruously - tucked in behind the Town Hall itself. Although completed in 1948, the hall is very Art Deco in flavour.

The 26 mayors making up the Régie are all ranged in a long parenthesis facing out to a large gathering of red vinyl chairs, some of which are occupied by questioners.

The president of the Régie and Mayor of Lasalle, Michel Leduc holds forth in this venue. He is a powerful speaker, very earthy and direct. He has mastered his subject.

But Leduc can seem arrogant, cutting off questions coming from the "regulars" with insulting curttness. And there is no debate among the mayors. But, then again, how can 26 people properly air their views in one go?

At MUC Environment Commission meetings, there's more MUC staff in the audience than public. The presentations are guaranteed to put the most dedicated ecologist to sleep. Even the media are starting to stay away.

There is a father-knows-best quality about most public meetings that is devilishly difficult to shake off. At Westmount's last Council meeting, I tried to get a debate going. It worked to a degree, but it was a little ragged. Maybe we need more practice.

My point here is that the physical set-up is not always conducive to useful exchanges.

Ottawa and Quebec are no models. Now that Parliamentary proceedings are televised, we can see just how sterile and partisan those debates are. And they don't have questions from the public.

We need new forums for public discussion. Democracy must be more than simply holding formal public meetings. Openness is a frame of mind. A willingness to listen, to communicate, to learn through sharing a diversity of opinion.

July 2, 1993

ON THE VILLAGE GREENE

Last weekend, the Greene Avenue merchants had one of their festivals. While it did not have the colour - or the pricetag - of their medieval fest of 1984, it was well done and welcome. Wares spilled out on the sidewalk.

Since the back of our house gives onto the alter ego of Greene - Mount Pleasant - it's literally a few minutes' walk to do our Greenegroceries. Frankly, Victoria/Sherbrooke has more variety of useful shops, with fewer Fifth-Avenue-type emporia. But Greene does manage to have a nice high-street feel to it.

Both Greene and Victoria village merchants have one thing in common - a pretty ephemeral existence. In spite of hard work and financial sacrifice, the odds in the past were never in favour of long-term survival. Today, the chronic precariousness of the retail trade has been heightened by the surtax and the recession.

Proof? Let's go back a dozen years or so.

Then, you could actually go and see a movie on Greene Ave. Not just in Westmount Square, but in the old Avenue Theatre. This cinema, built just after the war, made way for that delightful row of Queen-Annish red-brick shops designed by Brian Burrows. These shops seem to change as often as the films once did

Just up from the Avenue Theatre was Steinberg's, now come back to life as Five Seasons. For a while, a car wash operated where parasols now flourish at DeMaisonneuve.

Down from the Avenue was Ohman's (est. 1899), and then the granddaddy of them all - Smithers. This shoe shop saw the light of day in 1890. In 1981, George Smithers said of himself and his shop: "We're all antiques around here. I'm worth more in antiques than I am in shoes". Floors creaked and shoes squeaked when trying out a new pair. Those shoebox-lined walls are now gone.

Was it that long ago we bought antiques at Pauline Mullins's or Breitman's?

There was a strange restaurant near where The Bistro is now. It had Maxfield Parrish paintings of Old King Cole on the windows. You almost expected to see flypaper garlanding down from the high and greasy ceiling. Some things do improve.

And some old standbys stay. Nick's. By George. Alexander's (no credit cards, please. A cheque is just fine). Then there's Tony's. Young's. Double Hook. Even the mysteriously-titled The Iron Cat seems to have many ferric feline lives.

And at least Togos made its transition to Sherbrooke and Grosvenor. Vale et ave Maria.

You have to admire the tenacity of our merchants. Westmount would not be Westmount without them.

July 8, 1993

SMOKE-FREE WESTMOUNT?

*Fill the pipe once more,
My brains dance trenchmore.
It is heady, I am giddy,
My head and brains, back and reins,
Joints and veins, from all pains
It doth well purge and make clean.*

* * * * *

Or so said Thomas Weekles in his hit madrigal of 1608 that praised the use of tobacco. I had to go to my biggest Oxford dictionary to find out that a trenchmore was a boisterous country dance. Aside from that, and the quaint use of French for kidneys, this song reveals how tobacco was, early on, promoted for its medicinal properties.

Today, tobacco's medical record is as spotty as a smoker's lungs.

Thanks to efforts by Sally Aitken, in 1985 Westmount was the second MUC city after Côte St. Luc to adopt an anti-smoking by-law.

What was radical eight years ago is pretty tame stuff now. We need to toughen it up.

I should a bit queasy about taking up cudgels against a habit I indulged in for 25 years. But ever since I finally quit some seven years ago, I'm infected with the fervour of the converted. My zeal could also be seen as hypocrisy, retroactively speaking.

Smoking is an addiction, pure and simple. Tobacco is not a recreational drug to be enjoyed whenever the mood strikes. The *need* to smoke predominates the *desire* to smoke.

Should a municipality regulate this sort of thing? I think it should. From excess noise to ragweed, the city legislates against what is to some people a mere nuisance, and to others, a danger to health. Second-hand smoke is a nuisance *and* a danger to health.

Shortly after I was elected mayor, smoking was banned at City Hall - even in "private" offices. An office may be private visually and aurally, but the air is shared by all. Ventilation systems recycle a lot of the air.

On planes, it's worse. On two 14-hour flights to Australia from L.A., we had to breathe air coming from the smoking section. Only a fraction of aircraft air is fresh, because of the cost of heating the -50 outside air. This is also why it is so arid.

The Montreal General and the Royal Victoria Hospitals have completely banned smoking. Our own Reddy Memorial still allows it in offices and smoking rooms. I don't have much problem with designated smoking areas ventilated directly outside, but smoking in a *hospital*?

We should not permit smoking in malls either. Or clerks who smoke behind counters. And the current 25% of seats for non-smokers in restaurants should be changed to 50% or even more. Comments, as always, are welcome.

July 22, 1993

A RETAILING REVOLUTION?

The other day we tried out a huge new 'home improvement centre' on the South Shore - our home being in perpetual need of improvement. On the way, we went grocery shopping at Club Price. Well, 'shopping' is not quite the word for it. 'Acquiring goods' is what we were doing. Everything is sold in massive containers looking as if they overdosed on steroids, or in normal-sized cans trussed up by the dozen in plastic. All brand names. At prices 25-50% below those in supermarkets.

In both of these prodigious stores-cum-warehouses, the consumer pilots an oversized grocery cart - or even a platform truck - through broad aisles, watching out for whirring forklifts, or the giant rolling ladders that are needed to stack merchandise 20 or even 30 feet in the air.

Is this the apotheosis of retailing? Supermarkets, while introduced in the 1930s, only took hold in the 1950s. The two stores we visited are called - ugh! - hypermarkets, a concept introduced in the 1960s and 1970s. And still growing. Will they change forever the way we shop? Perhaps. By getting rid of middlemen, by selling in bulk quantities, and getting the consumer to do a lot of handling and distribution, prices are inevitably low.

Hypermarkets only make sense in outlying areas where the land costs are low, as these stores have to be surrounded by an expanse of asphalt for parking. It is a shopping revolution that only the car could permit.

What has all this got to do with Westmount, you ask? Well, such retailing changes contribute to urban sprawl, and, more particularly, might have an effect on the future of commercial sectors of Westmount.

We may find it more and more difficult to get "convenience" goods in Westmount. Quality "shopping goods" and small specialty items could be the only things for sale, as Westmounters change their shopping patterns, buying basic groceries and hardware in the suburbs. Perhaps only those who can afford a car will be able to save money on staples!

Have you noticed how many merchandisers have their larger stores in the suburbs? Have you tried to buy floor tiles, appliances, or furniture recently? Selection and price in the suburbs is far better than downtown.

Even the hoary old department stores are disappearing, turning themselves into what amounts to multi-level shopping arcades of specialty goods. Each stall's territory clearly delineated. Funky old Ogilvy's is no more. Even Eaton's and the Bay have succumbed to tribalization on their ground floors.

More on retailing and Westmount next week.

July 29, 1993

A PENNY SAVED

Ho Hum. Again this year, Westmounters came out on top of the income heap, according to Statistics Canada. Predictably, I was interviewed on French radio and asked whether I was proud that - as the Gazette headline had it - Westmount was the "richest area in Canada".

I said I was not even middling pleased with such labels, as they reinforced the stereotype of the Westmount plutocrat. We are not just a rich elite. In fact, my guess is that the income *spread* between the wealthiest burghers of Westmount and our less fortunate citizens is probably the biggest in any other city our size. 11% of Westmounters live below the poverty line.

You can quantify "rich", but you can't quantify "well-off". Those happy few who are truly well-off, I would hope, have enough good taste to shun the word "rich".

* * * *

Many of our merchants were attracted to Westmount because of low taxes, or our proximity to downtown. Some were undoubtedly lured here thinking we Westmounters are as rich as Croesus, and all they have to do is open their doors to reap a retailing bonanza. Well, they quickly learn that most Westmounters - especially old-time Westmounters - are cheapskates. We want value for our money. Glitz doesn't sell too well.

This is why the "hypermarket" kind of retailing I talked about last week could be a threat to our commercial sector.

(A short etymological digression. After diluting down the meaning of the Latin prefix "super" - which originally meant "above", or "beyond" in the sense of "transcending", and after having trivialized it with words like *supermarket*, marketeer wordsmiths cast about for a super-superlative (a hyperlative?) and pressed into service the Greek prefix "hyper", which also means beyond. *Hypermarché* had already been perpetrated on the French. What's next? Ultramarkets?)

Westmounters will go out of their way for a bargain, even if it means driving out to the suburbs to those immense stores selling staples at prices our local people can't match. (Perhaps with the money they save they will indulge themselves in our upscale specialty shops. I don't know.)

The much-regretted Perzow and Masson - and their progenitors like Dionne and Buywell - will shortly be re-created in Westmount Square in the form of some kind of a food emporium. Will it work?

I still say that the lure of the suburban hypermarkets will be a very powerful one.

More next week.

August 5, 1993

STRIKING A BALANCE: HOMES, OFFICES, SHOPS.

Our traditional commercial zones have been unchanged for at least 75 years: Victoria, Greene, Sherbrooke west of Grosvenor.

If you look at our zoning maps over the years, the real battle between commercial and residential zones has been played out below De Maison-neuve. There, it looks like a coloured war map, with the red (commercial) territory being won and lost by the yellow (residential) zones.

Commercial zoning emerged triumphant in the sixties. Then, that delightful residential enclave below Dorchester got zoned for office buildings, along with Abbott to Bethune. This monstrous piece of zoning was influenced by the Bland Report of 1960, which recommended we demolish whole blocks of houses to make way for commercial parking, a new traffic artery, and high-density development.

(One *good* idea in the Bland Report was to close De Maisonneuve at the park. This did happen, thanks to the efforts of John Udy.)

The Bland Report was - ah - bland compared to the Goldyn Sunderland report of 1967, or Erikson's later fifty-storey fantasies for the Glen Yards. The former report seriously suggested the total "redevelopment" of 90 acres south of St Catharine, with constructions of up to 29 storeys, partially straddling the C.P. tracks and the highway. Le Corbusier would have been proud. I'll give *that* brave new world a pass.

Of course, in those days, projections showed a doubling or tripling of the MUC's population. There was a near-panic to accommodate the rising flood of people!

As well as providing services to Westmounters, our commercial sector is an important source of revenue. While it takes up only about 4% of our territory, it contributes 30% of our taxes. Mind you, that 4% is deceiving. Because of its *density*, our commercial sector might represent over 25% of the total floor space in the city. And, in spite of a doubling of floor space in the last 15 years, the commercial sector is now supporting *less* of the total tax burden!

Since the heady days of the sixties, there has been a definite trend in Westmount zoning to consolidate the residential districts. In 1984, the Commissioner of Planning and Redevelopment - Alderman Trent - persuaded the council to adopt certain planning principles. We agreed to *enhance* the commercial areas, but not allow any expansion. The residential and heritage character of the city must be preserved.

Next week: commercial gentrification.

August 12, 1993

COMMERCIAL GENTRIFICATION

In 1989, City Council was asked to approve the demolition of a rather ramshackle structure on Greene just below De Maisonneuve. This building was home to such shops as Vogel and Café Gourmet. While few people this side of Michael Fish feel such buildings should be preserved, a number of us felt at the time that its replacement with a sleek five-storey pile of the high-rent kind would contribute to the "Fifth-Avenue" syndrome that had afflicted the area in the past decade or so.

Some planners call this phenomenon "commercial gentrification". Local service shops are elbowed out by the high-end boutiques that can afford the rents in such buildings. Perhaps more importantly, these specialty boutiques have to draw on a regional clientele in order to survive. This exacerbates the already impossible parking problems in our retail districts.

Luckily, Café Gourmet is thriving after moving to Sherbrooke St. Vogel simply left.

At the time, there was some talk of limiting "retail occupancies on certain streets to local service retail". This sentiment was memorialized in our formal planning programme for the MUC.

Is this still necessary?

Well, the first thing we have to come to terms with is the explosion in retail floor space in the last few decades. With no concomitant increase in population, it's impossible that all these shops could continue to serve mostly Westmounters.

Even so, there are scads of vacant retail space. The only thing a shopper sees in the show windows of No. 1 Wood are lonely placards announcing the gyprocked interior is for rent. And these spaces will not exactly be filled with shoe repair shops! Yet, intuitively, one could say we have enough service shops. The problem is not one of too few service shops but one of too much retail space in general. Boutiques fill the gap.

With such a glut of retail space, and with so many shops having to appeal to a regional clientele, we should to continue the policy of limiting retail zoning. Consolidation is the order of the day. By restricting any further retail expansion, we are conferring the advantage of exclusivity to those shops already established.

The vacant retail space here is a bagatelle compared to what Montreal is facing. How could developers be so far off? The attraction of the suburban hypermarkets and the malls have already sucked out shoppers from downtown. Yet they added *more* space!

August 19, 1993

GUARDIANS OF THE PUBLIC PURSE?

It wasn't so long ago when the City refused to give out managers' salaries. The Examiner of the day was the first in line to chivvy Council to make them public. Now, we routinely give them out to our local paper.

And it is only in the last ten years or so that all municipal elected officials have been required to file details of their personal financial holdings. We don't have to reveal actual numbers; but, nonetheless, we have to list stocks, loans, and real estate holdings. The naive, yet well-meaning thinking behind this law was to reveal potential conflicts of interest.

Of course, like any such law, one could drive a truck through its loopholes. All you have to do is put your things in a holding company, or in your spouse's name. Devious politicians - that's not a pleonasm - can easily sidetrack the intent of this law. The rest of us are pretty squeamish about having to reveal such personal data.

Recently, the city received formal requests to have access to my own "statement of financial interests", plus a list of council/management's salaries and expenses.

Now who do you suppose these champions of openness, frugal civic management, and politician's probity might be? The W.M.A.? The Examiner? Bill Marsden? The National Citizens' Coalition?

No. It is our very own unions.

The fact they contribute not one penny of our taxes, and can therefore hardly claim to be an aggrieved party even if they find we *are* spending money like drunken sailors - this does not stay them from using the levers of open government for their own purposes.

If I were uncharitable, I would say these requests have nothing to do with revealing sloppy spending, but everything to do with their having no other stick to beat us with, now that we have made clear our intention to freeze *all* Westmount salaries for two years. I suppose they thought publicizing pecuniary peccadilloes would shame us into relenting.

So let me scoop them by giving you the dope our unions are so desirous of getting:

	<u>Salary</u>	<u>Car</u>	<u>Expenses</u>
Trent	\$30,492	\$0	\$3,668
Councillors	10,164	0	0
Schultz*	123,115*	city car	1,519
McCavour**	91,634	4,798	2,447
St. Louis	83,690	4,878	1,530

* under 3-year contract ending Feb. 1994.

** retired

These figures are for 1992. Expenses are things like travel, taxi, and meals. The expenses, certainly, are not abusive.

August 26, 1993

VICTIMS

The law moves in a mysterious way, its wonders to perform. Just take last week's news.

Our justice system allows Fabrikant to indulge himself in a four-month trial, just to decide if his killings were premeditated or not. And The Gazette was only too happy to play handmaiden to his sick campaign to publicise his persecutory fantasies.

The *victims* in this sorry drama have been assigned a secondary, almost incidental role.

Yet this same system allows a judge to rule that a 17-year-old girl *must* describe in open court the sickening trauma of being gang-raped. The accused goes free. The judge even called her "stubborn"!

We are so finicky about the rights of the accused to the point of totally abusing the rights of the victim. Even those who demonstrate a proven pattern of crime are set loose in our midst, on the remote chance they might be on the road to reform. We play Russian Roulette with blameless citizens.

We also allow people to own a single-purpose deadly instrument called a handgun just because a few wish to play urban cowboy on Saturday nights and go target shooting. Exposing people to being killed by handguns is apparently an acceptable price to pay to preserve the right to amuse oneself. I say if men want to fire guns, let them join the militia.

The good news last week on the legal front was the ruling that allows cities to ban pesticide spraying. At least this is a solid gain for potential and unsuspecting victims.

Minor infringements on individual rights are justifiable if the exercise of those rights can harm others. Because such harm is unpredictable, diffuse, and unquantifiable, does not mean we should allow it to happen.

Spraying pesticides is not a basic right, anyway. Banning or restricting their use does not materially dilute one's enjoyment of life. A weed-free lawn is not guaranteed by the Charter of Rights.

Besides, a healthy lawn chokes out most weeds. And pesticides are peripatetic poisons. Sprays drift easily on windy days, and can get in the groundwater. They are not exactly applied by Ph.D.s in chemistry.

If we can restrict speedy or drunken driving because of the *potential* harm it can do to (unknown) victims, we should accept restrictions on pesticides. The advantages of using pesticides - or noisy gardening equipment, for that matter - are tiny compared to the collective harmful effect on neighbours. So endeth the lesson.

September 2, 1993

A BORDERLINE CASE

In drawing any map, you don't need to use more than four colours to distinguish borders. This fact can be demonstrated empirically. Yet no one has ever been able to prove it mathematically. This is known, not unexpectedly, as the four-colour problem. (Is this a little clue that boundaries should be carved up by geographers, not geometers?)

Following the four-colour principle, then, the biggest group of cities that can share borders is only four.

Unlike any other city in our region, Westmount has only one neighbour. We are encircled - geographically embraced by the second-largest city in Canada.

In the past, Drapeauesque imperialism, with its rallying-cry of "une île, une ville", threatened our vulnerable residential island.

Now the tables are turned. A small sliver of Montreal on our north-east flank wants to call Westmount home.

August is the slowest month for the media. So when this group said that 98% of them wished to join us, it was like a pebble dropped into the Sargasso Sea of journalism. It created ripples that went on for weeks.

The electronic media loved it, as it was such an easily-understood concept. And many a beleaguered Montrealer could identify with this plucky little group.

Jean Doré didn't rise to the bait, but Nick Auf der Maur took it, hook, line, and sinker. He excoriated Westmount for wanting to make off with a rich part of his ward. He conveniently overlooked the fact that it was *they* who came to see us. We were not the predator. But he could hardly rap his own electors on the knuckles, no matter what their secessionist sympathies!

When I started a file on this issue, I wrote on the tab: "Rationalisation of borders", not "annexation".

The ever-sagacious editorialist of the Examiner suggested this annexation plea presented an opportunity to straighten out our borders. While perhaps brilliantly argued, the editorial was hardly covering new ground, so to speak.

Over the years, I and many others have deplored our arbitrary borders. We have witnessed, for example, the Keystone Kops skit where both our Fire Brigade and Montreal's arrives at Alexis Nihon Plaza or at Dawson College. They then proceed to argue over whose fire it is - as the border goes through both buildings.

In the mid-80s, I suggested we trade the CP's Glen Yards for a Westmounty piece of Montreal, such as Priest's Farm area.

More next week.

September 9, 1993

A BORDERLINE CASE - PART 2

Our boundaries predate much of Westmount's built form. The original surveyors must have taken particular delight in ignoring natural boundaries such as the Côte-des-Neiges slope. They seemed to have used a westward-leaning straight-edge rather than doing it free-hand. The crystalline precision of our eastern border ruthlessly slices through streets, gardens, houses, and even rooms.

Montrealers traditionally took the position that *their* boundary was inviolable, but somehow the converse of this principle held no intellectual attraction for them. Annexation *frissons* only seemed to occur when stroked in one direction.

From Montreal's point of view, then, the universe was unfolding as it should when they absorbed Rivières-des-Prairies in 1963, Saint-Michel in 1968, and Pointe-aux-Trembles in 1982. This was partially in an effort to keep their population over one million, a magic number that internationally defines a "major city". (What this distinction does for Montreal in any real way is far from clear.)

Back to that little fragment of Montreal nestled between our borders and Côte-des-Neiges, an area that wishes to join Westmount. It seems to me that for any such annexation even to be considered, a number of principles must be set down:

- 1) neither Westmount nor Montreal should experience any net financial loss;
- 2) there must be demonstrable efficiencies of service delivery;
- 3) there must be a demographic affinity;
- 4) the result must be more logical borders.

Through what kind of fiscal legerdemain could principle No. 1 be accomplished? Well, the secret might lie with the vast differential between our tax rates. The would-be Westmounters have said that it is not for tax savings they wish to join us - they simply want value for their money. Let's take them at their word.

In the event of any annexation, we could create a special local tax equal to the difference between the two tax rates, and give that money each year to Montreal - for a time. I calculate this would mean Montreal could enjoy 60% of its current revenue, with *no expenses*. For example, assume the area is evaluated at \$100 million:

	<u>Tax rate</u>	<u>Total Taxes</u>	<u>MUC Share</u>	<u>Local share</u>
Montreal	\$1.79/\$100	\$1.79 million	\$0.66 million	\$1.13 million
Westmount	\$1.11/\$100	\$1.11 million	\$0.66 million	\$0.45 million
Difference				\$0.68 million

We could pay Montreal up to \$680,000 a year by way of recompense.

September 16, 1993

THE STATE OF THE UNIONS

In 1971, I was 25, and I quit my job. It was a nice, safe job with an international chemical firm. I plunked down all my savings into a new company. It wasn't long before that money got eaten up and we were begging and borrowing the working capital to keep the company afloat.

We sailed sickeningly close to bankruptcy a number of times. Even though we were pioneering a totally new industry, scrabbling around for money left precious little time for R&D, marketing, and production.

We started off with two employees. The number steadily grew. There was rarely enough revenue to cover the employee's payroll and raw materials. My T-4 slip in 1975 was for \$3,000, but employees got a bonus that year.

In those days, I would often put on my jeans and batch chemicals. My partner sometimes drove forklifts or doubled as welder. We had parties with the men in the plant, drinking 50s and ordering unidentifiable chicken parts from "Au Coq".

In 1979, we moved to a 50,000 square foot plant in highly unionized surroundings. Rather than have it forced on us, I decided to ask for union accreditation. Slowly, people I knew as "Jean" and "Régis" became just "blue collars", and the joking and comraderie faded away.

By 1988, we had built a brand new plant and had 150 employees. We also had a bitter strike that lasted months. The reason? We were told if the company could afford a 15-million-dollar plant, it could afford to pay employees more. The fact we lost a million dollars that year was irrelevant. One morning I came into work to see a bullet hole in the window behind my desk. As president and CEO, I was considered fair game for intimidation.

Now as mayor, I find union tactics are much milder, but they still can be harassing.

Only one-third of the private sector is unionized, and that fraction is getting smaller as unionized firms go belly-up. By comparison, 95% of the public sector is unionized.

I see my role as protecting the citizen's interest at City Hall. In the whole matter of salary freezes under Bill 102, I tend to become the lightning rod. One Westmounter told me: "It's our *citizens* who must be seen as demanding our employees to be reasonable - not just you. Many others are accepting pay cuts in exchange for the very job security city employees enjoy."

And I don't see how we can justify paying municipal employees substantially more than any other sector in society. It's just not fair.

September 25, 1993

THE COMMUNITARIAN PHILOSOPHY

I spent last weekend with a discussion group at a lodge in eastern Ontario. I was a sort of an interloper in this group of about forty people: some of them had met together for nearly twenty years. They were mostly disillusioned political junkies with a bit of a left-of-centre bias. They found me a little difficult to classify, as I have spent the better part of my life avoiding the cant of the left *or* right. It's high time we trashed those labels.

We discussed communitarian philosophy.

Communitarian? This six-syllable mouthful as an adjective moves into the realm of the unpronounceable as a noun: communitarianism. But this ungainly name hides an intriguing way of looking at things.

The participants were friendly, and, well, very *Canadian*. Many regarded themselves as intellectuals, which in a way they were. Humour was used liberally, but its limits were precisely drawn, circumscribed by a particularly Ontario brand of political correctness. For a P.C. clutz like me, it was a bit of a minefield.

The evening's entertainment was intellectually apposite: we played literary charades. It fell to me to have to mime Goldwater's rather non-communitarian quote: "Extremism in the defence of liberty is no vice".

At the heart of communitarianism is the idea that we have to serve others, not just ourselves. That the rights of individuals cannot be meaningful unless the community thrives. "Community" is defined as broadly and as narrowly as you wish.

Having focussed long enough on individual rights, we should now promote the obverse: individual responsibilities.

If we lived in China, we would push for rights, in today's North America, we should emphasize responsibilities.

We must decide what are our *secular* shared values, and not be afraid of teaching them (or having them taught) to our kids. Child-rearing is our most important responsibility.

Communitarianism not surprisingly favours local government; Canada is over-governed.

Exclusive pursuit of private interest can erode our social network. Minimal restrictions on individual rights are acceptable, such as gun control, or AIDS testing and disclosure.

I added a few ideas of my own. Our political system based on confrontation is getting us nowhere. The partisan, adversarial approach to government is clearly hostile to making the right, moral decisions. I argued for the dissolution of the party system.

What example did I give? Westmount Council.

September 30, 1993

BARBARIANS THROUGH THE GATES

"One bird's insides were the consistency of soup and its beak was cracked open. Others showed injuries consistent with blows and kicks"

Was this a description of the results of a particularly bloodthirsty Roman augury? The aftermath of a 18th century cockfight?

No. It is an excerpt from report number 930902003 filed by PSO P. Harper and Sgt J. Everatt of the Westmount Public Security Unit. Three ducks in Westmount Park had been massacred.

Two years ago, another three ducks were hurt and one killed. The city put up a fence to protect the ducks. This has obviously not worked. Besides, the pond was drained for cleaning at the time of the latest slaughter.

There was nothing to be done but take the ducks out of the pond. Forever.

Our experience of the park will be diminished: we will no longer enjoy these blameless creatures waddling up that green gangplank to their hut.

Treating animals decently has to outweigh the joys of watching ducks paddle around the still waters of our little arcadia.

Our modern attitude toward animals would strike our ancestors as a bit strange.

Animals then were just food, or a tool for man. They were not companions or some reminder of the mystery and harmony of nature. Cats were hung up in baskets to be used as targets. Dogs turned kitchen spits by running in dog-wheels - and were trained for this task by putting hot coals under their paws to make them run faster. Dogs were used to bait bears, bulls, and badgers - to the amusement of humans.

Civilization can be measured not just by how we treat our fellow man, but how we treat our fellow-travellers on this fragile planet. In fact, they go hand-in-hand.

There is also an element of self-interest. The wacko who mistreats animals will graduate (descend?) to hurting humans.

In the palmy days of the 80's, I frequented the Ritz dining room, where we would joke if duck appeared on the menu after the garden was closed down for the year. But even if the Ritz ducks were pampered, I was never entirely comfortable with the idea of having them disport in front of us for our pleasure.

From St James's Park in London, to the huge park that girdles Adelaide, I have watched waterfowl preen and play for hours on end. To think we can't even have our own modest duck family here without some twisted s.o.b. torturing them!

October 7, 1993

THE LAW IS AN ASS?

"(The law) is an edged tool of uncertain application, very expensive in the working, and rather remarkable for its properties of close shaving, than for always shaving the right person."

Or so said Dickens in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. A couple of judgments of late would seem to prove him right. If you will forgive a wretched pun, they both concern the posting of bills: one judgment deals with the surtax, and the other deals with posters in public places. Both rest on constitutional grounds.

Let's talk about the surtax issue first. The Quebec Superior Court declared that Quebec's non-residential surtax was illegal. Provinces can't impose an indirect tax. If it were the Federal Government using the surtax, everything would be hunky-dory.

As far as I can make out, the prohibition against Provincial indirect taxes - which is built in to the B.N.A. Act - stemmed from a desire to stop the Provinces using customs and excise taxes. The Fathers of Confederation did not have Claude Ryan and his surtax in mind!

But all the detractors of the surtax had to do is prove it was an indirect tax, and, Bob's your uncle, it's unconstitutional.

Now, I'm not a fan of Ryan's reform, with which he unilaterally removed \$200 million of transit subsidies and unveiled the surtax as a means of recoupment. But *if* indirect taxes are illegal, it should be because they are unfair, not because of some Federal monopoly.

But all business taxes - income, capital, and property - are, by their nature, indirect. They pass through the corporate body and are presented undiminished to the consumer in retail pricing - a kind of hidden sales tax. It's a cost of doing business.

The plaintiffs may find the medicine for their ailment is worse than their suffering to date: Quebec might have to resort to a variable tax rate.

In 1982, Mayor MacCallum and I met with Jacques Leonard, Minister of Municipal Affairs. This was at the height of skyrocketing residential taxes. We pleaded for the right to a variable tax rate; that is, a tax rate for each class of property - commercial, residential, industrial. He, like all ministers since, turned it down. The *real* reason? Because the Cities and Towns act applies to *all* municipalities, regardless of size, he was afraid the little villages would misuse it, and favour one group over another.

I've run out of space. I'll talk about the freedom to post signs next week.

October 14, 1993

POST NO BILLS.....PLEASE?

Can municipalities prohibit posters on public property? The Supreme Court said no - unanimously. Infringes the guarantee of freedom of expression, they said.

Mind you, only an absolute ban is a no-no. In other words, absolute anti-poster power tends to infringe....absolutely.

Now, the reason this issue came before the Court was not because some one wanted to post up "Vote for me" on a lamp standard, or tell the world a cat was lost. No. It was because a certain Reverend Ken and the Lost Followers (a rock band, not an incompetent Boy Scout troop) wanted to advertise their performances by sticking posters up on Hydro poles. Just the thing the City of Peterborough said you could do nowhere and nohow.

Rev. Ken - no legal slouch, he - feared his freedom of expression was gravely compromised. He upped and took the city to court - all the way to the Supreme Court.

According to the Canadian Charter, everyone has the fundamental freedom of "thought, belief, expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication" So far, so good. The Supreme Court declared that "posting" is a form of expression, even if it is advertising.

(If I were even a tiny bit sarcastic, I would ask whether the use of non-word "posting" is an example of freedom of expression. Post is a perfectly good verb. Poster isn't.)

Interestingly, the U.S. Supreme Court, in that land where freedoms are protected to the extreme (with guns, if necessary), ruled that cities can completely ban posting on public properties. The city's desire to avoid visual clutter justified it; and public property was not a "public forum" protected by the First Amendment.

Back home in Canada, at least we have an out. The judge said, reasonably, that we can regulate posters: dictate where they can be allowed, require they be removed after a time, and charge a fee for our pains.

The problem with all this is that, once again, we will have to set up the bureaucratic apparatus to make it work. The alternative is total visual clutter.

The larger questions are: did we put the Supreme Court in too tight a legal straitjacket in 1982? Is the formulaic nature of the Charter making Judge's decisions too simplistic? Don't some rulings carry the notion of individual rights to almost bizzare extremes?

Perhaps. Then again, perhaps freedom of speech is so precious that any hindrance is unacceptable.

October 21, 1993

POLITICS 'R' US

This is the first time I've looked to an upcoming election with real apprehension. Canada is being put to the test, not because of the rise of separatism, but because of the rise of negativism: people are fed up with mainline parties; and, out of frustration, they are voting for the Bloc or for Reform.

It's a massive rejection of politics and politicians. A plague on both your Houses!

Are we witnessing the approach of a kind of *nox populi*?

But how should we vote locally, here in our comfy enclave of Westmount?

If someone asked me what makes a good politician, I would reveal my method of gauging the worth of candidates. It's a stepwise evaluation of key qualities.

Your chosen candidate should be: 1) moral; 2) intelligent; 3) articulate; and 4) knowledgeable. *In that order*. The order of importance is crucial. A politician who is intelligent without being moral is dangerous. An articulate politician with no brains can make a hash of things. A knowledgeable politician who cannot communicate is ineffective.

Like a key employee, we should be far more careful in recruiting our M.P. or M.N.A. Usually, they are selected and elected on a whim, and are tossed out unceremoniously when they don't deliver the goods they could never have delivered in the first place. We want politicians to make us feel all warm inside by telling us we can have and eat our cake. Then we leave them alone in their job for four years, and are mightily surprised no miracles were delivered up. As the White Queen said, it's always "jam tomorrow".

To be fair, the public has no say in who will win a particular nomination battle - although they *could* get involved in that process and wrest power from the backroom boys. Elections are like shops with a frustratingly narrow range of goods and brands that have been preselected for you.

Voting once every four or five years marks the beginning and the end of a certain process. In music, you could say that it's the space between the notes that's important, not the notes themselves. Likewise, it's what happens *between* elections that counts. Making a better country takes more than looking at a scoreboard once every four years.

We should no more leave politics up to politicians than leave our health up to doctors.

So vote next Monday. But do more. Get involved politically next Tuesday.

October 28, 1993

PAY AS YOU THROW...AGAIN

Two Fridays ago, I arrived at an anonymous box of a building on Fullum where "Droit de Parole" is broadcast live. "Droit de Parole" is a no-holds-barred panel discussion with over a dozen participants.

As I was the main guest, I had to be made-up. While someone applied black gunk to my eyes, I chatted with Anne-Marie Dussault, the presenter, about the less-than-glamorous topic: user-fees for garbage. That chat made up the sum total of her exposure to the subject, an informational level that seemed to be shared by a lot of the participants.

That morning, La Presse had published a poll on the subject of charging for garbage based on weight. This was a few weeks after they did a piece on my suggestions for "garbage metering". Well, the results weren't encouraging, but people were not told *why* one would implement such a system. 52% of those polled were strongly against the idea. But, interestingly, of those earning more than \$55,000, 63% were favourable.

During that hour-long broadcast, it became clear why most people were objecting: they had no clear idea of the rationale for such a measure. They weren't even aware that it was designed to *increase* recycling, as recyclables would be free. They also suspected that it was just another tax, and would not replace the hidden garbage-removal costs in property tax bills. Moreover, they were afraid of people cheating. (After a dozen years of garbage metering in Seattle, it hasn't proved to be a problem.)

Now, the Examiner, editorially, has pronounced that a weight-based system won't work. Something about peanut butter gumming up the bar codes. That's not a problem. In Toronto, where a weight-based system is used for commercial trash, an identifying microchip is embedded in the can. The customer name and the quantity of garbage is instantly forwarded by radio-frequency waves to head office. The operator does nothing.

With the impending self-destruction of the Régie, user-fees (weight or volume based) become even more important. Based on the past few years' experience, a stick seems the only way to get people in the MUC to recycle. A carrot in the form of an educational blitz would be nice (and compostable), but it can't do the trick alone.

The pilot project I would like to see in Westmount would also incorporate free collection of compostables for central treatment. We could become the leaders in the Montreal Region in sane waste management.

November 4, 1993

THE HALF-WAY MARK

The passage of time seems to accelerate as you get older. Months and years flash by with increasing speed. Considering everyone's ultimate destination, you're tempted to ask, "what's the rush?".

I'm having trouble accepting the fact it was two whole years ago when this Council got elected.

Still animated by a good measure of political innocence, Council has retained most of its idealism. And we do get things done. By consensus. It's boring to read about, but it's good government.

It's also been two years that I've come to call myself a politician. Now this is a job that has the lowest "honesty rating" of all. Last year, only 11% of the population rated politicians high/very high in honesty. They did worse than union leaders and advertising executives. Even lawyers got 22%, and journalists got 27%. Doctors, smugly on top, were rated honest by 64% of the population.

The thing that always held a morbid fascination for me was to watch how politicians can transmute from the wide-eyed idealist into the hard-bitten cynic that, for most, typifies the politician.

This degenerative process can take years, but most politicians eventually succumb. Candour slowly deliquesces into guardedness. Speeches ring hollow. Politicians learn to talk a lot and say zilch. As Shakespeare put it, they "speak an infinite deal of nothing".

As long as the role of the press is seen as a game of tripping up the politician, namby-pamby political statements will continue.

The experienced politician has also learned never to reveal his true thoughts and inner fears. You must "stand" for something. Doubt is bad. If the media smell doubt, they harry their quarry. The politician is the fox and the press become the hounds sent to winkle him out of his lair.

Ah, but the media can be fickle. Only a few months ago, they were breathlessly doing in-depth pieces on "Campbellmania". A veritable political Madonna. Now, they join the rest of the country in dumping all over her.

I am intrigued by the interface between politicians and the media. It's the trickiest part of my job. How to communicate simply so many complex issues?

At least the Examiner has two very professional reporters who see their role as presenting an issue as fairly as possible. And they care about this community.

With their continued cooperation, maybe I can still avoid politician's twaddle - at least for another two years.

November 11, 1993

A PORTRAIT OF A POLITICIAN

"We have the principle of liberty of movement in Canada. (Unhappy Anglos) will do what others in the past have done - they'll leave. Those who want to stay will stay. It's not the end of the world".

Claude Ryan is not in particularly good odour with the English-speaking community with the above remark tossed off in reaction to a poll that said 50% of Anglos would leave a sovereign Quebec.

I sometimes think that Ryan has just too much on his plate. He's Minister of Public Security. He's responsible for the *Charte de la langue française*. And he's the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

But I respect him.

Claude Ryan is not your garden-variety politician. Honest to the core, proud of his profession, he's a perfectionist.

Physically, the kindest thing you could say about Ryan is that he is a *beau laid*. He has a chiselled, sallow face, with a lopsided smile and small eyes. His nose wants to grow in a number of directions, finally settling on growing downward.

Ryan speaks softly - almost mumbling. (There was a N.Y. law firm's newsletter that I used to get. The masthead proclaimed: "when in doubt, mumble".)

He comes prepared. He scribbles things down in a little 10c notepad, a hangover from his journalistic days.

Ryan's trademark is a subtle little joke that slips out unannounced. Following the delivery of some bon mot, a quiet staccato cackle lets the auditor know what just happened. A sort of homemade laugh track.

Ryan quotes Latin with the same abandon as our own Raymond Ulyatt - the chairman of the Westmount Library Committee. My six years of Latin don't always guide me through his linguistic brambles.

Claude Ryan is incisive, in control, and not to be messed with. Having once had a run-in with his brother Yves - the mayor of Montreal North - I can say that the Ryan clan respect those who stand up to them.

Both Ryans live simply. They are ascetic, almost priestlike. But I know that Yves, at least, loves a good party.

French Quebecers, collectively, exude a blend of precision and sensuality. Of Descartes and Rabelais. This bipolar nature makes the life of an Anglo in Quebec so fascinating, if we choose to celebrate the culture around us. And Ryan is one end of that rich spectrum.

But, M. Ryan, *don't* write us off like that.

November 18, 1993

AND THE BAND PLAYED ON

If a military band playing lustily while you eat is just the thing to get your gastric juices flowing, then a mess dinner is for you.

Over the years, I have gone to the Royal Montreal Regiment's annual Officers' Mess Dinner. The Mayor or Pro-Mayor of Westmount is always invited, not just because the RMR is in Westmount, but because the ties between the Regiment and the City go back to the early years of this century.

The RMR has possibly the only municipally-funded armoury in Canada. In 1925, the City of Westmount leased to the RMR the land on which the armoury is built for one dollar a year. Its citizens helped raise the money for the building. In fact, in 2024, the whole property reverts to the City - lock, stock and barrel...so to speak.

The regiment is home to about 150 soldiers. Unlike in the U.S., the regimental system in Canada creates a sense of family: once you join a regiment, you are attached to it throughout your career.

Now, I'm not a particularly bellicose person - many of my relatives are ardent pacifists - but I believe the military is necessary in this far-from-perfect world. And I'd rather have a militia in our midst than some power unattached to a community.

But back to the dinner. And the stentorian band. Since most of the guests wear scarlet mess kits, and only a few are in black dinner jackets, it's safe to assume that most diners have leather lungs from bawling at soldiers all their lives. They have no problem making themselves heard above the musical din.

I think it was in the "Ipcress File" where Michael Caine, after listening to a military band manfully playing Mozart in the park, got up to go, saying to his companion, "Let me know who wins."

After dinner, there is a series of toasts. Port is passed. To the left. As a tribute to the guests from other units, the band booms out a few bars of their regimental or service march. Each guest snaps to attention as his regiment is so honoured. The senior service - the navy - is the first to be recognised with a naval march written in 1759 (Heart of oak are our ships, jolly tars are our men...).

During all this, there is a basket being passed around. People put in slips of paper and money. They are betting on when the speeches will be over. This year it was after midnight.

The evening was not kind to my larynx nor to my liver; but I felt, once again, how much we owed to these soldiers.

And, by the way, I did enjoy myself.

November 25, 1993

WHO'S TO RUN THE MUC?

Lucien Saulnier. Lawrence Hanigan. Pierre Des Marais II. Michel Hamelin. Fill in the next name in this series.

If you came up with Vera Danyluk, you just might be right. I hope you're right. We'll know for sure in a few weeks.

Since the MUC was created in the early 70s, the chairman of its Executive Committee has been male. And usually a Montrealer.

The Executive Committee is made up of the chairmen and vice-chairmen of the various MUC Commissions - Administration, Planning, Economic Development, Environment, and Public Safety. Thrown in for good measure are the chairman (Yves Ryan) and vice-chairman (Jean Doré) of the MUC Council. Got it?

Anyone who thinks that the Commissions themselves decide or debate anything of substance has obviously never gone to one of their public meetings. These Commissions were set up ten years ago as a sop to those who were clamouring for more transparency in the workings of the MUC.

Commission meetings are staged, pro-forma side-shows that certainly don't come cheap.

As I have learnt in the Police Station issue, it's the Executive Committee that really wields the power. One of the objections to Danyluk's appointment that was leaked out from the anti-Danyluk camp was that she has had no experience on the Executive Committee. Good!

The *selection* rather than the *election* of Vera Danyluk to the job brings up, once again, the whole question of the MUC. In a dyspeptic and ungracious editorial last week, the Gazette took issue with the way we nominated Danyluk. It was not done in public. Well, Hamelin was selected the same way.

I, for one, have no problem with the idea of an elected chairman. But we have to be careful not to create the Metro Toronto monster by having *all* of the MUC elected by universal suffrage. The last thing we need in this congenitally over-governed country is yet another level of government. What we should be doing is giving back things like policing to the local level.

I see the MUC ultimately being reduced in responsibility, yet expanded geographically.

A few years ago, the editor of the Examiner suggested I quit as Councillor and become Westmount's Director-General. A few months ago, the Westmount Municipal Association suggested I quit as Mayor and become the chairman of the MUC's Executive Committee.

I resisted both suggestions. I had too much experience for the first job, and too little for the second. Maybe I'll just stay a member of the municipal lumpenproletariat.

December 2, 1993

A MEETING OF THE MAYORAL MINDS

The French words *maire* (mayor), *mère*, and *mer* are pronounced the same way. They are homophones - which is not a term for yet another linguistic group in Quebec.

When I said to a friend I was participating in a *Colloque des maires*, she asked why I was going to a meeting of mothers. I retorted I was actually going to a seminar of the seas. Oh well. I guess you had to be there.

(Last year, I went to a restaurant with the Mayor of Outremont, and the owner asked, with a wink, if we would like a bottle of *Entre-deux-mers*.)

Anyway, the first *Colloque des maires* (loosely translated as a symposium of Mayors) took place last weekend. It was the brainchild of the Mayor of Laval, and was soon strongly supported by the Montreal suburban mayors. Unfortunately, Jean Doré found it easy to contain his enthusiasm, putting in only a cameo appearance.

The idea was to get the mayors of the Greater Montreal Region into one room to talk about how we can create a sense of regional purpose. It had to be a big room, as there are 136 mayors in the region.

If that sounds like a lot of cities, keep in mind that the 36 urban central cities make up 75% of the population of the Region. The 100 remaining are mostly villages.

The intellectual underpinnings of the *Colloque* can be fairly said to stem from the report the Montreal suburban mayors presented to the Ryan Task Force - a report I had a hand in putting together. In that report, we pointed out how cities control a number of major economic levers - mass transit, zoning, industrial development. It only makes sense we get involved in the putting together of a Regional economic blueprint.

Instead of playing beggar-thy-neighbour with cities competing against cities to attract investment, we want to work together to best other regions in North America.

Pierre-Marc Johnson was our very effective animator over the two days. This urbane, cerebral, ex-Premier seems to get more popular in the polls the more he stays out of the limelight. Maybe there's a lesson there.

We got the Chairman of the Atlanta Regional Commission to tell us how they are creating a spirit of regionalism in that area of 2.6 million people. Their secret was to consult with the people - novel idea! - even to the extent of using 90 minutes of prime-time television and special newspaper inserts.

If we are to avoid the improvisation that passes for economic policy from Quebec and Ottawa, it's time all of us got involved in the process.

December 16, 1993

ILLUMINATION AND OBSCURITY

Ah, Westmount. It's so nice, after grappling with those trivial regional matters, to read in our local paper about the major issue of the day (or night): the Christmas lights - or lack of same - outlining City Hall. Even the editorialist found it worthy of mention.

Now, this was a week in which I had been trying to 1) worry about Vera Danyluk's getting elected head of the MUC, 2) keep our police station, 3) get Ryan to modify the surtax legislation, and 4) understand the implications of the Task Force Report on Montreal and its region.

I got no advice on these matters. But people stopped me to tell me what they thought of our Xmas lights unplugged.

In these pages two years ago, I admitted to preferring City Hall "bespangled with magick faerie lights". I went on to say by what I thought looked like Camelot, others were probably reminded of a used-car lot. Alas, the latter camp finally won the battle of the bulbs. The Light Brigade was crushed.

Now to make a bold segue to more weighty matters: the Ryan Task Force report could have used a bit of illumination. Not that it wasn't a superb report, and reflected a lot of the ideas you have read here first, but it was written in darkest bureaucratese.

For such an important report, one that serves as a blueprint for radical change in the way the Montreal region is governed, it seemed a bit cut-and-pasted together. Also, a dash of style, pungency, and wit would have leavened it up. Where is Keith Spicer when you really need him?

Ryan put together a disparate group of 12 academics and consultants, many of whom knew very little about municipal affairs. They quickly rectified that lacuna. It's a tribute to their hard work that they came up with so many good insights. But you have to hunt a bit for them.

Yet the "vision thing" did need a little elaboration beyond vague references to social responsibility, solidarity (mayors unite: you have nothing to lose but your chains of office), and something called subsidiarity. Occasionally, the report careers between the blindingly obvious and the murkiest of vogue words. But I carp.

Certainly, a more limpid style would have transformed an excellent report into an historic document.

I've learned one thing in writing business reports and now this column: good writing is a process of reduction. It's like starting with a big block of stone and carving away what's not needed. One hopes what's left has some grace and meaning.

December 23, 1993

HAPPY HUMBUG!

Like a wind-up doll that eventually runs down, the frenetic pace set weeks before Xmas is slowing. And I'm thoroughly sick of shops.

It's hard to believe that shopping and Christmas were not always synonymous. The appropriation of Christmastime by the merchandisers is not just a question of the profane gaining on the sacred. After all, the religious celebration of Christ's birth was itself grafted onto a former pagan festival.

These two sides of Christmastide - the sybaritic and the spiritual - co-habited for centuries. So much so, that the Puritans banned the observance of Christmas as being too secular.

No, what's upsetting about the commercialization of Christmas is the trashing of that fine balance. The peculiar human genius for adaptation has carried us too far. We have MBA'ed one of the most potent of festivals. It used to be a season when we could reach back into history and touch old traditions, to feel part of a continuum through time.

It's our innocence we've lost - the innocence of celebrating Jesus's birth and the paean to nature that marked the winter solstice. Our oneness with our spirit and our flesh has now been corrupted by mass merchandising. The crèche and the wassail-bowl replaced by visits to Eaton's and Club Price.

Yet some of what is good about Christmas does remain. The singing of carols, for example. As a child, I always liked Good King Wenceslas, as it has such a reassuring rhythm, with a satisfying double beat at the end of certain lines. The words are also so evocative of winter, with phrases like "through the rude wind's wild lament".

Then there's the Christmas tree. Introduced to England by Prince Albert 150 years ago, it already was a tradition in Germany for 1,000 years. Was it really only my imagination that, as a youngster, our tree was lighted with candles? And have you noticed how standard all tree lights are these days? They used to come in so many styles and shapes.

The sending of cards, also started in the 1840s, manages to keep old friendships alive - some artificially!

I'm never quite sure whether to send cards to Jewish friends. After all, they don't send me cards on Jewish holidays. I go ahead anyway, based on the logic (probably shaky) that it is a national holiday celebrating peace, friendship and tolerance.

So I hope you have a memorable holiday. Perhaps the Lord of Misrule no longer holds sway during Yuletide, and gift-buying supplants older ceremonies, but some spirit still remains. The kind I put in my egg nog.

January 13, 1994

AN ELEVENTH-HOUR REPRIEVE

"Delay is the deadliest form of denial"

- Cyril Northcote Parkinson

While Parkinson had in mind the inertia of bureaucrats (he called them "the abominable no-men"), the quote describes my own approach last month to keep our police station.

The idea of delay is not new: at our public meeting in September 1992, where 500 Westmounters came to tell the MUCPD what they thought of the plan to cut 24 full-service stations across the Island to 14, I said that delay is one way to save our station. The wrongheadedness of this new "Police Map" will eventually be revealed. I just don't want the Westmount station to be history when the scales fall from the eyes of the people responsible for this "rationalisation".

My manoeuvring to stay the closing of our full-service Station 23 for at least a few years was characterised as "scandalous" by the chairman of the Public Security Commission. (He no doubt was thinking of the Greek root *skandalon*, meaning "stumbling block".)

This delay could allow us to study other options, without having the sword of imminent closure hanging over our heads. An example: I have floated the idea with the MUC of a "community station" that would be half-way between a mini-station and a superstation.

The deal I struck last month means that, instead of both Station 25 (serving downtown) and Station 23 (serving Westmount) combining and moving to new quarters, only Station 25 would move for the time being. Since 1981, the MUC had been studying merger plans in order to get out of the decrepit Station 25 facilities at 1684 de Maisonneuve. *This* was the imperative need behind closing our own Station, and why we were in Phase 2 of the eight-phase roll-out of the new Police map.

How did this deal come about?

On December 15, the MUC Council was asked to approve a 30-year lease on a building at Guy and René-Levesque - to be the new home of the blend of Stations 23 and 25.

I rose to make a pitch for delaying the signing of the lease. I was not too hopeful, as only the mayor of Outremont and myself had come out clearly against the new Police Map.

I reminded the assembly of the Police Commission's promise (in September, 1992) to evaluate Phase 1, in order to modify future phases accordingly. No such evaluation was made, as part of Phase 1 is not finished - the combining of the two West-Island stations.

I was surprised and pleased to see at least 16 of the 25 mayors there voted with me on my motion. But that was not the end of the story, which shall be continued next week.

January 20, 1994

A STATIONARY IMMOVABLE

I left off last week describing what took place at the December 15 MUC Council meeting. We were asked to approve a lease for the new police station at Guy and René-Levesque - a station that was to combine Westmount's Station 23 and downtown's Station 25.

I knew the MUC executive committee had recommended approving the lease. That's why I had already written them pleading our case:

"The new superstation will try to serve both a transient population of 400,000 workers coming to central Montreal, yet also cater to a bedroom community. We'll have a real bicephalous monster. And one of the stated objectives of the new Police Map was to divide districts by "population homogeneity"! (...)

"We need a radical change in the way the MUC makes decisions. They should not be based on remote-control administrative shuffles made without consultation, but on the needs of your clients and shareholders."

"Anachronistic aberrations such as Police superstations and administrative centralisation would cause private firms to go bankrupt. The MUC has a monopoly that insulates it from financial bankruptcy. But, please, let us not have a bankruptcy of ideas."

And on it went for five pages.

But back to the MUC meeting. I got up on my hind legs to push for a motion to delay the signing of the lease because: 1) the MUC promised to evaluate the first phase of the cutback from 24 to 14 stations; 2) our superstation proposal was not fairly evaluated; and, 3) our "community station" idea had not received formal MUC blessing.

So the MUC would shut down our full-service station, without any specific replacement services. (When I had tried for a guaranteed level of service in exchange for land for a Westmount superstation, they had demurred.)

Most mayors backed my motion, much to the consternation of Montreal, who were justifiably worried about yet another delay of moving from their clapped-out Station 25; and much to the fury of the executive committee, who saw this as an affront to their judgment. This was not my intent, but I did not wish to see us go empty-handed in order to get Montreal a new station.

Tempers flared. A recess was called.

The two groups closeted separately and Michel Hamelin served as a go-between. I agreed to a "compromise". Station 25 would move, but our station would remain at least until an evaluation was made of Phase 1. Hamelin proved to be a superb shuttle diplomat. He formulated a new motion - true to our agreement - that passed unanimously.

In reality, we'll probably strike a deal with the MUC for a modified police station in Westmount well before the Phase 1 evaluation is complete. But they won't be the only ones calling the shots.

January 27, 1994

A HODGEPODGE OF STODGE

Well, well. According to a recent reader survey, 93% of *Examiner* readers read this column. 50% always read it. Granted, the number of people who wrote in was small. (I tried to help by sending in dozens of forms saying I always read my column.)

I'm a bit surprised at those results. I always thought my column was pretty heavy going. Like stodge. You know what stodge is? "Food of a thick heavy kind", says the dictionary; whence *stodgy*, "heavy and indigestible" (food), "dull and uninteresting" (person), and "turgid and dull" (of a literary style).

I grew up on stodge, especially for breakfast. I got fed groats - a kind of lumpy, yet runny cereal of cooked oats. In Canada, it was Quaker oats, a brand-name that's redolent of wholesomeness and rectitude. We tried something called Red River Cereal until my father remarked that it looked more like the bottom of said river.

But I must admit my favourite first meal was and still is that greasy fry-up called The English Breakfast - called that way by Frenchmen who get by on breakfasts that are starchy, sweet, and insubstantial.

Most days, I now eat granola. Yes, granola. My natural-food supplier in Alexis Nihon ran out recently, so I ate uncooked wheat muesli. The glutinous paste stayed with me all day. I felt as if I had swallowed a cannonball.

I feel my columns are getting like that - indigestible and dense. If I can lighten them up a bit, maybe it'll also cut back on the time I spend on writing them.

Some readers are amused by my stodgy choice of words, as well as style. George Bowser - who's better known for his short, Anglo-Saxon words - once joshed me about my "sesquipedalian words". Some pot. Some kettle.

My writing gets so packed, the *Examiner* left out a line by mistake in last week's column. I bet you didn't notice. But that's not as bad as La Presse last Saturday. In a page 3 bio of me on my election as president of the Montreal Suburban Mayors, they managed to call me Robert F. Trent.

I hope my new job won't cut into the time I need to write these thoughts. As well as a way to communicate with citizens, I find it an effective way to come up with policies. If I can't put something in writing to persuade my readers, it probably not a good idea.

Some of you meet me on the street and refer to my column as my "letter". I'm flattered that readers go through these scribblings as if reading a letter. That's exactly the kind of one-on-one relationship I've been hoping to establish. Even if it is a bit stodgy.

February 3, 1994

BUILDING HARMONY

I have always felt that the 60s were not kind to architecture. As well as banal high-rises, we got minimalist, geometric, unnatural shapes - often confected on the cheap. Here in Montreal, architects liked to stick coloured glazed tile on the most unlikely of surfaces - on exterior columns, for example.

The St Laurent City Hall was probably built in the 60s. Tiles abound. A random mosaic of polished marble chips - terrazzo - is on the floor.

Westmount City Hall escaped the tile-spangled treatment when it was "renovated" in the 60s. At least we got some rosewood panelling. But the original high ceilings with their carved beams and corbels were inexplicably covered up by dropped ceilings and fluorescent strips. Instead of the barrel-vaulted Council Chamber ceiling that was so much in tune with the rugged mock-Tudor exterior, we got gyproc coffers.

The suburban mayors have taken to meeting in the committee room of the St Laurent City Hall. There are two reasons for this: the generosity of Mayor Paquet, and the need for a committee-room table that can seat 27.

So we are ranged around a gigantic table of inlaid beige tiles bordered by a band of polished wood. Not the most felicitous of marriages - tile and wood. The room is adorned with splashy 60s art. Both St Laurent and Westmount got the government-issue ceiling treatment in their committee rooms: above the central table, a maze of little metal light deflectors; the rest of the ceiling hidden by a nubby acoustical coating.

Now that I'm elected as president of the Conference of Montreal Suburban Mayors, my job is to corral and channel the considerable energies of this disparate group.

I told them that harmony is not a matter of everyone singing the same note. Chords are made up of different notes whose relationship is predetermined. As long as we sing in the same key, we'll send a coherent message.

In some respects, my new job is a test of sorts. While I have been a business entrepreneur and have lived to tell the tale, I have since learned that public office presents a wholly different set of difficulties (euphemistically called challenges).

And worrying about Westmount with an occasional sortie out to the Conference of Mayors to get my oar in - that's not the same as speaking for a group of cities representing 750,000 people. I can't play the gadfly.

I hope to use the same consensus approach that I use as mayor here. I happen to believe that, given the same facts, disinterested people will come up with similar conclusions.

February 10, 1994

WHEN I'M 64

*"...doing the garden, digging the weeds, who could ask for more?
Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I'm 64?"*
(© 1967 Northern Songs, Ltd.)

That indefatigable Westmounter, Don Wedge, asked me to speak to the Seniors of Westmount Action Group on the subject of the future.

Don came up with the theme "when I'm 64", because he thought I could perform that Beatles song by way of introduction. Well, I felt *that* would have done incalculable damage to any *gravitas* attaching itself to the mayor's job (and permanently set back the cause of good music in Westmount).

I'll be 64 in the year 2010. What will the world be like? Well, all futurologists have one thing in common - they're always proved wrong. In fact, futurology is like meteorology - accuracy varies inversely with the time span involved.

In my talk, I decided on six subjects, in increasing order of my competence to comment on them: women, education, cars, population, technology, and, lastly, aging. I have had first-hand experience of the latter subject. In 16 years from now, women will be in key positions of power. As a consequence, people will count more than things, relationships more than acquisitions, and accommodation more than aggression.

We will finally realise that education is a life-long pursuit, rejecting the notion that education is somehow "front-end loaded." That is, once you are through with university, you will just be beginning, not ending, your voyage of educational discovery.

The car will no longer be king. We will have realized the true costs of car use. Today, the manufacture and use of just one car creates 60 tons of carbon dioxide, 2 billion cubic metres of polluted air, and, finally, 26.5 tons of scrap. In North America, each car has 4,000 square feet of land given over to its use - three times as much as for each human. Cities will revert to the compactness they lost when cars began to dictate the patterns of urbanisation.

When I was born, there were less than 2 billion people on the earth. Now there are 5.5. By 2010, there will be over 7 billion - if we don't do something about it. By then, we will have realised that *the* ecological problem is our pathological penchant to over-populate.

We will have no choice but to reverse the imperative to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it".

If you can stand it, more next week.

February 17, 1994

BACK TO THE FUTURE

This is to complete last week's column about the future - as seen by me in a speech to the Seniors of Westmount Action Group on the subject "When I'm 64". Next column, I promise I'll get back to mundane matters municipal - like frozen water mains and waste management.

The two topics I didn't cover last week are aging and technology. The baby boom generation will give birth to a new power base - a kind of gerontocracy. With shrinking families and the resultant concentration of wealth, the idle old rich will wield substantial power and influence. The generation gap revisited: no longer created by the length of one's hair and the puffing on funny cigarettes, but by the fatness of one's wallet.

The way a society sees the future is revealing. It's like holding up a mirror to its soul, reflecting its deepest preoccupations, and very much of its time. Before this century and its fascination with technology, if people looked at all to the future, it was coloured by religious or social themes: the Day of Judgement, the end of the world, pastoral Utopias, and the like. An exception to this was Tennyson prefiguring in 1842 both commerce and war in the air:

"For I dipt into the future, as far as human eye could see,
Saw the vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;
Saw the heavens filled with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales;
Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain'd a ghastly dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue."

It's hard to realise that "Future Shock" was written 24 years ago. The theme of this book was that the rate of technological change will have apocalyptic effects on our society. The author saw it as important as the invention of agriculture.

My belief is that the technological acceleration has slowed down. It probably reached its apogee in the 70s. The computer chip has clouded our vision; most break-throughs have occurred solely because of the chip. In fact, the information overload that it brings is ironically slowing down any real advances. Which is good.

The second World War opened with the British still using some biplanes (top speed: 140 mph). The Poles actually had a real cavalry. Six years later, both British and Germans had jets capable of 500mph. The war ended with a huge bang, not a technological whimper - the atomic bomb. No such changes occurred in any six-year period since. Which is also good.

So I don't look for a radically changed technological world in the future.

February 24, 1994

WATER ON THE ROCKS

Last week, neighbours on either side of us were struggling on without running water because of frozen water entrance pipes. The prospect of becoming waterless was approaching at more than glacial speed. We could almost imagine the underground ice sheets creeping in on us on both sides to choke off our water in a sort of icy pincer movement.

Normally, the frost line in these parts settles in, at most, about five feet below grade. This winter, it is averaging six feet, and in some places it has gone as far as eight feet. Even with milder temperatures, frost will continue to penetrate - perhaps another six inches. And Westmount water entrances above Sherbrooke are not always very deep. Wielding a pickaxe against bedrock, one tended to get satisfied very quickly about just how deep one should have to excavate.

Surely one of the few advantages of winter is that nothing much goes on outside the house - everything is dormant. All winter long, the unseen underground usually waits silently, well-behaved, until spring.

In our house, spring is announced by the intermittent chugging of the sump pump telling us that the spring run-off has worked its way down to sub-basement level. (That's one piece of equipment I keep in good repair - a brown high water mark memorializes, in the best Venice tradition, a long-ago spring flood in our basement.)

Back to frozen pipes. Not only can they simply block up, but they can actually burst - as some water mains did this year. Ice is 9% less dense than water; so, for a given quantity of water, freezing results in a 9% expansion. Occluded air acts as a kind of cushion - air is very compressible - but the expansionary forces are often irresistible.

The way we kept our water entrance from freezing was to let a steady stream run from one of the basement taps. I felt a twinge of guilt at wasting all that water - but it quickly went away. At two gallons a minute, or \$1.50 a day, I figured it was a good sight cheaper than the cost of thawing frozen pipe.

But what about the waste of such a precious resource, you ask? Well. May I make a confession? I consider myself fairly ecologically aware, and, after all, I *am* a member of the MUC Environment Commission, but I always had a problem with the "wasting a resource" approach to water use. You see, I'm not sure we *are* wasting a resource. In Arizona or Australia, it would be wasteful. In Montreal, It's not an environmental problem of the same order as, say, air pollution. Let me explain next week.

March 3, 1994

DEEP WATERS RUN STILL

It's an article of faith among environmentalists that we must conserve tap water. Now, I go along with the argument that, if we treat water as disposable, we then tend to waste other, truly non-renewable, resources. But the shibboleth about having to cut back on water use comes to us from other areas of North America where water shortages are real.

Here in Montreal, the issue is not really how *much* we use, but how well we clean it up once we are through with it. After all, if we did not dirty it with pollutants, we would be just "renting" it for a while. The *reductio ad absurdum* would be if we put nothing in the waste water: we would pump water out of the St Lawrence, and pump it back in, along with a little pluvial run-off. Where's the harm?

Looked at another way, even if we did cut back water consumption by 50%, all that would happen is that the impurities in our waste water would be twice as concentrated. Now, there is a substantial saving in water treatment costs when the muck is more concentrated, but that's an economic issue.

The only environmental effect of such a drastic cutback would be the halving of the chlorine required to treat the incoming water, and a saving in pumping energy. Both things would be desirable, but they shouldn't top anyone's ecological hit list.

If there is a problem with potable water on the island of Montreal, it's the leaky, outdated water system we have - run by the City of Montreal, who supply 87% of the island's water. There is not much point in putting bricks in toilet tanks when 150 million gallons of our water are gushing out of leaks in the system every day:

Water Consumption - all MUC Cities

Waste in delivery system	35%
Industrial uses	20%
Residential exterior uses	17%
Commercial and institutional uses	12%
Residential toilets	7%
Residential showers, baths	4%
Residential laundry	3%
Residential cooking and drinking	2%

Let's say we did wish to cut back on water consumption; and, let's say we wanted a fair way of charging for it, rather than burying costs in the tax bill. Water metering is the answer. Only 11% of Quebec residences are metered, compared with 76% in Ontario. It's no surprise, then, when we learn that the MUC's per capita water consumption is double that of Toronto - 250 versus 125 gallons/day.

In Westmount, we are billed for about 1.5 billion gallons of water per year, at \$0.60 per 1,000 gallons - plus the cost of operating the system. Whether it works or not.

March 10, 1994

A CAPITAL MISTAKE

In the early days of air travel, passengers bought box lunches just before taking off in converted World War I bombers. Airline owners must have looked with a jaundiced eye at the generosity of space enjoyed by the railroads - room to prepare food in galleys with huge gas cookers, room to serve food on expanses of tablecloths populated by flowers, glasses and silver cutlery.

Well, now the fold-down tables have turned. The railroads today are doing their level best to copy airline fare and food delivery.

Working their way down the train aisle, men push narrow trolleys, chock-a-block with plastic trays of microwaved food on little square plastic plates, with minuscule stemless wine glasses wedged in the few millimetres left. Your dessert is staring you in the face while you make your way through the other courses. You're trapped in your seat. The dining car is long gone.

The railroads have faithfully reproduced all the artifices of travelling in an aluminium tube hurtling through the troposphere, all right down here on terra ferma. Overhead lights and storage bins - you are for all the world in a flight simulator for airline cabin crews. You almost look around for seat belts.

But the railroad tradition of overstaffing continues. Resplendent in his blue uniform with red piping, the conductor, after peremptorily collecting your tickets, has nothing to do for the rest of the trip.

What prompted these musings on train travel? Well, as head of the Montreal Suburban Mayors, I have to go to Quebec City quite often; and, compared to the numbing dullness of Highway 20, I prefer the train.

But it set me thinking - once again - how we can ill-afford keeping up Quebec City as the provincial capital. It's not just the six hours of wasted travel to and from a relative commercial and political backwater, but it's the ignorance of some Quebec bureaucrats of the realities of the economic motor of this province - the Montreal region.

In fact, if the Pichette Task Force recommendations on forging a Montreal Regional Council go unheeded, it might be not just because some North and South Shore mayors have come out against it, but because Quebec City mandarins see such a regional force as a threat to the powerful hegemony they artificially wield over us.

And if the PQ gets in, Quebec City will be a boom town - with even more civil servants living off the avails of the fiscal milch cow called the Montreal region.

We should move government departments *from* not *to* our capital. That is, if we need one.

March 17, 1994

GOOD MORALS AND GOOD SENSE

A couple of weeks ago, I got a telephone message from a citizen who was complaining Council was wasting its time passing bylaws against such things as pesticides and smoking. According to her, we should be directing our energies toward, for example, more efficient snow removal and recycling efforts.

This got me thinking about just how far should a municipality go in circumscribing the activities of its citizens.

On the simplest level, regulating pesticides, smoking and noise - an anti-noise bylaw was another one of our initiatives - is just a question of adding more contemporary concerns to a pretty long list of nuisances already prohibited in our city.

With typical turn-of-the-century pomposity, one of our nuisance bylaws is "intituled" "By-law concerning good morals and decency".

This bylaw prohibits "all gaming houses, bawdy houses, disorderly houses, houses of illfame and houses of assignation". It goes on to forbid "cock fighting and dog fighting" and "any person who appears in any public place while clad in a bathing suit or in immodest wearing apparel". You also can't drive faster than at an ordinary trot. And keep in mind that "bicycles or velocipedes" cannot be ridden on the sidewalk.

More recent affronts to public decency were prohibited in 1984. We banned shops selling "devices of an erotic character", electronic game arcades, and massage parlours. (I said at the time that we didn't want to have people rubbed the wrong way.) These activities keep their questionable company in the same zoning bylaw with such superannuated undesirables as stables, slaughterhouses and glue factories.

You can tell the temper of the time by sifting through the historical strata in such bylaws. And what strikes us as a pressing matter today will seem quaint in the future.

I like to think, however, that environmental issues such as second-hand smoke, pesticides, and excess noise are more than just nuisances.

To me, cities have the primary task of creating a certain quality of life for its citizens. This is partially done by ensuring the security of one's person and property.

In other words, if you wish to maim yourself with cigarette smoke, pesticides, or excess noise, that's your look-out (or Quebec's). But your predilection for such pastimes cannot go as far as wafting such irritants into your neighbour's nose or ears.

It's nothing to do with good morals. Just good sense.

March 24, 1994

VIEW FROM THE UPPER DECK

As a child, I actually looked forward to riding in a bus - one of those scarlet double deckers that noisily plied the grey London streets. This vehicle was once called an omnibus ("for all"). The word is now reduced to the meaningless "bus".

The conductor would stand guard on a little rubber-carpeted platform that sped along only inches above the road surface. He dispensed tickets from a metal whirligig contraption. I would rush by him in order to clamber up the narrow spiral staircase and beetle onwards to the very front of the upper deck. Once there, I was master of all I surveyed.

London Transport busses sported green livery when serving the countryside. Up in my favourite spot, I critiqued the driver as he lurched down country lanes, branches tickling the sides of the bus.

Now, forty years later, I feel decidedly childish (and faintly ridiculous), sitting up in the second story of another red vehicle, dressed up in my chain of office, with a top hat and green scarf.

Instead of a chattering bus engine below me, I now sit above the cab of a Westmount fire truck - our contribution to the Saint Patrick's parade. Sirens are blaring, people are waving. We always have a great old time.

You have to be a bit of a kid to enjoy this parade. It gets a bit tawdry at times - but that's just part of its charm. But they should cut back a bit on the motor vehicles and stick in some more of those boisterous floats featuring people dancing and singing.

Also, let's have more bona fide marching bands. Over the years, I've seen enough majorettes in shiny polyester, mincing to the beat of massed xylophones. Give me pipes and drums any day!

Yet this year, the quality of the offerings was really very high.

The Irish deserve this parade. The Irish *are* Montreal. They blended with the French, while serving as a link with the English - or, more accurately, the Scots - who were in power in the last century. If Montreal can claim to be bicultural, it owes an immense debt to the Irish.

Last year, the parade got a certificate from the Guinness Book of Records for having the world's longest float. The show went on in spite of a huge snowstorm. The year before, we had bitterly cold weather.

This year, people came out in droves, shading their eyes and letting the sun wash over etiolated skin.

Dare we hope for such weather next year? And dare I hope that Westmount could enter a float?

March 31, 1994

FAREWELL TO ARMS?

Gun control has been much in the news lately. The Coalition for Gun Control wants a total ban on military assault weapons. Concordia University (minus Professor Taylor Buckner) wants a ban on handguns, except for military and police use.

Meanwhile, out in farthest Manitoba, the Dauphin Handgun Club (Inky Mark, president) has been mounting a counter-offensive. They're trying to get municipalities across Canada to "advocate support for firearm use". They have the backing of the National Firearms Association.

Now, it is the NFA that came up with the "lioness method of rape prevention": all you women have to do is get yourself a gun. Simple. Why ever didn't you think of it?

These groups maintain that early settlers in Canada needed firearms for food and protection ("against whom?", you might well ask). They go on to say that "farmers, ranchers, and trappers still depend on the firearm in (sic) their daily existence". Indeed. And when is the last time you saw a farmer going about his business with an AK-47 or a revolver?

Putting aside this nostalgic and bucolic call-to-arms, one soon discovers the real motivation behind their resistance to banning such patently unnecessary weapons.

It's our old friend the thin-edge-of-the-wedge argument.

Today it's handguns and military weapons, tomorrow it'll be shotguns and rifles. And *then* we will stand naked in front of an all-powerful government, stripped of any means of fighting back. Or so their logic goes.

I'm not making this up. I quote them again: "there's a fine line between a democracy and a police state where only agencies of the government are allowed to own firearms. Remember that two world wars were fought to make sure we are free in this country".

Where have I heard that sentiment before? Ah, yes. It was the gun lobby's favourite thinker, Mao Tse-Tung, who said that political power grows out of the barrel of a gun. Strange bedfellows indeed.

I am proud of Canada's military. In fact, as someone who sits on the Advisory Committee of the Royal Montreal Regiment, I'm strongly supportive of the militia. A locally-raised militia is, in fact, a measure of protection against the very abuse of power that the gun enthusiasts are so worried about.

So if you want to fire a handgun or an assault rifle, you can. Join the militia.

Some monopolies are justified. That only police and military types can use certain types of weapons seems eminently sensible.

April 7, 1994

ELIMINATION, NOT ESCALATION

Escalation. That word, coined in the Viet Nam era, is a back-formation from escalator. "Escalade" was doing the job nicely for centuries, but U.S. wordsmiths felt "escalate" was trendier, I suppose.

Last week, I tried to show why the gun lobby was resisting a ban on handguns and assault rifles for civilian use. They are worried that, once the public got those weapons banned, the next target would be shotguns and rifles.

Escalation, in other words.

And if they were then totally shorn of firepower, gun lovers ask - with a mixture of paranoia and bravado - how would citizens defend themselves against an overweening State, drunk with power?

Well, I don't think most Canadians would support a ban on *all* guns, including hunting rifles. Although I'm not a hunter, I don't see how a bullet bringing down a deer is any more reprehensible an act than having it clubbed in an abattoir - as long as it doesn't upset the equilibrium of nature.

But handguns and assault rifles aren't accurate enough to be used in killing beasts.

They have one purpose - to kill humans.

So do daggers. Now, I'm a bit of a magpie. Somewhere along the way, I acquired a dagger - a 1937 Luftwaffe officer's ceremonial dagger. With its elegant bone and aluminium hilt, it is malevolently arresting. And evil. So should daggers be illegal, too?

No. The danger of handguns is their action-at-a-distance. You can kill others - and yourself - with a slight squeeze of the trigger. 24,000 people did it last year in the U.S. And a gun in the house is far more likely to kill family members than intruders.

I can understand why people collect militaria. Flintlocks and pepperbox revolvers are fascinating objects, but modern pistols are dangerous once stolen. And stolen guns by definition are used by criminals.

I also think that rifles and shotguns should be registered. Right now, Firearms Acquisition Certificates are issued to a user, regardless of the number of weapons he owns. In other words, it's as if we required a licence to drive, but did not require vehicles to have registration papers.

And instead of the current "restricted weapon" status for handgun and military assault rifles, they should be illegal.

The real losers in all this would be men who use pistols for target practice, or who collect handguns or machine guns as a hobby. But surely they can sublimate their passion for marksmanship or history into kindred activities? It's a small price to pay.

April 14, 1993

THE DECLINE OF THE ANGLOCRACY

When I came to Quebec in 1968, business meetings were conducted in English, even if only one person present was English-speaking.

Now, the linguistic tables have turned.

For example. The language of meetings of the Montreal suburban mayors is French, very occasionally dissolving to a Frenglish patois. Yet 45% of the mayors are anglophone. Together, we represent a constituency that is 49% French, 30% English, and 21% "other".

(In Westmount, though, our City Council meetings are in English, with a smattering of French during the public question period.)

We have come a long way from the days of what I call the Anglocracy, when English was the language of power and money. We now have precious little of either.

Through those years, my own French has become workmanlike, although I do stumble from time to time.

Take the gender trap, for example.

Why should nouns have a sex, I ask you. They don't reproduce.

Why should *eau* and *peau* be feminine, yet *bateau* be masculine? Was it because the first two came - a long way - from Latin and were feminine in that prior life?

Boats are feminine in Latin, masculine in French, feminine in English, and *neuter* in German. Let's call the whole thing off! Down with genderism.

In French, I sometimes resort to a neutered article of my own invention - a kind of quick mumble halfway between *le* and *la*. I then avoid adjectives. They would give me away.

But converting classical words into French is easy. You lop off the classical ending and you affix an "e". Thus, museum becomes *musée*, criterion becomes *critère*, Achilles becomes *Achille*. Many classical words arrived intact in England and have been preserved in their original condition, including plurals. The French wanted to tack on a sign of ownership.

Yet in this bilingual Island, how many translation errors one finds. A recent form letter going out to Westmounters was so full of mistakes in French that we got a deserved dressing-down from a citizen. Yesterday, I got something from the Visual Arts Centre in Westmount that translated "a satirical look" as "*un coup d'oeil satyrique*". What dionysian delights await audiences who speak French!

A letter to the editor in the Gazette rightly pointed out that to assume a person is a translator just because she speaks two languages is like saying someone is a pianist because she has two hands.

But it's nice to live in a place where the French use words like "chum" and "fun", and we use words like "autoroute" and "metro".

April 21, 1993

THE AFTERMATH

*April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.*

- T.S. Elliot

The first signs of spring in Westmount are the "for sale" signs. They push up through the matted lawns even before the crocuses. While a hardy perennial, these signs have no roots and consequently get around a lot. And every year some Westmounters worry about their proliferation. Are there more than last year? Is it a trend? In their minds is a ready association between real estate signs and an upcoming provincial election.

And every year I watch the snow retreat from the sunny areas of our garden, to remain as a crusty hold-out in the shade, covered with a tarry deposit - the accumulation of six months of air pollution.

The winter's jetsam of litter strewn along the verges of our streets could be the subject of a short archaeological dig. Nearer to home, there was February's newspaper in sodden sections, yellowed and unread, nestled in the flower beds.

As the sun got brighter, we started to sweep the grit of winter from our paths like wiping sand from still-sleepy eyes.

I cursed each slat of snow fence that slipped out as I rolled up the bundle, along with yards of scratchy burlap. Each winter, I also put down coconut matting on the steps. I'm really not sure what good it does, but it long ago became part of the ritual.

All of this paraphernalia of winter protection gets stored in our two-car garage that houses no car, keeping company with assorted garden implements and bicycles rusting away until spring.

All across Westmount you see snapped branches - casualties of this year's heavy snow. Retaining walls have now a raked angle. The underground bumping and grinding of frost have cracked water mains like so many straws. Some pavements have been shoved around as if they were minor tectonic plates.

The city itself looks as if it came out of a battle. A battle with nature.

It was a tough winter, especially for our Public Works department, what with burst water pipes and some 273 centimetres of snow. The average snowfall is 214 cm, yet it can range from 85 cm in the winter of 79-80 to an incredible 413cm in 70-71. Even Moscow gets only 160 cm on average.

To quote Elliot again: "winter kept us warm, covering earth in forgetful snow."

And to think that lilacs, in these parts, are over a month away.

April 28, 1994

COMPARISONS ARE ODIOUS

Last Saturday but one, the Gazette ran an article comparing property taxes in Montreal, Toronto, and Boston. Once again, the city of Montreal seemed to get it in the neck.

Item: The Gazette calculated that the owner of an average house in Montreal pays \$2,647 in taxes; in Toronto, it's \$2,407; in Boston (the home of the bean and the cod), it's a mere \$2,150 - and that includes taxes for some education and health costs.

Item: Montreal spends 20% of its local costs in financing charges. Toronto the Good spends 10%; Boston spends an even better 7%.

Item: The Pichette Task Force found Montreal's administration costs much higher than those of other cities in our area.

Montreal responded by saying they provide services and attractions that benefit the whole region, and that they are weighed down by the iron-clad job security of its staff.

Five hundred years ago, one John Fortescue opined that "comparisons are odious". A certain John Lydgate, a little earlier, said: "comparisouns doon offte gret grevaunce". Well, making meaningful comparisons among cities on the same *island* is difficult, let alone cities in another province or country.

First of all, the fiscal systems of the three cities are radically different. Cities in Quebec (as in B.C.), have a narrow range of responsibilities, so 96% of our revenues come from local sources. In contrast, cities in Ontario provide some social services, so one-quarter of their revenues are grants.

Moreover, in Toronto, it's their version of the MUC ("Metro") that picks up the tab for things like major roads and stadiums. Metro also provides water and waste disposal services that are charged out to the cities.

The MUC and its transport commission spend \$1.5 billion. Just a few - mostly capital - costs are subsidised by Quebec, to the tune of \$0.3 billion. Metro, which spends about \$3.3 billion, gets \$1.5 billion from the Provincial government. And mass transit riders pay 68% of operating costs. The MUCTC gets only 37% of costs from users!

Yet, while Torontonians pay less for local costs (\$900 per capita vs. \$1300 in Montreal), they pay about the same as Montrealers if you include Metro or MUC costs.

And some local expenses don't compare. It costs the City of Toronto \$7 million to get rid of snow. It costs Montreal \$58m. When I lived in T.O., you had to clear the snow from the sidewalk in front of your own house. If someone slipped on *your* ice, you could even get sued. I think it's still that way.

So, while not an apologist for Montreal, I do think some comparisons are erroneous.

May 5, 1994

A MATERIAL CHOICE

When flying over Florence, the first thing that strikes you is a rippling flush of red roof tiles. These warm clay tiles give a reassuring uniformity, piqued only by the geometry of the roofs.

In the Cotswolds, the almost-exclusive use of local stone gives a characteristic buff colour to buildings that makes it hard to tell the difference between a house built last year and one put up centuries ago.

In London, an ochre-brown colour of brick makes many buildings part of the same urbane architectural club.

Montreal once had that indigenous grey limestone look that knitted together so many architectural styles, giving them all a sense of belonging and harmony.

In pre-war Westmount, residential builders used a fairly limited palette of materials, giving our city a distinctive visual flavour. Slate roofs, limestone quoins and lintels, brick or fieldstone walls - and most houses were given a rusticated limestone base. A little copper here, a dottle of stucco there, all served up a satisfying cohesiveness.

Yet Westmount architectural styles ranged from Regency to Queen Anne, from Georgian to 'Jacobethan'. They all looked right at home.

Then came the 50s and plate glass, the 60s with glazed brick, and, a little later, exposed concrete. In the 70s, builders liked anodized aluminium and stained wood. Polished granite was the material of choice for the expansive 80s. All these were good, but strikingly *different* building materials.

Some of the post-war architectural styles ranged from the banal to the ostentatious, contrasting sharply with their more *soigné* neighbours. But. And here is my point. Had these buildings been made of established materials, the worst architectural excrescences would not have stood out so much. In fact, some of the most successful designs have used traditional Westmount materials.

But some original materials are simply unattainable. In the Edwardian heyday of Westmount, the fashion required smooth, uniformly-coloured bricks with thin mortar joints. These bricks had to be produced by the "dry-press" method, because it gave bricks with close dimensional tolerances.

Then in the 1920s, rough-textured bricks, in variegated colours, laid with wide joints became all the rage. These bricks could be produced by extrusion (the "stiff-mud" method). Now, I suspect, it would be hard to get precision-made bricks. Or to get a mason who can lay thin joints!

I would like next week to tie all this in to the choice of materials for our library.

May 12, 1994

GRAFTING NEW TO OLD

Last week, I wanted to show how the use of traditional materials gives a common language to building styles, and makes new architectural citizens of Westmount look more at home. A number of loud, egocentric buildings of the post-war years were made even more boorish by their use of materials that were radically at odds with their neighbours.

Architects today are much more concerned with fitting in, with being contextual.

Some of this concern is reflected in our by-laws. When I helped write Westmount's Building Code in 1987 - it hadn't been done since 1941! - we were careful to exclude "foreign" materials such as wood shingles and metal siding. We kept our tradition of masonry exterior walls: no wood framing, please.

While I'm on the subject of building materials - did you realise that most would last forever if it weren't for water? Water, the giver of life, is the destroyer of building materials. Steel rusts, concrete spalls, wood rots. Freezing and thawing just hastens this silent process of destruction.

Now on to the library. The new annex will be made of brick, limestone, slate, and copper. A total departure from the old building stylistically, it will celebrate the same honest materials.

"According to the architects it would be a mistake to copy the details and proportions of the old work because of function requirements and the present-day inability of craftsmen to copy the old work at any reasonable cost. Any attempt to make a streamlined copy would result in an obviously cheap imitation. The design prepared by the architects as a solution will use similar materials."

Was this an excerpt from last week's press briefing on the library? No. It was a quote from the Westmount *Examiner* of May 30, 1958, describing the (then) new annex. The theory was good, the results perhaps less so.

As a self-described acolyte of the Prince Charles school of architecture, I embarked on a voyage of discovery when I started in 1990 working with Peter Rose on the designs for our new library. Rose grafts new to old in a highly personal way. Architectural relationships through the generations are thought through very carefully. There are no aesthetic absolutes, just that the building must work superbly well.

Rose works in three dimensions. He builds models of each architectural refinement. This way, he can plan the patterns of pedestrians, the interrelationships of rooms, corridors, and vistas. And the play of shadow and light.

So the new annex will be of its time, but will use the building blocks of the past.

May 26, 1994

MANAGEMENT BY WALKING AROUND

I get a kind of proprietorial feeling when doing the rounds of Westmount's public spaces. Not a monarch-of-all-I-survey kind of proprietorship, but it's the must-repoint-the-bricks feeling that homeowners know only so well.

I like to check out, first hand, how our City looks. It's called "management by walking around". I'm a great believer in that. Few citizens cast a more critical eye on the state of our public buildings, parks, and streets than your humble servant.

I sometimes walk with my eyes downcast, looking at the condition of the pavement. When we rip into a newly-paved street because of waterworks, I grit my teeth. Once again, I think of how primitive municipal engineering still is - we treat solid concrete pavements as a skin that has to be noisily and unceremoniously flayed in order to get at gas and power lines, sewers, and water mains.

The cenotaph is in pretty rough shape. This year, at least, we have it in the budget to fix it up. Our public steps often fare worse than our streets - reflecting society's disdain for the pedestrian. But help is on the way. Roslyn and Aberdeen steps are supposed to be done this year, with Holton and St Sulpice slated for 1995 or 1996.

How about vertical litter? I am not the only member of Council to rip down pole-mounted advertising - usually stuck on with tape that makes a molecular bond with the paint underneath - and bring it into City Hall as a kind of bounty. Whether or not we manage to drag the miscreants into court, I don't know.

On to our parks. Our three main parks lie one below each other like a cascade of green spaces. The other day in Summit Park, I caught sight of birdwatchers tiptoeing through the trilliums (trillia?). One very purposeful-looking group even had microphones on tripods to record the birds' song, perhaps for later enjoyment in the privacy of their own living-room. Or maybe there's a market for bird calls on CD. There's no royalties to pay.

One or two couples, who were insensate to the sound and sight of birds, had stolen away to secluded spots to do what couples have done in Arcadian settings since history began (or humans begot).

Unfortunately, Summit Park has become the Greater Montreal Dog Toilet. I happen to like watching dogs running off-leash, but non-Westmounters have discovered this nirvana for dog-owners: 57 acres where dogs can run free - mornings and evenings. Unassuming little signs say this is a wildlife sanctuary, but hordes of hounds give the lie to their plaintive message. More on this next week.

June 2, 1994

A PARK PLACE

Our parks define Westmount. They serve as a backdrop to the surrounding residential areas. They seem to have acquired a patina that makes them naturally fit in.

For example. There is a lot going on in Westmount Park, but somehow it all ties together - boisterous in parts, tranquil in others: it is a resolutely democratic park.

The wading pond we have promised to fill is still bone-dry. Believe it or not, we have to reduce the water depth by pouring in concrete. It's too deep as it is, without a lifeguard. Meanwhile, the roller-blade crowd have found it a great place to go for a spin. Human nature so abhors a vacuum.

Years ago, that pond was used for model sailing-boats. In my mind's eye, I can picture Edwardian children in starched sailor-suits with ribbons trailing from their hats, prodding their little vessels using long cane poles. Did those same kids play on that old willow that has grown almost horizontally toward the watercourse, a tree that dominates a lazy promontory that seems to have been there for all time?

By contrast, Murray Park is more quietly residential, almost country-casual. Yet it sports a few touches of elegance: the charmingly-restrained pavilion, and the line of maples that still marks the former drive up to William Murray's "West Mount". This residence was demolished in 1930 to make way for the park we all stubbornly call Murray.

The new pebbly dog run in Murray Park is quite a success. Its surface is appropriately called pea gravel. I see the pond is yet to be filled. The carp are still in their winter quarters in our greenhouses.

Summit Park (acquired from McGill in 1940), is a precious chunk of wild that seems right at home up there. The City, at Councillor Stuart Robertson's prodding, refurbished the paths and did a lot to stem severe erosion. But an air of natural neglect requires care, as any English gardener will tell you.

I just hope the invasion of non-Westmount dogs will not spoil this yet-unspoiled wilderness. Maybe we can restrict Summit Park to Westmount dogs only. But can you just imagine the field day Aislin would have?

There's a little appendage to Summit Park - below the Lookout - called Sunnyside Park, strewn with limestone from rock outcroppings, it is most remarkable for its variety of weeds. This orphan park should be taken in to hand. And fast.

Each park has its personality and its habitués. Our job is to interfere only when necessary, and to do so discreetly.

June 9, 1994

CARVING UP A COUNTRY

Two weeks ago, Professor Graeme Decarie spoke at the annual meeting of the Westmount Municipal Association. He ventured into that much-travelled terrain that is as Canadian as tundra - the Constitution.

Decarie's well-argued thesis, in a nutshell, is that during the divvying up of Federal/Provincial powers in 1867, the Feds appropriated those jurisdictions that were *then* the real levers of power and therefore patronage. The railways. The banks. Shipping.

The Ottawa-based politicians-cum-businessmen who wrote the BNA Act left a few scraps on the table for the provinces: education, social services, roads. In those days, the health and education of the masses were small-ticket items.

Now those tables have turned. The very items that were insignificant in 1867 have come into their own. Highways have supplanted railroads and canals as the prime method of transport. Then there's electrical power. All provincial responsibilities.

No one asked for my reaction, but here it is.

First of all, Decarie forgot to mention another provincial responsibility that has grown by leaps and bounds: municipalities. In 1867, cities and towns as we now know them did not really exist. They have now become crucial economic entities, even to the extent of clubbing together to form urban communities that - in Ontario, at least - have become yet another level of government.

Think of it. Four levels of government for a nation of under 30 million. Each layer is scrambling for more powers - to pull the bedclothes onto their side of the bed, as the French say. It's congenital overgovernment.

Decarie's idea of restoring power to Ottawa at the expense of the provinces could be a blueprint for the breakup of this country.

However. What if provinces disappeared, and provincial powers were divided up between Ottawa and those 21st century nodes of power - the urban regions? We wouldn't have the guts to do it, yet it would make sense.

In Europe, the big news is the emergence of urban regional centres - mostly free from the trappings of nationalism. And provincialism.

Provincial boundaries and responsibilities made up convenient administrative regions in 1867, when only 20% of the country was urban. Boundaries were set by the dictates of travelling distance and an agrarian economy.

Today, they make little economic and even cultural sense, except in Quebec. Our first allegiance is to our urban region. Almost 60% of Canadians live in 24 urban agglomerations. *These* are our real provinces.

June 16, 1994

THE TYRANNY OF THE RURALITY

Last week, I suggested that in order to cut back on Canada's chronic overgovernment, we eliminate one level of government - the provinces. This would leave jurisdictional room for urban regions where all economic and cultural action will be in the next century.

Provinces have become superfluous. Even now, two-thirds of the ministers in Canada's and Quebec's cabinets have the same portfolios. The few areas where Federal and provincial responsibilities *don't* overlap are Education and Municipal Affairs (provincially), and Defence and Employment (federally).

Provinces, created so many years ago, are almost artificialities. In Ontario, for example, Mississauga has a lot more in common with Scarborough than with Thunder Bay.

What I'm suggesting is not quite a return to the city-state - as in ancient Athens, mediaeval Venice, or modern Singapore. You could call it the state-city, I suppose.

The industrial and information revolutions have made their indelible marks on modern society, but someone forgot to tell Quebec City. A ruralist, anti-urban mentality is alive and well there. For them, Montreal is full of the cosmopolitan fleshpots that so endanger the untrammelled pastorality and purity of the rest of Quebec.

But we can't afford to wallow in nostalgia. Other urban regions of the world have no such handicaps. Most get solid support from the higher level (*not* levels) of government. Paris, for example, gets one-half its funding from the central government.

I am a member of the executive committee of the Union of Quebec Municipalities. Rural preoccupations often dominate the agenda because of the sheer number of rural towns. At our annual meeting, they fill our workshops with their special needs and worries.

But it gets worse. There is *another* union called the UMRCQ (don't even ask me what it stands for) that represents even *smaller* municipalities - about 1200 in number. Even though the UMQ can speak for 80% of the population, we have often to share equal space at the negotiation table with the UMRCQ when dealing with the Minister. So urban regional centres are in a double minority!

Contrast this with Europe, where a thing called the subsidiarity principle is often in play. Services are pushed down to the local urban government. Germany, with three times as much population as Canada, has one-half the number of federal bureaucrats.

Planning and policy should be centralised, the delivery of services should be up to the cities. Provinces, with the exception of Quebec, could then be superannuated.

June 23, 1994

OUR WATER GARDEN

It all started when we decided to landscape our garden ten years ago. At that time, our landscaping consisted of assorted clumps of clapped-out lilacs and honeysuckle, along with a patio permanently graced with shade.

Around our property grew - uninvited - a scraggly row of trees of unknown lineage. We had maples (silver, Norway, sugar, and dead), elms (mostly of the latter variety), chestnuts, poplars, and acacias. Even a ginkgo.

Well, in our enthusiasm for a total garden make-over, we got seduced by the idea of a pond. The plans showed a "water feature" (read: pond) scooped out of the earth, with a PVC liner neatly tucked under cleverly-placed boulders. Just add water and enjoy. Ha.

When the earthmoving equipment took over our garden, they had no earth to move. Six inches below the grass was solid bedrock. The architect made himself rather scarce at that point. So, after everything else was done, I took it upon myself to carve out a pond from the rock. Sort of sculpting in reverse - Henry Moore and Capability Brown all rolled into one. Sisyphus, more like it.

Armed with a pickaxe, sledgehammer, and crowbar, I removed some 20 tons of rock. By hand. The limestone came out in slabs, interleaved with thin wet clay layers that released an iodized sea smell trapped for eons.

We filled the pond one evening. The next morning it was empty. Westmount rock formations look impervious, but they are as leaky as our water mains. I finally found an elastomeric coating that stopped the leaking.

We then got a few fish. After one season of spawning, our fish stocks would have put a dozen Newfoundlanders back to work. We got desperate, even putting up signs in supermarkets: "Westmount goldfish looking for a good home...and school".

Ah, but it was all worth it. Last Sunday night, after applying a new coating, and after filling the pond and putting in McCoy - our eight-year-old carp - everything looked idyllic in the moonlight. Our cat Kate and the neighbour's cat Pablo watched the fish. A raccoon come to wash his hands, and then sidled off. McCoy made little splashing sounds as he slowly checked out the borders of his watery demesne.

The next day, McCoy was dead, his foot-long luminous body at the bottom of the pond. Probably it was because of the new coating that was not fully cured. Or was it the raccoons? Whatever. We shall never see him again, gliding around the pond, settling in under the lily-pads when the sun got too hot.

Another sad reminder of the fragility, yet the beauty, of our ecosystems.

July 28, 1994

SHOULD SKATERS BE KEPT IN LINE?

Have you ever stood in the middle of Summit Park and been persuaded you were surrounded by a forest of almost pre-Columbian purity? Probably not for long, mind you. Even if you ignored the interlopers, both of the two- and (particularly) four-legged variety, you are jerked back to the modern by the constant thrum of traffic that wafts its way up to our mountaintop sanctuary. When you come out of the forest at the Lookout, the noise increases and you can occasionally see the ochre pall of smog spewed out by traffic.

Up to one-half of our cities is given over to vehicles. Because of a particularly virulent strain of man-made madness, we have allowed the infernal combustion engine to dictate all patterns of urban growth.

Actually, rumours to the contrary, I don't dislike cars. They have their place. The trouble is, that place seems to be everywhere.

This little jeremiad about cars was prompted by the recent controversy concerning in-line skates - or "Rollerblades".

By wanting to get them off sidewalks, Council might have created the impression that they just want them to go away. This is not the case - at least as far as I am concerned. If we wish to reduce our dependence on the car, we *must* support other means of transport.

So in the territorial war between the car and muscle-driven forms of locomotion, the car should give ground. We should make room for bicycles and rollerblades by reclaiming some of the asphalt now exclusively given over to cars. Allowing rollerbladers on sidewalks - at least busy sidewalks - would be elbowing out the very form of transportation we should be encouraging the most - walking.

If cars and rollerblades don't mix, surely pedestrians (especially the elderly) and skaters don't mix, too. Already, the cowboys on bikes that mount up on sidewalks (and go the wrong way on streets) have given bicycling a bad name. Both bicyclists and bladers must show discipline if they want to be taken seriously. (God, I'm beginning to sound *old!*)

Because the flat areas of Westmount are mostly below Sherbrooke, bladers will naturally choose this area, which is only one-third of our total city. We will soon allow them on the bicycle path along DeMaisonneve, but how do they get to it? John Udy has suggested we give over one sidewalk per street to them. I think this is going too far, but perhaps this might be a solution for certain north/south feeder streets to the path.

We might also allow skaters under sixteen on some residential sidewalks. The real solution is to convert street pavement for bike and blade use. For example. There has been talk of narrowing The Boulevard throughout its length. I've been lukewarm to this idea, unless it can be proven traffic won't go elsewhere in Westmount. *If* we did do it, a protected centre median for bicyclists and bladers would be a showcase of co-existence.

August 4, 1994

A LOVE AFFAIR ENDS?

My last column on the subject of bikes and rollerblades got me thinking - once again - about the whole question of cars. How does an early-20th century city like Westmount deal with late-20th century modes of transport? How can we come to terms with the car?

Our city is already scarred with parking aprons and retrofitted garage doors bunged in where windows used to be. People buy an Edwardian row house designed in a car-free era, then they expect to accommodate a whole stable of cars - one for each member of the family.

Yet, if we can't adjust to the next century's mode of living, we risk becoming a historical preciousity. Unchanging, unadaptable, and undesired.

What follows is a personal view as to the evolving attitude towards the car in our society. I don't know if it's helpful in dealing with the local condition: but it might put things in context.

Where is the car going, figuratively speaking? My view is that the days of the car as a cultural icon are numbered. The thrill is going. Cars are becoming a commodity. We used to produce idiosyncratic, sometimes even *lovable* cars. Now they have become, like burger joints, uniform offerings with untraceable lineages. Like many things in the 90s, we are given the illusion of choice. But I must say they really *are* dependable.

The number and variety of marques have dropped like a stone over the last few decades. The death of hundreds of car companies led to the emergence of a handful of international players. American, Japanese, and European cars are now indistinguishable and interchangeable.

Look at the variety back in 1960. Germany, while producing the muscular Mercedes-Benz 300SL, also made tiny cars putting out less than 20 h.p.: the magnificently-named Goggomobil and the 8-foot long, one-cylinder Isetta. No one would dare make something like that today.

England then produced a whole slew of marques: Hillman, Humber, M.G, Morris, Riley, Rover, Singer, Standard, Sunbeam, Triumph, Vauxhall, and Wolseley - not to mention a dozen specialty car manufacturers. All R.I.P'd. Even Canada had cars (sort of): the Meteor Montcalm and the Monarch Richelieu...with their pre-Trudeau bilingual names.

The recent homogenization and internationalism of cars is nowhere more apparent than in their strange names, presumably chosen for their ersatz polyglot sound. Did some motor-car maven decree that henceforth all model names must end in "a"? I give you samples of this lingua franca:

Integra, Elantra, Sentra, Ciera, Supra, Micra, Optima, Altima, Ultima, Maxima, Serenia, Previa, Precidia, Celica, Cressida, Festiva, Achieva, Corsica, Lumina, Berretta, Corolla, Sonata, Stanza, Impreza, Jetta, Miata.

They sound like something cranked out of a computer programmed for pig Latin. What's next: Pretencia? By the way, can you have two Sentrae?

I'll get on to more down-to-earth stuff like traffic and parking next week.

August 11, 1994

COOLING OUR WHEELS

According to marketing theory, all products have a life cycle. There's four phases - introduction, growth, maturity, and decline - just like, I suppose, humans, empires, and pop music.

I tried to show last week why I felt the car was well into the mature phase, where sales are typically the highest, but the market is saturated - a bit like the market for refrigerators.

Our love affair with the car is no longer torrid. But breaking up is hard to do (except in a scrapyard). As the car gets treated more as a commodity, we might see more sharing of cars and the move to other - heretofore less glamorous - means of transport.

But I promised to discuss the everyday problems created by cars in Westmount. At the risk of simplifying the issue, there are three main problems: speeding, parking, and traffic volume. Speeding is a problem more above Sherbrooke, parking a problem mostly below Côte St Antoine, and we get complaints of traffic volume (and noise) all over the city.

Since some citizens have taken us to task for taking too much time to come up with a parking policy, let's deal with that issue.

First a little background.

Before 1980, there were no legal means of parking on the street longer than the city-wide four-hour maximum, although it was tolerated to some extent. Actually the toleration had more to do with inattention than intention: it was only until we got the Public Security Force in 1980 that we could apply the law more rigorously than the MUC police were doing.

In 1980, the Council declared war on on-street parking for reasons of safety, snow clearing, police work, and, rather curiously, "aesthetics". After some rethinking, overnight on-street parking was offered to those citizens who had no off-street parking space on their premises.

Unfortunately, the 80s saw a lot of parking aprons crop up. People paved over their lawns to create a personal parking spot.

Under increasing pressure from those Westmounters who were forced to take their car to work for lack of daytime parking at home, in 1985 Council allowed 24-hour on-street parking privileges for \$30 a month.

But even back then, people who bought overnight stickers (at \$10 a year) complained they couldn't hunt down a parking spot.

Also in 1985, resident reserved parking was permitted in the evenings in those areas that were inundated with non-resident cars going to events at the Forum, the Shaar, and so forth.

By 1993, some 600 people a year got overnight stickers (and 300 for a *second* car). Around 175 people paid for 24-hour stickers.

Next week: where do we go from here?

August 18, 1994

STILL WHEELS

In the parking game, there are no all-out winners. Here in Westmount, we can never match the on-street parking spaces with the demand. Even if we could create new spaces, they would just draw in more parkers, the same way widened expressways soon get clogged up again.

The only way to approach the juggling of our limited parking spaces is to establish a kind of hierarchy of use. But who should be given priority? Once we are clear on that, we then have to make sure there's enough turnover to make these priorities meaningful.

It seems axiomatic that Westmounters should be given preference over non-Westmounters. Next, clients of businesses located here should be given priority over employees. Students should rank last. In order, then: citizens, shoppers, salesclerks, students.

To reinforce a sense of community, we should also make it easier for Westmounters to shop and visit friends in their own city.

So far, any "preference" given to Westmounters over the years was directed at a minority of Westmounters who have no on-site parking. We allowed them to park on the street for a modest cost. But what about the rest of us? Nothing, so far.

Indeed, the homeowner who paid more for a property because it had on-site parking pays at least \$2,000 a year in interest expense and taxes on the driveway alone. Others pay a hefty price for indoor parking in apartment buildings. 24-hour parking on our streets costs only \$200 a year, although - to be fair - it is much less convenient.

But back to basics. There are some 9,000 cars registered in Westmount - about 2.4 people per car. (The Quebec average is around 2.6). Above Sherbrooke Street, there are 2.1 people per car; below, 2.6. With our 8,400 households, that's about one car per dwelling - nearly the same as the Quebec average. (My Westmount numbers are a bit skewed, as leased cars are often registered at the workplace.)

This one-car-per-door might be a good measure of basic parking needs. We should discourage multiple car permits on our streets, for example.

But what about the majority of Westmounters? How do we give them preference? Now, the easiest thing to do would be to reserve long strips of street just for residents. In the commercial districts, this would mean all other users could say goodbye to parking (*vale* parking, you might say!).

What we are looking at is to keep the four-hour parking for Westmounters, and have a new two-hour limit for visitors - the same limit we use for metered parking. Such a measure would free up more spaces for Westmounters, whether for local shopping, or for 24-hour permit holders.

This would also imply hiring more Public Security people, but their salaries should be covered by ticket revenues.

This whole parking issue should be the subject of a "town-hall" meeting.

August 26, 1994

SPEEDING WHEELS

We live on a short, narrow street. Still, in the last couple of years, at least three cats have been killed or hurt by speeding cars.

A few months ago, another cat was run over when a car went barrelling through a stop sign on Mount Pleasant, right at the back of our house. I swear nobody stops at that sign, and it's been years since the MUC police put a car there to give out tickets.

I watched the owner as she carefully cradled her dying cat, unmindful of the gory effects of the car's wheel that had squeezed an eyeball from its socket, stool from its intestine, and life from that blameless body.

I imagined what I would have felt had it been a child.

So I understand, but not condone, the actions of a Lansdowne resident who, out of concern for children's safety, actually attacked a speeding bus. He was armed with a particularly Westmount weapon: a pooper-scooper.

While this gentleman's method of slowing down traffic is unconventional, it must be added to the list of measures tried over the years:

- We have some 367 stop signs in Westmount - many put up to discourage speeding. Most are ignored.
- Against the advice of our Administration, City Council has yielded to citizen pressure and put in speed bumps on some streets. (Did you know that a speed bump is an "ass's back" in French?)
- On arteries, we use synchronized traffic lights to nudge drivers into driving at a desired speed.

Traffic flow control is like a minor branch of fluid dynamics - volumes can easily be rerouted. Traffic *velocity* is something else. The 1987 Traffic Report pointed out that there had been a 40% drop in westbound traffic *volumes* since 1972, and that both The Boulevard and Sherbrooke were running well below capacity, even though they handled mostly through traffic. There had been no such drop in volumes on Grosvenor or Victoria. When this report recommended drastic changes in street configurations to slow down traffic, it got lots of raspberries at a public meeting. Among its suggestions was the *closure* of Cedar at the Boulevard, restricting Cedar to two-way residential traffic.

In fact, the 1990/91 tentatives to constrict Cedar, while being a worthy attempt to slow down traffic on that much-travelled street, precipitated a local war of biblical proportions, pitting what I dubbed Cedarites against Boulevardiers. The papers had a field day. I was against any narrowing because of its potential to offload traffic onto neighbouring streets.

The heat from that explosion can still be felt. But it should not be forgotten that the whole thing was about controlling speeding traffic, and trying to do indirectly (narrowing streets), what we could not do directly (giving out masses of speeding tickets).

Next week: how to control speeding traffic.

September 1, 1994

IT'S THE LIMIT

The literal and figurative progress of early cars in England was slowed by a law - lifted in 1896 - that required all horseless carriages to be preceded by a man carrying a red flag by day, and a red lantern by night. The speed limit was set at 4 mph - perhaps out of consideration for that poor blighter out in front.

On the other side of the Atlantic, there was no speed limits in the Land of the Free; that is, there wasn't until New York came out with a traffic code in 1903. That same year, England rashly adopted a 20 mph top speed limit. By the 30s, most countries had established the speed ceiling of 30 mph in built-up areas that survives today, dutifully metricated to 50 kph.

Our technology for *controlling* speed has not really advanced much since the Red Flag Law. It's still very manual. We require a well-paid policeman - who should be doing more important things - to serve personally a ticket to a speeding driver.

But. If we hand out parking tickets to cars and not their drivers, why can't we give speeding tickets to cars, too?

Why bother, you ask? Well, if Quebec could change its law requiring a vehicle to be stopped to be ticketed, and permitted moving cars to be in violation, we could then use photo-radar. Alberta and Ontario have modified their laws to allow it. There, an owner, not just the driver, can be held responsible for a speeding infraction.

With photo-radar, the hapless speeder receives a picture of his vehicle *in flagrante delicto*, along with a close-up of the licence-plate, some time/date/speed data, and statement of the fine to pay.

Photo-radar can produce 400 pictures a day. Each unit costs \$80,000.

Here in Westmount, we go through all these machinations - tortured road configurations, a forest of stop signs, phalanges of synchronized traffic lights - all because we can't get enough policemen to enforce the limits. And there's no traffic squad at nights or on weekends.

In desperation, we have also lowered our speed limit to try and cut down on speeding. In 1988, we dropped the speed limit from 50 to 40 kph. Near schools, parks, and on steep grades, it's even lower than the 1903 limit - 30 kph. Without constant enforcement, these limits are meaningless. And doing 30 on a downhill slope means burning a lot of brake linings.

Having two - low - speed limits creates an overpopulation of signs. There are signs warning a 30 kph zone is coming up, signs saying you're in it, signs saying you're leaving it, and signs telling you you're back in the 40 kph zone. Whew! Police probably give up to a 20kph leeway in 30 kph zones anyway, making the effective speed limit in Westmount 50kph.

My suggestion is simply to declare all of Westmount a 40 kph zone (10 kph below most other cities), and really crack down on speeders using photo-radar. With a 20% leeway. Tops.

September 8, 1994

OF BOWLING, BUILDING, AND BUDGETING

Last week, I persuaded Claude Ryan to take an impromptu tour of our lawn bowling green. I was not trying to put up a new member (though getting blackballed in bowls is pretty easy!), but I wanted to show him how we would bury an electrical substation under that velvety bent grass.

Minister Ryan was visiting Westmount to announce that Quebec and Ottawa will chip in \$2.3 million for the substation. But his *real* news was that he had bought my idea for a police/fire/PSU building and that he was willing to winkle out some \$0.9 million for it from a special fund. (Ryan, you might remember, was once the Minister of Public Security.) I was quite bowled over by that decision, as I really saw it as a long shot.

The substation will not only give us badly-needed 4,000 Volt capacity, and thereby reduce power outages, but it will be the literal foundation for a rebuilt clubhouse. We shall restore as much of the original pavilion as possible. The definition of a "pavilion" justly describes our clubhouse: *"An ornamental building, lightly constructed, often used as a pleasure-house or summerhouse in a garden, or attached to a cricket or other sports ground."*

I wonder how many buildings "lightly constructed" and built today will survive the 92 years this lovely old charmer has lasted.

But its undulating roof and uneven green shingled loggia are just hints of the structural problems inside. Since it has no foundations, the floor sags so much in places that I would think the main occupational hazard would be seasickness. It seems as if the central fireplace holds up the structure.

Early in 1992, I wrote some columns about our city "living off its capital", and how we were "consuming" our stock of municipal buildings - the average age of which is 60 years old - without restoring, replacing, or repairing them. I was not advocating increased capital spending, but a redeployment from roads to buildings; at least, to spend funds based on the relative value of these two main assets.

Egged on by other governments, are we being too prodigal in our capital spending? The answer is no, for two reasons. Firstly, the net amount the Westmount taxpayer bears - about \$5 million a year - will not change (except, as agreed, for the Library Projet). Secondly, the electrical substation is a revenue generator (transformer?); so, in a way, we come out ahead, once government grants are factored in.

Preserving our police station became a personal crusade early on in my mandate as mayor. In fact, even I have trouble keeping track of the various schemes I put forward to keep a meaningful police presence here.

A 24hr "multistation" would integrate synergistically all our services protecting both people and property. And we have to build a new fire hall, anyway. (Once every 100 years is not overdoing it!) Also, according to the deal I struck last year, the MUC Police has to work something out with us, otherwise the status quo obtains for a few years to come.

September 15, 1994

THE RISING STAR IN THE EAST

Well, here we go again. Quebec (and, by extension, Canada) will be once more examining its existential nature.

This being a political, not a dialectical process, there will be "time yet for a hundred indecisions, and for a hundred visions and revisions" - as T.S. Elliot put it - before Quebec has formulated the referendum question.

And all this because people wanted a *change*. Voting for the alternative to the party in power simply to effect a change is like buying a detergent just because it is new. (Except, in this case, it's getting pretty shop-worn.)

If people want the PQ in power because they truly think the PQ will be better at running the place, then well and good. If they want a new country, I can understand why they vote PQ. But to vote PQ just to get a change does border on the irresponsible. Because the PQ is not a party *comme les autres*. People might get more change than they bargained for.

I usually make it a rule to steer clear of politics at other levels, and I've just bent that rule. But now on to a subject that is in my purview: how the election will affect local and regional governments.

You may not have read about it, but the MUC is moving out of that anonymous collection of precast towers called Complex Desjardins. The MUC will save buckets of money, because other places are so desperate for tenants. And that's why I'm bringing the subject up.

Alone among the thicket of office towers downtown, Complex Desjardins is full. Why is this? Well, it's because it's an office block that houses government workers almost exclusively. The 20% vacancy in other buildings is a reflection of the cutting back of personnel in the private sector. Yet the number of government workers remains rock-steady.

If you think that government personnel are isolated both from the realities of the marketplace *and* the clients they serve, imagine what it will be like when whole departments are moved downstream to Quebec City.

I've often said we should be doing the reverse. Departments such as Industry, Municipal Affairs, Cultural Affairs, and Immigration belong exclusively in Montreal - close to their customers. And reality.

All we need is the PQ's idea of a jumped-up Quebec City to finish the job of bleeding Montreal dry. After all, Montreal makes the money that Quebec City spends. And there's not enough around to invest in both places. Shouldn't the Capital be where the money is made? Would that not inject a small dose of reality into decision-making? Ah, but, in the short-term at least, we can expect ever more power bestowed on that Disney-world, so blissfully far from the bubbling, messy melting-pot of Montreal.

And with the Rest of Quebec still getting 20% more seats in the National Assembly than their population warrants, what I call the tyranny of the rurality will continue to hold sway.

Cheers.

October 6, 1994

ATLANTA THE BRAVE

I spent last week at St. Simons Island, Georgia. Every morning, a waiter bounced into my hotel room, balancing my breakfast on a tray ("grits" was the breakfast menu default mode), and chirped, "How y'all DOin?". Regardless of the mumbled response that passed thickly through my lips, he would always say, "Aw'RIGHT!".

I have visited the U.S. hundreds of times, yet it always strikes me how chummy and classless that society seems to be - or wants to be seen to be.

Along with the mayor of Laval and Chateauguay, I was in Georgia to take a course given by the Regional Leadership Institute, an organisation sponsored by the Atlanta Regional Commission and Atlanta's Metro Business Forum. We were three Canadians among some 50 movers and shakers from the Atlanta region: business people, state legislators, academics, civil servants, professionals, mayors, educators - even a county sheriff (the first black woman to hold that post) and a child care activist.

The Atlanta Regional Commission was created in 1971 - the same time as the MUC. Two major differences. The ARC takes in the entire Atlanta region, which is 33% larger than even our Greater Montreal Region (yet, at 2.6 million, it has 20% fewer people). The other thing is that the ARC is a co-ordinating, planning body. It does not deliver services.

Harry West, the Director of ARC, says that trying to get everyone to agree on common goals is like "herding cats".

Like Montreal, the transportation industry shaped Atlanta. First it was a railroad hub, and more recently it could boast the largest air passenger complex in the world. Looking to the future, communications might supplant transport as its major drawing card.

But in some ways, Atlanta is approaching 90s transportation problems with 60s thinking. They are considering a 211-mile highway "loop" around the region at a cost of \$2 billion, slicing through wetlands and parks. This is a knee-jerk solution for a region whose suburban pattern of growth was always dictated by the car. And smog is a serious problem.

They also put out 40% more garbage than we do. Of necessity, Atlantans use 2.5 times *less* water. Their lack of water might throttle future growth.

With Atlanta's motto "if it's good for business, it's good for Atlanta", the number of jobs has actually increased by 3½ times since 1960.

But all this growth masks the engrained racial tension that lies beneath the placid surface of Deep South society. Part of our course was an exercise called "undoing racism". The level of emotive energy and honesty showed that this bunch, at least, wanted to exorcise that old devil.

With a majority of Atlantans saying that "crime and drugs" are the things needing most attention, and with the 28% of the population that is black (caught?) committing most of the crimes, "undoing racism" was a sobering counterpoint to the cheerfulness of my morning waiter.

October 13, 1994

PRESERVING THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE

Last week, I gave a speech at the annual general meeting of Heritage Canada and Heritage Montreal. The theme of their meeting - and my speech - was "Heritage in the Age of Sustainable Development". *This* was a subject to warm the hearts of ecologists and preservationists alike - and send most everyone else running for cover. If I share with you a couple of thoughts from my talk, you won't abandon this column in favour of something a little less, ah, philosophical? Of course not.

First of all, I wanted to make it clear in my speech that "sustainable development" does not mean "sustainable *growth*". The latter idea is no more workable in the long run than a perpetual motion machine. In fact, we in North America have no choice but to move away from the easy job of managing economic growth to the management of a kind of economic consolidation. It is already happening. In the United States, not only has productivity growth nearly come to a standstill since 1973, but the average weekly pay has dropped 15% in real terms in the last two decades.

Secondly, I said that heritage preservation and sustainable development are concepts that should be complementary and intertwined. Is it too simplistic to regard heritage preservation as retrospective conservation and sustainable development as prospective conservation? I don't know, but it does illustrate the kinship if the two ideas.

Our built heritage is a rare and non-renewable resource, not unlike our natural resources. If we agree that buildings should not be cast aside (nor be built to be cast aside) like so many TV dinner trays, then surely it follows we should not be party to wasteful environmental practices.

And when you cherish what you have received from past generations, you think a bit more about what you yourself will hand down to those in the future. It's worrisome when you realise that we are in the process of creating the heritage of tomorrow.

The major dissonance I can see between *urban* heritage preservation and sustainable development lies with the very nature of cities. Cities are, almost by definition, ecologically dysfunctional.

Yet cities are the tangible manifestation of our past collective thinking, a physical expression of humanity's ideas as they evolved through the passage of time. You can see frangible strata of the past that are laid bare in a kind of outdoor museum. If we are to have any cultural signposts, we will just have to accept the ecological price to be paid in leaving untouched at least the essence of our built heritage.

Perhaps the inspiration for the new city will be found in the city of long ago - before the car defaced the urban landscape. And let's shed an anticipatory tear for our descendants, who, in some far-off day, will actually have to save our malls and highway overpasses - all in the name of heritage preservation.

October 20, 1994

SAVING LAND AND BUILDINGS

In the last decade, 11 new primary schools were built in the Greater Montreal Region. On the *Island* of Montreal, 31 were closed.

In the last two decades, the population of the Region grew by 14%, yet the urbanized area has increased 31%. The number of cars grew by 50%.

The City of Montreal has one-third of the population of the Region, but only 3.5% of the land area. Put another way, if the rest of the region were as dense as Montreal, it could contain the entire population of Canada.

But ours is not the first generation to waste land. In North America, land was always considered, not as a precious heritage to preserve, but as a cheap commodity to exploit. The rapacity of man went unchecked. Now, the highway-builder is the spiritual descendant of the buffalo-hunter, the lumberjack, and the fur trapper. Trouble is, there are so many more of us.

While the early settlers were prodigal in their consumption of rural land, at least they did build dense cities in the European model. The ecologically-sane tightness of the old urban patterns were determined by transport methods powered by human or animal legs. But there was a price to pay.

Which brings us closer to home, where density muscles out green space.

Westmount has 6 acres of parks per 1,000 people - double that of Montreal, but much less than Toronto. Thankfully, private green space helps in giving Westmount its character. It is also needed to set off our elaborate old houses. But the property tax system eats away at private green space, in that land - built-on or not - is taxed at full market value. This will mean, in 1995, taxes of about \$0.60 per square foot.

I've said many times that taxing by evaluation is neither a measure of one's ability to pay nor of one's use of services. And in the Montreal area, 86% of local revenues come from property taxes. Taxing by evaluation also discourages restoration by rewarding the renovator with a hike in the tax bill - even though the owner will use no more services than before.

And many owners of heritage houses in Westmount will think twice before re-doing their roof, say, in historically-correct slate, and will, from lack of knowledge or funds, stick on asphalt shingles that cost one-tenth as much. While Westmount's building code prohibits wood frame construction and, for that matter, aluminium siding, we have always been a bit squeamish in *requiring* things such as slate or tile roofs.

This brings up a question. Should the costs of residential heritage preservation be borne just by the individual homeowner? Should we depend on the personal wealth or simple goodwill of homeowners to preserve private architectural legacies? Or should local governments give tax breaks for historical renovation, as they do in other places?

My solution is to require new suburban development to pay for all the hidden costs of urban sprawl - not just for the new schools, highways, and hospitals, but for the cost of heritage preservation in the downtown core.

October 27, 1994

JOINING THE REGIMENTAL FAMILY

When I told friends that I was thinking about accepting an appointment as an Honorary Lieutenant Colonel, a few expressed surprise that I had any particular military leanings. Was it really me? Well, that's the very kind of stereotype of a military person - laconic, macho, stolid - that I would like to debunk. (No doubt, though, that my secretary felt it to be totally in character: I think I'm looked at as a bit of a martinet around City Hall.)

The fact that the Royal Montreal Regiment decided to ask a civilian to accept this honour made it all the more intriguing. While I am at home in a variety of settings and tend to take on the colouration of my environment, I was a bit worried about committing certain military faux pas that a seasoned veteran would never do. And would I be accepted? Well, my friends over at the Armoury on St Catherine Street assured me I would fit in just fine, and that they knew what they were doing. Even if I didn't.

The only other civilian in the Regiment's 80-year history to accept an honorary rank was John Jenkins, Mayor of Westmount from 1933 to 1939. I did a little research on Mayor Jenkins, who was an insurance company executive. Back in those heady days of King and Country, he was actually given two months off from mayoral duties to "represent the City at the Coronation of King George VI". Jenkins died in office in January, 1939.

Westmounter's enthusiasm for matters military as well as monarchical was no more evident than in their patriotic gesture to have the City donate the land for the present armoury in 1925. Citizens gave money to build it.

But the Westmount and RMR relationship goes even further back. In 1919, five years after being raised as a battalion in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, the RMR was amalgamated with the Westmount Rifles.

That's the Westmount connection. Why did *I* want to take on the position? Well, I benefitted immensely from my own short spell in the reserves - both as a cadet colonel and as an NCO in the Toronto Scottish Regiment. It occurred at a crucial time in my life, and gave me a feeling of accomplishment and self-esteem that I did not get from school or from parents. The militia turned a diffident, introspective kid into someone who could actually inspire others - which is the essence of leadership.

And that's the role the militia continues to play. It gives a sense of discipline in an age where discipline is frowned upon. It instils a sense of pride in an age where cynicism reigns. It offers a sense of family when families are exploding. It is full of old-fashioned virtues such as bravery, comradeship, duty, sacrifice - virtues that today are regarded as quaint.

The RMR has egalitarian traditions. It puts the accent on training, not on social standing - everyone is equal in this family. Promotions are based on merit. It is the only bilingual militia unit in Canada. It is ethnically diverse, and this diversity is especially reflected in its most senior ranks.

And, as they accepted me as "HLCol", their inclusiveness is beyond question.

November 3, 1994

WORSHIPPED IN CANADA, HONOURED IN THE U.S.A.

Would you mind if I brought up the rather immodest subject of my own title? There seems to be a genuine confusion as to exactly what I should be called. Now, I've been called many things, including some pretty scurrilous sobriquets, but today I'm referring to my more formal moniker: is it *Mayor*, *Mr Mayor*, *Your Worship*, *Your Honour*, or just plain *Hey You*?

In the third person, a Canadian mayor is formally referred to as His (or Her) Worship. In the second person, it becomes Your Worship, although informally, cautions the manual *Styles of Address*, you may call me "Mr Mayor". Harrumph.

[When I refer to myself, I invariably use "My Worship", of course. On second thought, should that be "Our Worship", to use the royal we? (Today, given the predilection of the Windsors for extramarital dalliance, that should be spelt the Royal Whee! But I digress in my digression.)]

Back to the matter at hand. The word "worship" in my title does not mean "adoration". Of course, you are free to interpret it that way if so moved.

This use of "worship" is a holdover from an archaic meaning of "worthiness", or, literally, "worth-ship". When Spenser wrote of the Red Cross Knight wanting "to win worship", he meant to gain honour or renown.

This is why the Canadian and British use of "Your Worship" is really semantically equivalent to the U.S. "Your Honor". Mayors of large American cities get letters addressed to them as "The Honorable". Small city mayors have to get by with a simple Esquire following their name, sharing that tag with all the lawyers down there.

I think, also, the practice in the U.S. is to address (informally!) the mayor by saying, "Mayor,...", where in Canada, Mr Mayor is the norm. So I nearly dropped my tea and crumpets in surprise when we got our yearly letter from Buckingham Palace, thanking Westmount for the Queen's maple syrup. The Master of the Household wrote not "Your Worship", not even "Dear Mr Mayor", but "Dear Mayor". How informal! How American! O tempora O mores!

Speaking of English nobbs, we dined with the Lord Mayor of London a few months ago. (Boy, I can drop names faster than you can say E.J.Gordon.) A fascinating man. *He* is "the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor", but most other British mayors are worshipful, unless a Lord Mayor, in which case they're addressed as "My Lord". Got it?

Locally, our newspapers were more formal in the past. When May Cutler wrote in the *Examiner*, the rubric was: "Our Mayor, Her Worship May Cutler, says..." Now, it's plain old "Our Mayor, Peter Trent". And that's whether I'm experienced or examined, if you get my drift.

But I'm still honoured to write this column, even if not worshipped.

November 10, 1994

SIC TRANSIT GLORIA MUNDI

As I write this, I'm still trying to figure out the implications of Mayor Doré's drubbing at the hands of Bourque and his Visionaries. The two titans, Doré and Cousineau, were toppled in one night, along with most of their troops. Ah, the evanescence of political power!

First of all, there's the question of how the polls could be so wrong. Like a lot of people, I'm tired of politics by poll. Besides, pollsters never seem to realise that you don't vote in your living-room armchair; that is, it's those who bestir themselves to vote who count, and people vote *against* incumbents, not *for* newcomers.

As president of the suburban mayors, I'll be dealing with totally new *dramatis personae* in Montreal. The effect on the MUC will be major.

I had a good relationship with Jean Doré. He, above all, is an adept at quickly mastering the essentials of a problem. And remembering them. But Doré didn't master the most important point of all: you must be liked. If not liked, at least respected. But he came across as arrogant. Now, Pierre Trudeau could get away with being arrogant because it came naturally to him. But Doré doesn't have the self-confidence to pull off being truly arrogant. Yet Léa Cousineau has self-confidence in spades. Strange.

Also, Doré didn't always stay in touch with his constituents. He was seen as someone who climbed the ladder and pulled it up after him. While this was not wholly the case, that was the image he gave. Humility in a politician affords a good measure of self-preservation.

But having the electorate rise up every four years to wipe the slate clean does not necessarily lead to good government. If only people would get more involved between elections, then we wouldn't have the spectacle of a city administration lurching from election to election. Evolution is to be preferred to revolution - the effects of revolutions are rarely permanent.

Back home in Westmount, I'm having trouble accepting that we were elected three whole years ago. Because it is a much smaller municipality, I can stay more in touch with what's going on than can the mayor of Montreal. I send out Mayor's letters - often four or five a year. John Lehnert writes a newsletter inserted in your electricity bill. I put out these scribblings most every week. We have had dozens of public consultation meetings on an assortment of civic issues. At least, no one can accuse this Council of not staying in touch.

In a recent cartoon, Aislin has me elected by acclamation. That's some advance poll! A character asks: "with your mayor winning by acclamation, do you have any genuine municipal concerns here in Westmount?" Actually, we do. And this Council is addressing them. And with my work with the suburban mayors, the MUC, the Symposium of regional mayors, plus meetings with the Minister of Municipal Affairs on a host of regional issues, I am making our voice heard well beyond Westmount's borders.

November 24, 1994

MM PARIZEAU ET BOURQUE

I was invited to a Board of Trade lunch last week, during which Jacques Parizeau held forth as feature speaker. Lunch was served to some 900 guests in the depths of the Palais des Congrès.

The Palais de Concrete is that gargantuan grey box that straddles the Ville Marie autoroute, trying awkwardly to help cover up an irreparable gash that cuts through Old Montreal. It's a strange place. If you manage to discover the reception area, and take the world's longest escalator ride, you are rewarded with hothouse-level sunlight - just up until the moment you enter any of the meeting rooms. There, natural light is ruthlessly banished. A bit of tinselly tubing is strung up on the ceilings as a decorative afterthought to enliven the mostly unremitting concrete.

Anyway, I found myself at this lunch seated right across the table from the Premier himself, with, not surprisingly, Lisette Lapointe sitting nearby. Mme Lapointe, of course, is Parizeau's *confidente en premier et commandante en second*. She has remarkably well-chiselled features and an utterly disarming smile. Her charm was slightly compromised when she started smoking halfway through the entrée, but never mind.

Parizeau got a polite standing ovation. (It's a sign of our times that standing ovations have been trivialized to the point where they can even be polite!) Once he sat down - and we could at last eat - I asked him whether he would consider sojourning more in the Montreal area if a group of Montreal business types chipped in to buy him another, even more grand residence. In Westmount, say.

I got the impression Parizeau did not find this little joke to be a thigh-slapper. But he did flash me one of his toothy smiles, garnished by the trademark spiky mustache. That, along with his prominent, darting eyes, gives Parizeau a slightly rodential, but not unpleasant, look. He is a complex man. And pretty brave to engage in fed-bashing at a place like the Board of Trade.

Pierre Bourque was also at the lunch. Bourque is another man with an aloof mien. He exudes an air of quiet confidence, with a gentlemanly manner. He looks a bit distracted, as if preoccupied with looking into the distance, or into the future. His cool passion contrasts with Jean Doré's intense and engaging nature. Bourque is also a bit of an ascetic. At his swearing-in ceremony/bash, nothing stronger than coffee was to be found.

Bourque has also chosen a 2nd in command. To replace the razor-sharp Léa Cousineau as Chair of Montreal's Executive Committee, Bourque has picked an engineer-cum-realtor, without any political experience. But before you think I'm questioning his choice, let me say that experience is not always an asset in politics, as Jérôme Choquette can attest.

The road to obscurity is strewn with the bodies of politicians with experience. And lunches can take their toll along the way.

December 1, 1994

WHAT KIND OF GREENE AVENUE DO WE WANT?

Recently, a developer has got the Greene Avenue merchants - and, not unexpectedly, many of their customers - rather excited about a scheme for a multi-storey parking garage on Greene, just across from Nick's Restaurant. Right now, it's a city-owned metered parking lot.

This proposed building would accommodate over 100 cars, a "*Shop 'N' Wash*" car wash centre, and an elevator - all wrapped in an "aesthetically appealing facade, disguising the use of the property".

A delegation of merchants and the developer came to City Hall for one of our parking meetings. Most of them were uncomprehending, and some even angry, because I didn't immediately embrace the merits of such a boon to the area. To be fair, I shouldn't have spoken out before they did.

But why would I question something so logical, so needed? Is it just because I don't use a car, and therefore have no sympathy for those who do? That's hardly my style. I don't use the library either, yet I'm the one who led the way in convincing Council and our citizens that we needed to sink \$7.5 million into a revamped library.

Well, the issue here is not about a parkade, but it's about what we residents want for our two main commercial areas - and the limits we wish to place on them in order to preserve the delicate residential nature of our city. I'm not even touching on the obvious ecological arguments.

For years, the city has barricaded the Greene entrance to the Ville-Marie expressway in order cut traffic in and around lower Greene, traffic that would otherwise disturb the delightful residential enclave nearby.

In like manner, we should not create more traffic around upper Greene by allowing a parking arcade that will undoubtedly attract more shoppers. And people will *still* circle around, hunting for an on-street spot without the hassle and expense of going into an indoor parking facility.

The southwest sector of Westmount has already sacrificed some of its tranquillity over the years, as Westmount Square, Alexis-Nihon, Dawson and Westmount Life were plunked down in quiet residential communities. All Westmounters benefit from the taxes these mammoth buildings generate. Should we add to the stress by attracting even more traffic?

Another point. In earlier columns, I've written about commercial gentrification and the rising swank factor on Greene that pushes out local service shops. One merchant said I was dreaming if I thought the local "high street" character of Greene was still salvageable. For him, big-city glitz and a regional clientele had taken root and there was nought we could do about it. Still, I don't think it's quite time to run up the white flag.

But it's not my decision to make. Even if Council wants to go ahead with this, the first parking arcade in Westmount, a zoning change is required. So all the people in the adjacent zones get to vote against it if enough request a referendum. The residents will have the final say.

December 8, 1994

TRYING TO ARTICULATE REGIONAL CHANGE

There are now three newspapers that, thrown by three different pitchers, all wind up each morning in the same area of our porch. In wet weather, they arrive at our doorstep dressed in identical clear plastic sheaths, with *Le Devoir* being quite elegantly thin. *Le Devoir* and *La Presse* show up at some ungodly hour before 6:00 a.m. The *Gazette* is always late. But since I get the French papers for their municipal coverage - which is usually better than whatever the *Gazette* puts out - I can at least be *au courant* before the day - or *my day* - begins.

Which is good. Occasionally, CBC Daybreak calls for an interview. They fiendishly telephone me at 6:30 a.m., awake or asleep. To those who have heard me croak over the airways through a somnolent fog, I ask you to make allowances for my lapsed logic and sloppy locutions.

Speaking of being inarticulate, I would like to share with you a transcript of a press conference I gave during what proved to be a very busy and significant last week of November. But before I do, some background.

As president of the Conference of Suburban Mayors, I negotiated with Pierre Bourque as to who would make up the new MUC executive and who would be the chairman of the MUCTC. I got him to accept that it was the suburbs' turn to head the MUCTC. I had to play shuttle diplomat in order to get Yves Ryan finally voted in as its president. In the process, I became vice-chairman of the MUC Council and got on its executive.

During the months that led up to that crucial last week in November, I had managed to change the makeup of the Conference, making all our MUC executive members automatic members of the Conference's executive. This will help solidify the Mayors' stance on MUC matters.

Also that week, I was co-president of the second annual *Colloque de maires*, during which the French media went into a tizzy when I said we have to nearly destroy structures like the MUC, or at least reduce and simplify them. Imagine their surprise when, the next day, Bourque agreed with me! He also might become a new and powerful ally in my campaign to scrap the new police map, and in turn save our police station.

I said what I've always said: the MUC is a hastily-conceived, overly-rigid, 60s type of structure. Some functions, like Police and evaluation, should be localized. Others, such as mass transit, should be regionalised.

What about the transcript? Well, I always thought I was relatively articulate: if not a speaker with polish, at least with a semi-gloss finish. What follows is a transcript of some of my remarks to Pulse News on the subject of reducing the welter of organisations in Greater Montreal:

"On our hit parade, uh, superstructures are not very high on the list, um, in fact, uh, we're probably more in favour of, uh, simplifying structures, or even eliminating structures..."

And this was at 10:00 in the morning, not 6:30!

December 15, 1994

THE CAMELOT CHRONICLES

(Note to a presumably mystified reader: what follows is a manuscript found in the Tower of City Hall that has surprisingly modern references. It is written in a rhyme scheme that has not been used for 400 years (with reason!). The rhyming is ababbcbcc, which is not a Swedish rock group but was known as a Spenserian stanza. If you think it is difficult to read, try writing it!)

I

Once upon a time, in a Chrétien land
Dans une province that would a country be,
 A Tudor castle, fully fearless did stand,
 Ruling the town of Westmount, proud and free.
 From the castle Keep, a symbolic apogee:
 The fleur-de-lis and maple leaf did fly.
 So regard these rimes as a Westmount ode *de vie*,
 A merry lay that limns the year gone by,
 With passing strange, urbane, Dramatis Personae.

II

In Southern Westmount hard by the edge of town,
 Some local folk petition'd to build a Wall,
 An increasingly steady drone they wished to drown.
 The Bruce, the Clandeboye, the Lewis, and all
 Posthaste did bring their plaint to City Hall.
 The only salve for them would satisfy
 To block the hurly-burly of Montreal:
 A quarter-league long, fifteen cubits high,
 The wall could hide their Prospect: a boon to ear not eye?

III

Two Town Criers they did blazon out
 From Victoria to Hillside, broadsides were struck.
 Sancton *redux* lost without a doubt,
 But few exist who fault his doughty pluck:
 He Experienced the very worst of luck.
 For eight short months the champions battled hard,
 Until one Herald's purse-strings came unstuck.
 While both remain good friends of this humble bard,
 The two did raise themselves in all the Town's regard.

IV

The merchants selling wares on Avenue Greene
Complain'd, "A place for Conveyances cannot be found!"
Methinks pedestrian clients are often seen,
But pelf from the Carriage Trade will not abound
If Carriages are forever going round and round.
The shopkeepers clamour, each desirous to compel
The Town to permit a pile on city ground:
A Carriage House for patrons and shop personnel
Near Galerie Kastel, where a Hoare once did dwell.

January 12, 1995

FORWARD TO THE PAST!

The New Year is a time to look back as well as forward. After all, January is named after the two-headed god Janus. Indeed, I would be somewhat two-faced myself if I didn't admit an intent today to unburden myself of some minor modern irritants I have collected over the past year.

So, at the risk of whinging on like Andy Rooney, and feeling a curmudgeonly yet nostalgic post-holiday sourness, I would like to decree certain things return to the way they were:

When *classic* referred to antiquity, not credit cards or soft drinks;
 When movies were preceded by cartoons, not commercials;
 When tenors didn't sing in trios, *especially* doing "My Way";
 When a standing ovation was reserved for an outstanding performance;
 When total strangers didn't call you by your first name on the telephone;
 When your telephone bill wasn't quite as long as Bell's annual report;
 When you didn't have to go to Anjou or Laval to buy a kitchen sink;
 When junk shops were properly so named, and not called antique shops;
 When hotels didn't put chocolates on your pillow at night. [Who wants to eat sweets just before going to bed, I ask you.];

When a crest surmounted by a crown meant royal associations, not some yuppie label concocted by Madison Avenue to bedeck blazers or toiletries;

When running shoes could be used for any sport involving quick movement. [They even have specific shoes for *Badminton*, for God's sake]

When shops and products did not try to get revived by tacking on "plus" to their names;

When you couldn't *lift* \$200-worth of booze, let alone carry it home from the SAQ;

When the main floors of department stores weren't populated exclusively by white-smocked women selling cosmetics;

When the word "literally" strictly meant "without exaggeration", and was not misused as an intensive. [A recent ad vaunted: "Club Biz - the warehouse that literally blows your mind".];

When the solecism "between you and I" would have been greeted with hoots of laughter;

When there were no Information Highway jokes;

When only umpires wore baseball caps backwards. [After all, the visor's there to keep the sun out of your eyes - do these people have eyes in the back of their heads? Or are they afraid of becoming rednecks? While we're on the subject, why has everybody from the U.S. President on down taken to wearing baseball caps? It reminds me of the witticism that "nobody ought to wear a Greek fisherman's cap who doesn't meet two qualifications: 1. He is Greek. 2. He is a fisherman."];

When politicians actually wrote about politics. Ahem.

End of list. Next column, I'll get back to mayoral matters. Promise.

January 19, 1995

INFORMATION OVERLOAD

I've just finished calculating that I work about 60 hours a week at this job. Mind you, I'm not complaining: the day I no longer like mayoring, I'm outta here. You won't even see my dust. And that's your best guarantee of getting value for your money. Actually, with the paltry sum you people pay me, it's pretty easy to get value for your money! But that is not today's topic.

I spent a little time analysing how I now spend my time - as president of the Suburban Mayors, as a member of the MUC executive, and as mayor.

It turns out exactly one-half my time is spent on activities outside the City of Westmount. This probably makes sense, as 44% of the City's expenses are payments to the MUC. Put another way, 53% of the taxes we collect are siphoned off to that beige precast monster tower on René-Lévesque - the same building in which lurks Revenu Québec.

I was also interested in figuring out how much time I spent in meetings. I discovered that *half my time* is taken up by meetings or preparation for meetings! The rest is interviews, phone calls, events - and my reading and writing, which I only do at my office at home. (A business colleague once told me: an office is a place you go where people stop you from working.)

This ridiculous amount of time taken up by meetings is a cross that most elected officials have to bear. More on that next week.

What also gets my goat is the plethora of reading material that comes across my desk. Aside from briefing papers that are anything but brief, most of this pile of paper is made up of various bulletins, reviews and trade journals. Over fifty different publications! Some have coy titles such as Quorum, Profil, Forum, Avenir, Contact (and Contact Plus!). Others are more up-front: the Dangerous Goods Newsletter, the Go-for-Green News, the Commercial Law Review, and the Disarmament Bulletin.

I am not sure why I get the Canadian-Lebanese Chamber of Commerce Bulletin. Perhaps the Handicapped Athlete's Bulletin has *some* relevance. Maybe some groups get more government aid the longer their mailing list.

The specialisation sickness in our society is reflected in such a welter of publications. Even for the general public, there are 1440 Canadian periodicals - 300 of them are represented by the Canadian Magazine Publishers' Association, 50 of which are devoted to the Arts (including Bluegrass Canada Magazine), 40 on literary topics, and 12 on feminism.

I don't know about you, but I would love to subscribe to The Economist, Country Life, or the New Yorker - my favourite magazines. But I don't have the time to read them regularly, let alone any specialty magazines.

Now, I think it's wonderful that we can indulge ourselves in such specialisation, but what a waste. I mean, think of all the energy, effort, and research put into each article for so few readers. No wonder that writers are so poorly paid. Even less than the mayor of Westmount.

January 26, 1995

INFORMATION OVERLOAD - PART II

"THE LAW OF TRIVIALITY: The time spent on any item of a committee's agenda will be in inverse proportion to the sum of money involved."

- Cyril Northcote Parkinson

Parkinson felt the ideal number of people for any meeting is five. As the number of participants increases beyond five, so does the "coefficient of inefficiency". At around 20 people, side conversations break out and speeches begin, and the meeting falls apart. How true.

Last week, I complained about the farrago of specialty magazines that I'm sent as mayor. This is yet another manifestation of the information overload that is choking off any serious decision-making in today's world.

Gratuitous information is so all-pervasive and jammed into every nook and cranny of our society that we are not really even totally aware of how it is crippling us. It's a kind of informational ether.

The computer is the driving force creating this onslaught of information. What we get, though, is often not even information. We get data. We have lost sight of the fact that information is organised data, knowledge is organised information, and wisdom comes from organised knowledge.

As the flood of data rises exponentially, meetings are called to manage it. The greater the volume of "facts", the greater the need for specialists. So each meeting involves more people - each possessing narrower fields of expertise. And the coefficient of inefficiency climbs.

Half my time is gobbled up in travelling to, preparing for, or participating in, meetings. Mostly outside Westmount. The meeting mania that obtains outside our borders is a direct product of the cat's cradle of Councils and committees that I have to be on. There are so many that we politicians have lost control: the sheer number, coupled with the information explosion, means that functionaries are in charge by default.

We need to de-invent not reinvent government.

There are literally hundreds of government organisations that operate in the Greater Montreal area that bear on municipal affairs. Take mass transit. As well as three public transit bodies, and an umbrella organisation called the CMTC, there are *fourteen* Intermunicipal Transit Councils.

If you think that's bad, you should see the gallimaufry of Regional organisations that promote economic development. There are 7 CDECs, 27 CDEs, 5 CRDs that together spend \$40 million.

Quebec just adds to this hodgepodge. Our region *was* one Administrative Region. Now its five. Divide and conquer is the watchword in Quebec!

There are 12 MRCs ("counties") in the Greater Montreal Region. An MRC is like our MUC in the larval stage of development - their budgets are about 0.1% of what the MUC spends. But they're there. And they each have a *préfet* and a Director general. And lots of meetings.

February 2, 1995

HARDHATTING IT

If someone asked me - and no one has - what will be the greatest accomplishment of the current city Council, I wouldn't have to think for very long. The library renewal project has to win hands down. (Keeping a police station in Westmount rates pretty high, too; but that saga is, as they say, to be continued. I'll continue the fight. Indeed, the latest ruminations of the MUC police chief echo what I've been saying all along.)

I visit the library construction site every week. Thanks to exceptionally mild weather, the contractor managed to pour the whole concrete structure for the new annex by December 21, before winter really set in. In fact, we're slightly ahead of schedule. And, so far, *on budget*.

Your Council is determined that Westmount show the way as to how local government should manage such capital projects. And we're now just over the million dollar mark in our \$1.5 million fundraising campaign - which is, in itself, an innovation in shared government/citizen financing.

If you could visit the library site these days, you would be in for a shock. The original Findlay-designed building looks like bomb damage inside. A pile of rescued bricks here, a mortar-encrusted lintel there, bits of plaster everywhere. Orphan leaded-glass windows lie around, waiting to be ensconced in their original homes. The original brick fireplace, redeemed from obscurity, is protected with old grey plywood.

Most of those magnificent arches supported by square Romanesque pillars have yet to be restored. Their chalky plaster and lath skeletons are exposed, and I-beams still cut through them. Engineers are figuring out how to remove these brutal intrusions into Findlay's original design.

Short-legged brown radiators stand docilely in the middle of the room, having been herded together to be sent off for cleaning.

A workman's picnic table is the only piece of furniture. A few festoons of bulbs on wires give off a sharp yellow light. You can smell that slightly acrid, musty smell of powdered masonry that always tells you're in a construction site of an old building.

Three weeks ago, the entire ceiling in the south Findlay building collapsed. Each wooden coffer was fastened to each other, so the ceiling crumpled progressively like a tent slowly collapsing when the poles are removed. The ceiling quite completely carpeted the floor. You can now see the wooden bones of the attic floor and the underside of the roof. We will, of course, replicate the original ceiling.

Our neglected library has been falling apart for years. In 1992, a window came off its hinges and hit a library patron. We've had floods in the basement. Not recommended for a place whose main product is paper. The contractor has just finished digging all around the outside of the foundations to put in French drains and to waterproof the limestone rubble walls.

More on the library construction project next week.

February 9, 1995

BUILDING ON THE PAST

It was the 7th of March 1991 when we first sat down with Peter Rose to begin the design process for the library reconstruction project. Raymond Ulliyatt and I represented the client. A Rose between two thorns, you might say. (Or Peter might have said!) The meeting took place three days after city council had given Rose the go-ahead to prepare preliminary drawings.

Rose's architectural practice operated from a nondescript office block that overlooked the rooftops of even lesser buildings, with their rusting skylights and jumbled mechanical equipment. This view was an object lesson in the sad state of Montreal architecture: ugly, discordant, and run to seed.

By the 2nd of April of that year, Rose had already come up with five different concepts. One of them - Sketch E - was conceptually the same as the building now going up. This was the scheme favoured by Rose and eventually approved by Council. It showed a central passage as the main organising element, marrying the old Findlay building with a new annex. This new spine exploited a "fault line" that had pre-existed between two parts of the Findlay building, thereby creating three pavilions. The new annex was stepped back and down to defer to the original building, and featured a two-storey reading room overlooking a courtyard.

The whole tale of how we got from there to here might someday be told. It's a story of a few bruised egos and flashes of genius, along with a good measure of political stickhandling, heated arguments, and damn hard work. And a cast of hundreds. But, believe me, it will all be worth it.

The current city council courageously got behind the project in 1992, followed by the majority of Westmounters. While the basic concept was established nearly four years ago, it had to be subjected to chopping and changing, testing out of different layouts to make a working whole, and wringing out refinements in design and materials. For it's the refinements in architecture that turn a good building into a great building.

The new annex is hunkered down, almost self-effacing, and certainly respectful of the Findlay building. While it will share the same brick and limestone, the annex is endowed with some wonderfully quirky architectural features that seem right at home. To use a Rosean conceit, it carries on a quiet dialogue with its exuberant but solid Victorian neighbour.

Right now, the whole new annex is covered in white polypropylene film. Inside, propane-fired heaters - called salamanders - blast away, billowing out the film like a ship under full sail. An appropriate simile perhaps, given the (modified) Emily Dickinson quotation inscribed over the library fireplace: "There's no frigate like a book to bear us leagues away".

The job site is going well. It's almost as if the time spent planning is in inverse proportion to the time spent building. I've rarely followed a construction site that has progressed as well as this one. So far!

February 16, 1995

NOT IN GOOD BATHROOM HUMOUR

This is the last of a trilogy of columns on the library project.

But first I'd like to talk about bathrooms. In our house, that is.

As you might have guessed by now, I'm a stickler for authenticity and longevity in building materials. Recently, we wanted to replace the fixtures in an upstairs bathroom. It's a c1910 Westmount-issue tiled job, boasting a white adipose sink with bulbous legs, matched with a two-ton bathtub. Both fixtures are ceramic, or - more accurately - glazed earthenware.

As it turned out, tiles for the space shuttle are cheaper and easier to get than traditional 3" x 6" wall tiles, or 1" hexagonal floor tiles. We did finally find a "retro" tub in cast iron. But it cost \$3,000. And it had nowhere near the solidity of our original. In our bathetic search, we were affronted by acrylic tubs in a million mutant forms and egregious colours -all with more inboard jets than the Starship Enterprise.

We certainly couldn't find another solid sink like our old one with its Rubenesque legs, unless we were prepared to plunk down \$2,500 for a lithe, elongated French number that looked as if it had been put on a diet. Even our taps with their sensuously slippery porcelain handles are unavailable: we only found taps that were caricatures of the honest designs that made Edwardian bathroom hardware so comforting and permanent.

It is in this dudgeon against modernity that I again address the library renovation and expansion project. Nobility in architecture comes from a sensitive spatial organisation of its elements, but it also comes about through the use of the right materials.

An example. In the library project, we've tried to avoid cheap materials such as calcium sulphate sandwiched between blotting paper. You know of it as gypsum board, gyproc, drywall, or sheetrock. The names are numerous, the product ubiquitous. Not only is it fragile, but it presents the viewer with paper, not a true plaster surface. You get painted paper-protected Plaster of Paris.

Where we *are* using plaster is in the old building, where new decorated columns will be cast to match those ripped out in past "modernisations".

The ceilings in the new library annex are concrete. None of your Puffed Wheat acoustic tile, alternating with white plastic eggcrates camouflaging fluorescent lights. Outside, we cannot find brick of the same size as used in the old building, but the colour will be the same, with matching mortar.

I can't wait to get rid of the asphalt shingles on the old roof. Before approving the sample of grey Vermont slate that will go there, I scratched off the weathering from a rescued original tile and found the colouring and grain to be identical. It might even have come from the same quarry.

On the new entrance floor, you'll also find slate. We were going to lay slate in the old Findlay entrance, but we might opt for the original 1" hexagonal mosaic tiles. Just like in my bathroom. If we can get them.

February 23, 1995

HISTORY OF A HOUSE

Every house in Westmount can reveal a fascinating history, and ours is no exception. I hope you won't find it too tiresome if I write about it.

Our house was built in 1910 by a man who became a mayor, then bought by a man who became a senator, and was next sold to a woman who became a duchess. More of that anon.

I don't know how common it is, but when I bought our house in 1979, I also became the owner of a thick packet of original papers documenting the ownership of the house and land. A kind of property pedigree.

There were deeds of sale decked out in their red seals and engraved law stamps in such old-fashioned colours as sepia and bistre. There were also the "certificats de recherche", all neatly handwritten in a spidery hand tracing the ownership of the land back to 1846: from Asa Goodenough to William Footner to John Young to R.J. Reekie - these worthies were the founders of Westmount, as local historians will tell you.

There are letters from the law firm of Brown, Montgomery & McMichael (telephone numbers in 1911: "42 and 43"). This firm was to become today's Ogilvy, Renault.

The man who built the house and who was mayor of Westmount in 1911-1912 was William Rutherford. His father had started the family lumber business in 1852 - which explains the wainscoting in the hall and originally in the dining room. Rutherford sold the house in 1911 to Lorne Webster ("manager of the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company") for \$20,000.

Without a doubt, the most interesting person to live in our house was Gladys Wilson, who bought it in 1921 from the (by then) Senator Webster for the astonishingly high price of \$42,500. She sold it in 1946 for \$30,500. Someone told me by then it had become a rooming house: the owner had long since taken to swanning glamorously around the world.

Gladys Wilson was born in 1897, the only child of Senator Lawrence Wilson. She married Charles Lacaille at the age of 19. The marriage certificate is part of the documentation. They were separated in 1923 and divorced "in Paris France as she declares in or about the year 1928".

Gladys Wilson then married Baron John Heinz von Eysenhardt, whom she divorced in 1937 in California. Later, she married the Duke Pini di San Miniato, becoming the duchess. She was a stalwart of the Montreal and New York social set even into the 1980s. She died not too long ago.

Gladys Wilson built a two-car garage in 1923, and made major interior changes in 1933. I know this because I copied the blueprints on file at City Hall. She enlarged the dining room, removing the wainscoting. She put in an Art Deco bathroom with yellow fixtures. Her touch is everywhere.

The Haldenbys lived in our house from 1948 to 1964, then David Carter (the director of the Museum of Fine Arts) until 1978. I've just calculated we have owned it longer than any one else. Except Gladys Wilson.

March 16, 1995

GREEN SPACE BLUES

The media are a strange lot. If you suggest restricting Westmount dog runs to Westmounters, or have a water main collapse, the media go wild.

But when I sent out a press release as president of the suburban mayors, declaring our support for a potential sea change in MUC policing, for an assessment freeze, and for a moratorium on green space acquisitions...the electronic media collectively yawned. The print media covered it sketchily, except *the Examiner*, and, strangely enough, *Le Journal de Montréal*.

But it's not all bad. Early in February, the *Gazette* ran an interview with me on sustainable development ("Westmount mayor has a green streak"). The reporter, Joshua Wolfe, wanted an in-depth article and didn't try to trip me up in that irksome manner of some reporters. [You want a copy of it? An operator is standing by for your call.]

So what kind of hypocrite is your mayor to prate on about sustainable development, and yet go along with the mayors' decision to prevent the MUC from acquiring any more green space? Are we being shortsighted and indulging in a bit of Babbitry? A bunch of dyed-in-the-wool rednecks against greenspace? What's exactly is going on here?

Well, so far, the MUC has gone into hock for some \$100 million in acquiring green space over the last 15 years. This was a farsighted and necessary action, although the MUC itself should not be in the park business, in my view. This programme effectively *doubled* the area of major green spaces throughout the MUC, from 3400 acres to 6700.

The trouble is, all these strips of land follow the extreme northern shore of our island. They're great for people living in Laval, but are pretty remote for most urban dwellers. They are really only accessible by car. They are largely unknown and underused.

If anyone is going to buy up any more green space, it should be where the people are. You shouldn't have to pollute with your car in order to breathe fresh air. We have enough regional parks along the back river.

Now is the time to bring green space to the people.

The city of Montreal needs parks. Desperately. The rest of the MUC has *three times* their ratio of parkland to population. Montreal has only two major parks: Mount Royal and the Botanical Gardens. Mount Royal Park is only 485 acres. Exactly the same space is given over to the dead as to the living: the two cemeteries on the mountain take up another 485 acres.

The Miron Quarry should become a park. And Meadowbrook with its 140 acres. Maybe even the Glen Yards should be another 50 acres of park.

But the main issue is money. With Quebec continuing to slough of more costs to the cities (*une autre façon de gouverner*, indeed), we could be looking at up to a 5-10% increase in MUC costs, mostly due to an increased public transit bill. Besides, regional parks should be - and were - paid for by Quebec. Not by property taxpayers. Please.

March 23, 1995

WHAT TO DO WITH VICTORIA HALL?

I was holed up in the Dollard-des-Ormeaux civic centre recently for a three-day think-tank session with 22 other suburban mayors.

It struck me that suburban civic centres take their inspiration from shopping centres. It's in the blood, I guess. You get the same purposeful clump of buildings gathered around the same enclosed common areas, with benches and lights copped from the shopping-centre developer's catalogue.

Naturally, these new-age agoras are also laid out in a vast field of asphalt. A veritable municipal mall. Only the smell of chlorine and the sight of kids lugging around clunky hockey gear or library books tells you its a place to develop one's body and mind, not one's shopping skills.

DDO (population 48,000) is particularly well served, with a civic centre boasting three arenas, a swimming pool, a gymnasium, a library, an art gallery, a cultural centre, and lots of meeting rooms - all under one roof.

Suburban municipalities, because of their relative isolation, have to provide quite a range of such services. Here in Westmount, a lot of them are found in our churches, synagogues, schools, the YMCA, and so on.

Yet Westmount probably had one of the first civic centres in 1897-9 with the construction of our library and Victoria Hall. The latter came with a swimming pool, gymnasium, dance floor, concert hall, bowling alley, and billiard room. (Billiards and bowling were pretty up-market then.)

This Findlay-designed red-brick Victoria Hall burned down in 1924, and a rather ponderous new building rose from the ashes: the building we know today. As well as the concert hall, there was a "supper hall" below that could seat 500. (This whole lower floor was lost to the public in the 70s when it was taken over by Manoir Westmount.)

In the 30s, Victoria Hall got a lot of use: the concert hall ("fitted with portable modern upholstered opera chairs"), was booked around 150 times a year. In 1939, 66 theatrical productions took place. One of its four kitchens had enough china and cutlery to serve 1,000 people!

In 1945, there were 919 meetings, 149 dances, 139 luncheons, teas, dinners and suppers in Victoria Hall. There were 109 stamp and art exhibits, plus private parties, musicals, lectures and fashion shows.

By the 70s, Victoria Hall was used for bingo games and carpet bazaars. Then the Recreation Department started using it for their programmes.

Can we revive Victoria Hall as a community centre? If so, what should it be used for? You will soon have your say in all of this.

Personally, I would like to put an end to outside use of the Hall. Of 400 events in the last four years, only 127 involved Westmounters, and only 10% of the wedding receptions. The small revenue generated is offset by wear and tear on the building. And it makes the place, well, less "ours".

While some of the past uses of Victoria Hall have fallen into desuetude, we still need a place to rub shoulders with neighbours and feel at home.

March 30, 1995

A DIAMOND JUBILEE

The unexamined life is not worth living

- Plato.

I always take a great deal of pleasure in celebrating the anniversary of things older than I am. As time advances, these pleasures become rarer.

I don't know whether it was in the twilight years of Queen Victoria's reign that, owing to *her* advancing age, a "diamond" jubilee came to describe, not just 75th, but also 60th anniversaries. A sort of debasing of the adjectival coinage.

Whatever. I hereby wish a happy Diamond Jubilee to the Examiner.

You can divide Westmounters into two camps: those who read the Examiner and those who don't. The latter group tend not to be interested in their city as a community, but as a convenient place to live. They are often newcomers. Happily, the latter type slowly evolves into the former.

Some of my friends readily admit to devouring the Examiner column by column, page by page. Others, more blasé, affect a certain disdain for local papers, but seem surprisingly *au fait* with Westmount trivia.

The editor sets its tone. While the person now writing the editorials to the left of this column is still a bit unfamiliar with Westmount ways and whims, he does write a thoughtful and fair editorial. He argues *ad rem*, not *ad hominem*. His predecessor attacked the arguments of a politician by attacking the person. She felt that all elected people were, by definition, slippery and untrustworthy, and it was an editor's mission to expose us.

This white-charger editorialising was foreign to *her* predecessor, Don Sancton, who was supportive when he saw a good Council move. Father John was of another school altogether. He would thunder from on high in his paper pulpit - his Sancton sanctorum, you might say. He rattled not a few mayors. When he took on Mayor Donald MacCallum for denying Laureen Sweeney access to the Fire Hall, it became the local *cause célèbre* of the early eighties. The Colonel versus the curmudgeon. MacCallum got the sharp end of the stick, and never really recovered. But both Sancton's and MacCallum's love and knowledge of our city were unquestioned.

And that's the challenge of the Examiner now. No one among the current staff really knows the city. Yet. And I'm still a bit chary of freebie papers.

Also, I was appalled to learn just how little a reporter of any local paper earns. They have no job security and they work weird hours. No sooner a reporter gets the hang of this city, he or she moves on to greener fields.

Ah, the Examiner. There even used to be a column written by a dog - Amanda. Now the mayor corresponds with dogs himself. And long live the "Who's doing what?" and "Where were they going?" columns for snoops.

Since there will always be a Westmount, there will always be an Examiner. So best wishes until the *real* diamond jubilee. In 15 years.

April 6, 1995

CIRCULATION AND CIRCULATION

Last Thursday found me deep in the concrete catacombs of Place Bonaventure, where no sunlight ever penetrates. I was there for a pre-press-conference meeting with Jacques Léonard, Minister of Transport, along with other fellow members of a new round table on regional transport issues. It will have to be a big table: there will be 30 of us. I now belong to so many *tables* that I could open a restaurant.

Am I the only person to perspire profusely in such small, stuffy meeting rooms with work-to-rule ventilation? Trussed up in tie, shirt, and suit, with something wet trickling down the small of my back, I tried to be witty and interested. And this was 8 a.m., with a whole day to be got through. Now I see why Jean Doré put in a shower next to his office.

Is it for this humans emerged from the prehistoric ooze? To be mummified in broadcloth and wool and denied natural light and ventilation? What a piece of work is a man, said Shakespeare. What a nasty piece of work are his unnatural surroundings.

The outside of Place Bonaventure is literally falling apart. Have you seen the state of the exposed concrete panels? The ribs, weakened when cast and sandblasted, are riddled with freeze/thaw damage. It looks as if the building has mange.

At the press conference, M. Léonard read the usual speech which was at least 45 minutes long. No matter how good the speaker, a prepared speech is invariably dull. Even Demosthenes himself would have put people to sleep with today's plodding written speeches. But modern political handlers insist on prepared speeches to make sure their charges never utter a wayward word that could make waves. Spontaneity is ruthlessly discouraged. No wonder people distrust politicians.

After the speech, as usual, the TV interviewers immediately started shoving microphones at people's mouths for a reaction. Trouble is, copies of the explanatory papers, all 573 pages of them, were only given to us after the press conference. So you wing it. What a way to comment on public policy!

Overall, Léonard's plan is a good one. Fundamentally, he is telling us we must consolidate our existing transport network, not expand it. The only highway to be built in the near future is the extension of highway 30 on the South Shore for \$30 million.

There's a number of measures to reduce car use: more reserved bus lanes, and the introduction of what the Yanks call HOV (high occupancy vehicle) lanes to encourage car pooling. And \$100 million will be spent on low-floor busses.

The bad news is that Léonard will tread in Ryan's footsteps and remove any remaining Provincial funding of mass transit operating costs in the region, including commuter trains. This could up your tax bill. Cheers.

April 13, 1995

CIVIC PRIDE OR PAROCHIALISM?

Most know that Samuel Bronfman was a famous Westmounter. How many of you knew that the following people lived in Westmount? Dr Wilder Penfield (4302 Montrose), Senator Thérèse Casgrain (250 Clarke), lawyer-poet Frank Scott (451 Clarke), Air Vice Marshal Frank McGill (4 Grenville), Hollywood actress Norma Shearer (507 Grosvenor), Rabbi Harry Stern, cinematographer Donald Brittain, architects J-Omer Marchand (486 Wood) and the Maxwell brothers (184 St Antoine).

All of the above and others have been named to the Westmount Honour Roll, conceived "to recognise citizens of the past and make known how they have enriched our lives through their contribution to our City, to our Province, to Canada, or to the world". Not only did former mayor May Cutler come up with the idea of celebrating these past citizens, but she also came up with the *way* to celebrate them.

Every year or two, the City has held a *vin d'honneur*, when honourees are remembered by family, friends, or colleagues. While the affair is done with some style, it is not flashy or pretentious. The reminiscing of the presenters is laced with humour: we are not remembering dead people, we are bringing them back to life, as it were. To help in this reanimation, displays are set up featuring mementoes and photos of the honoured.

When one no longer remembers, one no longer lives. When a community no longer remembers, it dies too. We are the sum of all our citizens past and present. Yet we have a right to be proud of the glory of citizens past as long as we, in our turn, contribute to the well-being of citizens to be.

Which brings me to an allied topic. Last week, a reader whom I respect accused me of giving a cool shoulder to (1) newcomers and (2) outsiders. As the first mayor to send a letter to each new citizen, and as a newcomer myself in 1975, I hardly think the first shoe fits. The fact that newcomers generally don't get as involved in city affairs is to be deplored. But it is a fact nonetheless. Her assertion has overtones of messenger-shooting.

The *Westmount aux Westmountais* accusation has more substance to it. Can one promote a feeling of community - such as through the Honours List - while including "outsiders"? Interesting question. Where does fostering a sense of community end and insularity begin? Yet how far can you extend a family before it loses all meaning?

And by rationing Westmount facilities - be they parking spots, dog runs, or Victoria Hall - to locals, are we being municipalist, to coin a word?

Baldly stated, our job at City Hall is to extract money from Westmounters in the form of taxes and return it to them in the form of services. Most Westmounters would support some derogation from this principle. Where does one draw the line? I think the line gets drawn when some services are in danger of being compromised because of use by the outside community.

Admittedly, that's exclusionary. So is a Westmount Honours List.

April 26, 1995

THE BRIEF CANDLE

Gilles Gagnon was the cheerful factotum at the Conference of Suburban Mayors. He typed, answered the phone, and served as press officer. He had a ready smile, a shy demeanour, and a ponytail. A gentle man. Three weeks ago he had a heart attack, went into a coma, and died. He was 42.

Gilles, his boss Marc Vaillancourt, and I would entertain the mayors at our Xmas party. He was a mean guitar player. Together, we belted out a pretty raunchy "*Susie Q*". We practised in his little apartment in the east end that he had essentially turned into a musician's studio.

His body went back to his hometown of Jonquiere.

Closer to home, something that made all Westmount gasp in horror was the death of little Claudia, run over by a school bus when she darted across the street to greet her sister. How the family can deal with the inexplicable enormity of such a thing, I don't know.

The same week, two ex-aldermen died: Mel Nixon and Donald Byers.

How many other people died that week? How many lives of the left-behind were irretrievably blown apart? Since you can't, with any logic, feel sorry for the dead (except retrospectively), it's the survivors you have to console. The remains can't feel. The remainders can.

As mayor, I should probably go to more funerals than I do. What I tend to do is attend those funerals where I know the family, since funerals are for the living, not the dead. And they're for family and friends, not me.

In the parade of life, some drop out each day. And some join. But some are forcibly removed. One thinks of the blameless Beaconsfield couple massacred by three kids for no reason. Violent death is doubly abhorrent, in that even accidental death is hard enough to accept. And a car crash or a plugged-up artery are both accidents of a sort. But that someone could cause such pain intentionally is the most reprehensible act conceivable.

The more remote in geography and time, the less gut-wrenching is violent death. We deplore it intellectually, not viscerally. So McNamara's admission that 58,000 Americans died uselessly in Viet Nam hurts mostly the veterans. And, significantly, no one thinks about the Vietnamese peasants slaughtered in the process.

Sir Thomas Browne wrote this about death: "My desires only are...to be but the last man, and bring up the rear in heaven". He also said, with tongue still in cheek, "the long habit of living indisposeth us for dying".

The most human of curses is the knowledge of our eventual death. If we knew we had, say, five years to live, would we spend them any differently? To answer yes is to admit to self-delusion; as, given the inevitability of death, why should quantifying its arrival time make any difference?

Someone said that life is something that happens while you're busy doing something else. The death of others should shake us out of this torpor and make us live life to the hilt. If there is any meaning in death, that's it.

May 4, 1995

A UNIQUELY WESTMOUNT FACILITY

Someone asked Councillor Jim Wright recently what was the biggest problem facing Westmount these days. He paused, and then said, only half-humorously, "dogs". To which his friend commented, "you people must be running the city pretty well if dogs are your biggest problem!".

There is a kind of Westmount political lore that is passed down from Council to Council like Lord Chesterfield's advice to his son. It goes: don't mess with parking or dogs. Well, we have ignored both admonitions.

Mind you, we are not changing the dog run rules much, but just enough to deal with over-use of some of our dog runs by non-Westmounters, especially in those Elysian Fields of dog runs, Summit Park.

The reason that people are coming from all over the MUC to use our runs is because Westmounters are blessed with more dogs runs than all the other cities in the MUC combined, and then some. And to have a 50-acre natural forest within a twig's throw of downtown Montreal - a forest where dogs can sometimes run off-leash - this is a privilege unequalled in any city I know of. Many cities ban dogs completely from their parks.

And before some owners or their dogs jump all over me for calling them privileged, let me say I have nothing against such privileges, as long as they don't interfere with other uses or the fragile ecology of Summit Park.

Indeed, library patrons will soon be privileged to use the best municipal library in Quebec. Tennis players in Westmount have the privilege of using clay courts. These are some the nice things about living in Westmount. In fact, some people moved here *because* of our open attitude to dogs, or because of our library, or even because of our tennis courts.

The issue here really is Summit Park, which was a wild flower and bird sanctuary even when Westmount bought it in 1940, "and it is intended to maintain it as such" said Council then. We have ever since juggled the sometimes conflicting needs of dogs and birds. And strollers.

Now when John Lehnert wrote a letter to THE EXAMINER a little while ago suggesting that dogs in Summit Park should be leashed, and a dog run be established on the north side of Summit Circle, it unleashed howls of protest. His other, excellent suggestions were often ignored.

Even though I did not agree with Councillor Lehnert's idea of leashing dogs in Summit Park, I got 50 letters of complaint that got more and more virulent, personal, and wrong. One letter started off "I find it very appalling that you the mayor of Westmount are considering to ban dogs from the bird sanctuary"! I never even thought of such a measure.

The presence of dogs up there undoubtedly helps in making it a safe place. Dog owners are mostly a responsible bunch. This year, many have voluntarily kept their dogs on leashes during the spring nesting period.

I dare think that we have come up with regulations that respect the dog owners needs, yet deal with the problem of over-use by outside dogs.

May 11, 1995

THE "DE" WORD

There is a watchword that is repeated like a mantra, echoing down the corridors of power in Quebec City. It's the word "decentralization". It has, by now, even supplanted the once-ubiquitous "*concertation*".

Decentralization means different things to different people. At least Oxford knows what it means: "the transfer of power from a central to a local authority".

The word "decentralization", like decolonization and demilitarization, has a nice, positive ring to it, in spite of the negative "de". Most words prefixed by "de" are, by and large, pretty negative: decapitation, degeneration, defoliation, defenestration. (The last, a favourite word of mine, means "throwing something out of a window. Usually a person.")

Before the PQ got into power, decentralization simply meant the sloughing off of certain responsibilities from the provincial to the municipal level. Unfortunately, the Liberal government gave us the responsibility for funding public transit, for example, but not the money for it. Ryan's "reform" means the property taxpayer now picks up 100% of the public transportation deficit, thanks to the surtax. At least the PQ have promised to give us the money in the event of any transfer of power.

But for the PQ, decentralization is part of the Grand Plan. A way station to the New Jerusalem. You see, when Quebec is a sovereign country and has a whole bunch of new powers, and its budget goes from \$40 billion to something like \$65-70 billion, it will be hard pressed to manage alone all these new-found revenues. It will *have* to push down powers to municipalities. Or so goes the PQ argument. Otherwise, according to Parizeau, we will become "the most centralized country around".

So what's wrong with decentralization, other than the fact the PQ likes it? Wouldn't cities run things better, be more responsive? Yes, of course.

One problem. It would cost more, in spite of our more efficient ways. That's because cities pay their employees 26% more than does Quebec. When Quebec, in the 1980s, found themselves overpaying their employees, they just cut salaries 20%. They have the power to do that. We don't.

Montreal's sorry state of labour affairs was revealed recently in a 15-minute segment of *Montréal ce soir*. A hidden camera taped a bunch of City of Montreal blue collar workers lolling around the Peel Pub at six in the morning, sauntering off to work at seven. Trouble is, they were supposed to start at six. The reporter calculated they put in four hours a day. The workers said such fraud was normal, and happened everywhere!

Pierre Bourque wants Quebec to give Montreal the right of lockout in order to even things up a bit. If employees have the right to strike, why shouldn't cities have the right to lock out? But with quite a few ministers with roots deep in the labour movement, he shouldn't hold his breath.

If the window of opportunity opens, I hope he doesn't get defenestrated.

May 18, 1995

LET'S RETRAIN OUR CITIES

The layout of railway carriages says a lot about cultural differences between Europeans and North Americans. Here, you lurch down a central aisle, with the whole car laid out before you. Everyone is on the same - unstable - footing, brushing against *hoi polloi* while looking for a seat.

In the older European trains there's no central aisle. You thread your way down a narrow corridor, peering into each glassed compartment. Are the people within of your station (in life, not destination)? Is it empty or full? Sometimes the occupants glare back, trying to keep out undesirables like you, or just keep it to themselves.

Once in a cubicle, you sit facing a row of people. You avoid eye contact, just like in an elevator. Reading a newspaper makes a good screen.

This delineation and rationing of personal space is very European. The other extreme is found in Australia, where, for example, you'd better sit *beside* a taxi-driver - not behind - unless you want to be taken for a snob, or worse, a pommy. A toffee-nosed pommy at that.

Some commuter train carriages in England don't even have a corridor. Like the Titanic, each compartment is watertight and unconnected with one another. Perfect social immiscibility. Trouble is, you have only a few seconds on the platform to scan the contents of each compartment. Once you're in, it's too late. You can't move until the next station.

Those trains have doorhandles on the outside only. You have to lower the window to get at the handle. When I was a kid, the windows opened by pulling on a wide leather strap that was perforated with a series of holes. It looked to me just like a farm-hand's belt. You hooked it on a small knob to keep the window open. So satisfyingly simple.

My cousin used to live in a village suburb of London called Thames Ditton. They would never think of driving a car to the City. The train ride was 20 minutes including a change at Surbiton. Not bad for a 15-mile trip.

The story of commuter trains on this side of the Atlantic is not a happy one. Just when population densities reached a point where a train network made sense, the infatuation with the car began. Even the sparse trellis of tracks that were laid down in the early part of the century have fallen into disuse or have been ripped out. And the new terminus at Windsor station will be further from the centre of town.

Westmount, and later the Lakeshore, grew around the train station; highways now define patterns of growth. At least Westmount was developed early enough to escape the parking lots and sprawling malls of modern suburbia.

Now Quebec wants the MUC to pay for all the operating costs of both our commuter lines - Montreal/Rigaud and Montreal/Two Mountains. And any future lines will have to come out of an existing budget envelope.

More on trains and transport next week.

May 25, 1995

LET'S RETRAIN OUR CITIES - PART II

It's a truism to observe that most cities, in need of access to the main transportation system of the time, originally sprang up next to a waterway. And it's equally obvious that's why today's urban core is found next to water.

In spite of this, Montreal was able to grow in a pattern that radiates out from this central core in a complete circle - thanks to bridges. Today, one-quarter of the region's population is found on the south shore.

The Toronto region, faced with an expanse of lake to the south, could only grow in a semi-circle. In fact, it grew in a rather squashed semi-circle, since newer cities tended to hug the shores of Lake Ontario, thereby creating a 120 km. necklace of cities from Oshawa to Hamilton.

This long but dense crescent favours the passenger train. So Ontario has retrofitted suburban trains back into their landscape. GO Transit has nearly four times the ridership of our own suburban trains, and nearly four times the trackage (353 versus 93 km.). And the whole \$90 million operating deficit is picked up by the Ontario provincial government.

By contrast, Quebec cut it's \$16-million subsidy to the MUC for the Montreal/Rigaud line in 1992, and will be cutting a similar \$19-million grant to the Montreal/Two Mountains line by the end of this year. It will also cut a \$31-million subsidy to regional mass transit in general.

The good news is that Quebec is proposing to substitute a lot of these subsidies with the revenues from a proposed one-cent-a-litre tax on gasoline sold in the region. For some reason, Quebec has decided that transit costs in the Greater Montreal Region must be self-financing (so *autofinancement* has a double meaning!). I doubt whether other regions could likewise stand on their own.

The more you look into how Quebec finances transportation, the more you realize that the Montreal region (and the MUC especially) gets the short end of the stick. The big end goes to the sticks: rural Quebec. Total provincial spending on transport is about \$2 billion, of which only one quarter will be spent in the Greater Montreal Region - where one-half the population happens to live.

Provincial contribution to mass transit and school bussing in our region is proportional to Quebec's overall population. But we get only 10% of the amount spent on autoroutes (all 26,000 km. of them) and local roads. That's because there's only 1117 km. of autoroutes in this neck of the woods, of which 455km. are in the MUC. So why should we have to self-finance our transportation needs, when the rest of Quebec is on the dole?

But back to trains. It is proposed that the Ministry of Transport study the proposal of CN and CP to add another four commuter lines totalling 200 km. of track, and a new \$75 million of yearly deficit.

The question for next week: who pays?

June 1, 1995

LET'S RETRAIN OUR CITIES - PART III

I get my hair cut only when it becomes absolutely necessary. For me, undergoing tonsorial trimmings is not a shear delight.

This is not meant to reflect badly on the obvious charms of Rose, the delightful lady who cuts my hair. She is the barber of civility. (Should she be called a coiffeuse? A hairdresser? Or a trichologist, perhaps?)

Anyway, Rose told me (snip, snip) how she recently moved from St Leonard to Anjou (snip, snip). And how she doesn't mind the added travelling distance to her place of work near Westmount Square. By car.

I asked her why she no longer took the metro. The only reason I could winkle out of her had something to do with her aversion to metro crowds - having to mix with the great unwashed (or uncoiffed?). She also mentioned the metro's unreliability. But essentially, her decision turned on the splendid moving isolation afforded by a car.

Thousands of Roses help explain public transit's steady drop in ridership. The privacy of the car guarantees it's primacy as the mode of transport of choice for 60% of regional travellers. Only 25% use public transit.

We should not be surprised, then, to learn that 80% of commuting cars have only one occupant. A car becomes a mobile personal space.

Considering this clear preference for cars, why do we spend \$0.9 billion per year on the MUCTC, only 36% of which is paid by passengers?

In the Greater Montreal Region, governments pay \$0.7 billion toward mass transit costs. They spend a similar amount (\$0.8 billion) for road maintenance and construction - for more than twice as many commuters.

What's wrong with this picture? Well, it doesn't include the \$10 billion car owners in the region spend each year for their cars, and the value of the vast amount of public land given over to roads and autoroutes.

We may never be able to calculate the true cost of the car to society, especially the cost of pollution; but, unfortunately, it is all too easy to reckon the cost of public transit.

One thing is for sure, our roads are choked. We need four new bridges. If we added 12 lanes to the Metropolitan Boulevard, it would be full the next day. There are only two solutions: either get people to work on off-peak hours, or extend the metro and the suburban train network.

Since Quebec produces few cars and no oil, cars only have a 45% Quebec content. A train ticket represents 80%, a metro ticket 95%.

But our metro, of the same petite dimensions of the 1898 Paris subway it was modelled after, and a product of a now-abandoned rubber-tired 60s Parisian experiment, cannot be used overground. And, except for an extension to Laval, population density doesn't justify metro expansions.

So the only way out of total traffic chaos in the next decade is to invest in surface rapid transit: suburban trains. Financed by taxes on gasoline or electronic tolls. Or by a private venture. But not by property taxes.

June 8, 1995

A PAGE FROM MY DIARY

Saturday, May 27

10:00-1:00 Westmount Park. Schmoozing at Family day. Didn't come last in foot race. A sunny Westmount love-in. Who says we're stuck-up?

2:00-5:00 St Matthias Church, then the Royal Montreal Regiment Armoury. I put on my uniform for annual RMR Church Parade.

Sunday

11:00-1:00 Old Montreal. I chat with a princess. The Aga Khan's 24-year-old pony-tailed Harvard-attending daughter starts a walk-a-thon.

1:00-2:00 5-Saisons on Greene. Their tenth anniversary. P.R. people unhappy about no media coverage. I gave a mercifully short speech.

2:00-4:00 Visual Arts Centre. A draw for over one hundred exquisitely-decorated plates, run by the irrepressible and ebullient Ruth Shine.

Monday

10:00-12:00 Old Montreal. With George Sexton, lighting consultant for Library Project. Should the chandeliers hang, or cling to the ceiling?

12:00-2:00 Queen E. Hotel. At the Board of Trade lunch, I sit next to, and downwind from, Dr Camille Laurin. Eat smoke with my pork.

8:00-10:00 Baptist Church basement. The Westmount Municipal Association annual meeting. Desmond Morton lucidly explains Canada.

Tuesday

10:00-11:00 City Hall. With chairman of local hospital. Reddy or not?

11:00-12:00 City Hall. Courtesy visit by Venezuelan Consul and husband.

12:00-3:00 Downtown. Executive Meeting of the Conference of Mayors.

3:00-7:30 City Hall. Interview three architects wanting Multistation job.

Wednesday

8:30-12:30 City Hall. Three more architects. Tough time for architects!

12:30-2:00 Beaver Club. Lunch with soon-to-be-ex-Mayor and good friend Jean Pomminville. Talk about death and his severe heart attack.

2:00-3:00 City Hall. Peter Rose, our library architect, is up from Boston.

3:00-3:30 Westmount Bowling Green. I take tea with bowlers.

3:30-5:00 Old Montreal. Approve Rose's design for library tables. Argue.

5:00-7:30 City Hall. Healthy City meeting. Great talk by D. Drummond.

7:30-10:00 Home. Prepare for MUC Executive meeting.

Thursday

9:00-1:00 Complexe Dejardins. MUC Executive meeting.

1:00-4:00 Train to Quebec City. Prepare for UMQ meeting.

5:00-11:00 Quebec City. UMQ Executive. Meeting of Board of UMQ.

Friday

8:30-1:30 Quebec City. Now bored of UMQ.

1:30-5:00 Quebec City. Meeting with Guy Chevrette. Pierre Bourque wants to loosen the stranglehold city workers have on city management.

6:00-9:00 Train home. Order a double gin-and-tonic. Write this column.

June 15, 1995

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

Last week I went to the funeral of Pierre Bourque's father.

The service took place in Montreal's east end. The church was tucked in amid endless streams of white-bricked duplexes with facades in a Decorated Style reflecting the exuberant tastes of their Italian immigrant builders, modified by a generation of French-Canadian tenants.

The hominess, denseness, and human-scale of this residential district is just north of a collection of architectural oddities unrivalled in all Quebec: the jagged ziggurat of the Olympic Village, the Beaux-Arts balance of Chateau Dufresne, and the other-worldliness of the Olympic Stadium.

People attending the funeral milled about outside in the sunshine greeting each other, while the residents living on the opposite side of the street wandered out to see the spectacle. A serried row of police motorcycles waited to head up the procession after the service.

The church was built during that 60s craze for "modern" places of worship, when spires, crockets, and other Gothic paraphernalia were tossed out in favour of "clean" lines. So we got things like this church, with its concrete ceiling with light cans stuck in between its ribs and two portholes punched in the roof to let in two cylinders of light over the altar. Not stained glass, but nubbly amber-coloured Plexiglas covered some of the little square windows that ringed the upper walls.

Not my idea of ecclesiastical splendour, this. But the solemnity of the occasion, the white-robed priests, and the liturgical singers weaving their voices like a plait more than made up for the stripped-down architecture.

The service was at 11:00, Bourque buried his father at 1:30, and at 3:00 he was back at work - as it turned out, in a meeting with me.

How can a man who was so touched by the suicide of his father carry on as if it was just another day? I don't know. The inner strength and imperturbability of the man doesn't really come across in the media.

By 5:30, Bourque did admit to me that he was a little tired, but had to go through with a reception at City hall that night.

Bourque, like all politicians, is not allowed the luxury of private grief. But I think a lot of us (and perhaps that includes even me) find a strange kind of privacy in numbers. A public expression of sorrow can result in a kind of emotional deliverance that we have difficulty achieving privately.

So Bourque gave a restrained but poignant account of his father's life during the funeral service. He told us how his father, a lieutenant in the Montreal Fire Brigade, went on to become a businessman, and finally to head Laval's Fire Department. His last years were not happy ones.

Bourque's father was also a Montreal city councillor for many years, and a lifelong friend of Mayor Jean Drapeau. Drapeau, a frail husk of a man with a cane, attended the funeral.

On reflection, I really don't think I could have gone on with the show.

June 22, 1995

UNCONVENTIONAL THOUGHTS

Hiding in some remote research lab is the designer who invented the ideal membrane for efficient sound transmission. This membrane has become the material of choice for all hotel walls throughout North America.

For instance. Last week, while I was staying at a hotel in Toronto, the telephone rang. I reached out to answer, only to discover it was ringing in the room next door. These same neighbours also seemed to have a need to share all their television programmes with me.

The bathroom ablutions of guests many floors away could be aurally monitored. And the sudden whoosh of a nearby toilet had me sitting up with my heart pounding.

Yet I have seen priests sprinkle holy water with more force and volume than had the indolent stream that issued from my shower head. Mind you, the *sound* was nicely amplified when the spray hit the hollow steel tub.

So when I turned on the wall-mounted turbocharged hair dryer and got an exhaust like the business end of a Pratt and Whitney jet engine, I was not totally surprised. It came with two speeds: on and off. At least it offered a change of pitch to the constantly-wheezing ventilation fan.

So, other than that, what did I learn in going to Toronto for the 58th Annual Conference of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities?

Well, not a whole lot.

We spent one entire morning going over a raft of mind-numbing resolutions, an exercise that attracted its share of pickers of legal nits. From anodyne pronouncements ("BE IT RESOLVED that the FCM advise the Federal Government of its support of Canadian unity...), to gun control (East for, West against), to the national infrastructure programme (the city of Red Deer actually wanted the largesse to end "until such time as budgets are balanced and the debt is in control").

I have a confession to make to you, the taxpayer who foots the bill for sending me there: I skipped some sessions. There, I've got it off my chest.

By way of doing penance for playing hookey, I signed up to visit the Keele Valley Landfill. Who said that mayoring was not a glamorous job? This 250-acre landfill will be full in five years' time and turned into a park. Where Torontonians will dump their garbage then is anyone's guess.

The theme of the conference was "the enterprising community": among the clichés about reengineering there were some very interesting examples of public/private partnerships. For instance, Philip Utilities has signed a ten-year contract with Hamilton-Wentworth to operate its water and sewage works - and the city will even receive a share of the profits.

The question has to be asked: if cities privatise more and more services, will they privatise themselves out of business?

It won't happen, as city council-members across Canada couldn't then go on yearly junkets like this one. And get to stay in noisy hotels.

June 29, 1995

WESTMOUNTERS, PLEASE STAY AWAY!

It's a holiday weekend. I'm sitting in the garden, sipping a freshly-poured Guinness, the glass coated with little rivulets of condensation. It's five o'clock. The westering sun glints gold in our windows. When the wind blows enough to ruffle a row of maples bordering our property, shafts of light pierce its leaves, creating dappled patterns in the grass.

The same breeze carries the scent of nearby rose bushes: through them I can see the dull grey of the teak bench now weathered to the same colour as the low stone wall defining a perennial bed. In it, the blue cornflower, yellow evening primrose, mauve mallow, violet veronica speedwell, purple sage, pink flycatcher, white bleeding heart, and the dusty meadow-rue are all in flower.

The show is over for the rhododendrons, but the fat glossy leaves have a certain horticultural elegance. The holly in the sunken bed, and the Boston ivy cladding the back of the house have a similar green sheen.

We encourage the less-disciplined Virginia creeper on the garage, next to which slowly grows a ram-rod straight white oak.

English and Swedish ivy, along with periwinkle flourish around the pond, their roots commingling in the water. Ninebark dips its branches in, too. A blue campanula decided to grow on its own in the little stone cliff over the pond, near the Siberian irises.

I think of Tennyson and "the moan of doves on immemorial elms, and murmuring of innumerable bees." Well, we do have doves - rock doves (pigeons, gack!) and mourning doves, but - alas - old elms in Westmount are now only memorial. But we are blessed with innumerable bees.

I can hear the bees through the silence. This pastoral peace is only broken when those people lugging white canvas sacks start shoving advertising through people's mail slots. It's then when the little dog across the road starts up a series of irritating yips that are taken up like a canine chain letter by the many dogs resident on our street. It takes a while for peace to be reestablished.

Our own pet - Kate the cat - has adopted her summer hours: sleeping during the hot days, and holding fort outside in the cool evenings.

People who ask us where we are going for our holidays are always a little surprised to hear we are staying put. Westmount's a place to escape from in the winter, perhaps; for us it's a place to escape to in summer. That's because I count on most of you to decamp to points north or south once the warm weather starts, leaving us to enjoy Westmount alone.

You can have your country place and the obligation to stock two fridges wine cellars, bookshelves, and record cabinets. I leave to you the pleasure of keeping two dwellings in a passable state of repair. And I leave to you the commute each weekend. Thank you for all you leave behind!

Happy Vacation - I'm signing off for a few weeks.

August 10, 1995

LOCKED-IN ZONING

Whenever you install a lock on a door that has a window, you're supposed to use the kind that only opens from the inside with a key. You're also supposed to install the lock with one-way screws that cannot be unscrewed - to prevent a burglar from smashing the window and unscrewing the lock.

(One-way screws are fine until the day *you* need to get at the lock to fix it. This happens not infrequently, given the Crackerjack-prize quality of today's door locks. My solution is to use four different exotic screw-heads that could only be unscrewed by a burglar with lots of screwdrivers and lots of time.)

Many processes and procedures in life are irreversible, just like time itself. Many are like the principle of the ratchet (or the one-way screw): you can go forward, but never backward. People who still actually believe in progress think that it, too, is ratchet-like.

I suppose a lobster-pot is, metaphorically, a ratchet. I don't know why that example came to mind - maybe I was thinking of the one-way screw!

So the ratchet is characterized by turns of no returning.

Just like the process of downzoning, as I have recently learned.

In the 80s, as Commissioner responsible for zoning in Westmount, I downzoned many areas of the city. I felt (and still feel) that high-rises, as well as being an aberrant building form, were antithetical to the village feeling and human scale we were trying to preserve.

In the 70s, upzoning was still possible. For example, in 1976, the northeast corner of Greene and St Catherine was upzoned from 6 to 24 storeys, despite fierce opposition from local residents. The zoning change had gone to a poll, where the commercial owners outvoted the residents. Result: 69 for, 55 against.

In 1986, I nearly succeeded in getting that corner downzoned back to 6 storeys. But a few days before I was to give public notice, the owner formally asked for a building permit, and so we could not proceed. Today, that mammoth high-rise renders incongruous its three-storey neighbours.

But I did manage to downzone many areas below Sherbrooke threatened by inappropriate development. Some of these are the very areas today where our protective services building could go. So I am ultra-sensitive to citizen's desires to maintain the character of their community. Otherwise, it would be inconsistent with my past actions. This is why we are giving them every chance to have their say in any zoning change for the station.

But it must be remembered that, unlike the high-rise and commercial development I was fighting in the 80s, a police and fire station defines - and is essential to - a community. It must go somewhere.

So citizens have to watch out for NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) and we elected people must avoid NIMTOO (Not In My Term Of Office).

Next week: more on the irreversibility of downzoning.

August 17, 1995

LOCKED-IN ZONING - PART II

After a long fight to save our police station, and after I got Quebec to approve an extra \$900,000 subsidy (over and above what we were due under the infrastructure programme), Council thought it would be a piece of cake to find a home for the new protective services station. Not so.

Unlike our homologues over in the city of Montreal who can change zoning without local approval, we have to get the citizens' O.K. if we wish to build a station where zoning does not currently allow it. And since we don't move stations too often (the last time was a century ago), we have very few areas that are zoned for such use.

Now, I was responsible for much downzoning in the 80s, trying to limit the damage done by overly-permissive zoning put through in the 60s and 70s. I got a lot of opposition at the time. Even some members of Council feared for the erosion of our tax base. I feared for the erosion of the low-rise residential charm that makes Westmount Westmount.

Downzoning is pretty much a one-way street. That's because local citizens can oppose any attempt to upzone by getting 10% of the people in the affected or adjacent zones to require the zoning to go to a poll. And in a poll, it's the people who turn out who count (or are counted!), and usually it's people who don't want any divagations from existing zoning.

Which is fine. Citizens are thereby enfranchised to control what happens to their neighbourhood. But how do you change the zoning to allow for such an essential thing as a police and fire station, once the zoning hatches have been battened down? It's not as if we wished to go back to earlier zoned *heights*: we only wish to add a *use*. A use similar to commercial.

Interestingly, the four potential sites for the station were all part of my downzoning in the 80s:

- The Gladstone and Dorchester site went from 6-storey commercial (before 1986) to 3-storey residential (by 1991). Even the south side of Dorchester went from 6 to 3 storeys, to save those lovely greystones.
- The Hillside Lane site was originally zoned for both retail and commercial use. The south side of Hillside was downzoned from 12 to 6 storeys.
- The south side of St Catherine from Bethune to Abbott went from 6 to 4 storeys. And the old POM Bakery site and 200 Lansdowne were cut by 4 storeys, with 40-foot setbacks to increase greenspace at the Glen.
- The Westmount Station site and Victoria below De Maisonneuve were changed from 6-storey retail and offices to low-rise offices and residential.

The zoning ratchet effect is nowhere better illustrated than with the 16-acre Glen Yards site that was 6-storey industrial/commercial prior to 1986. John Shingler and I got it downzoned to one- and two-family dwellings. While we predicted some small upzoning would be necessary to allow for development of the site, we did not have in mind the scale of the zoning change that CP wants. So nothing happens, and citizens have the final say.

August 24, 1995

POST-REFERENDUM AGENDUM

As readers of this column might remember, the word "decentralization" in the lexicon of the current government of Québec refers to that happy state of affairs in post-partum Québec: powers will be passed down to the municipal level by a young government burdened with all kinds of new responsibilities after separating from mother Canada.

In mathematics and logic, "iff" means "if and only if". Well, we municipalities will only get all this bounty of powers iff Québec separates. The whole matter is laid out in a new government publication, a *livre vert* entitled: "*Décentralisation: un choix de société*". It has a foreword by Guy Chevrette, minister of Municipal Affairs and Regional Development.

I guess that our government thinks that the prospect of enlarging our powers will precipitate uncontrolled salivation in the mouths of mayors, and make us all converts to the cause. Especially in the regions, small-town mayors are expected to follow this Pied Piper of Hamlets.

"Quebecers have expressed their hopes for a new way of doing things, based on greater responsibilities devolving on local and regional communities. The government has listened to all the regions, and, conscious of its duty, has approved this document", said M. Chevrette. In it, the current constitutional status of Quebec is characterized as "*néfaste*".

Only by its "emancipation from federalism" will Quebec find its full ability to act. And all these changes will take place "inside a unitary Quebec state with delegation of powers, as compared to a federal state with sharing of powers". While the document is, of necessity, very vague, it suggests some powers that could be transferred: local airports, autoroutes, distribution of passports and identity cards, hospitals, maintenance of school buildings (and maybe even schools!) - the list goes on.

Decentralization came up last weekend at a Quebec Municipalities Union meeting (I'm a director of the UMQ). Some mayors wanted us to comment positively on the *livre vert*, but the majority decided not to take the bait. I said it was, for some of us, like asking a non-believer to critique the contents of the Bible.

As a kind of product sample, though, Chevrette is proposing some administrative reform (a kind of mini-Ryan reform) that he also calls decentralization; but these things can happen whether or not Quebec changes its constitutional stature. In this mini-decentralization, Quebec wants to give some \$120 million of new responsibilities to municipalities: only about \$80 million affects urban areas, and \$35 million of that is the taking over of handicapped transport.

Quebec promises to transfer new revenues to pay for these things, probably by increasing the grants they pay in lieu of property taxes. But they should be paying the full amounts anyway. Why shouldn't governments pay their fair share of property taxes? Even in a new Quebec?

August 31, 1995

OUR FINEST ACHIEVEMENT

I have some good news for you, dear friends and gentle readers. You and I will have at least a two-month respite from these columns. It seems that, as we enter a municipal election period, any such scribblings could be considered by Quebec as giving unfair advantage. I actually would put them more in the category of self-inflicted libel, but there you are.

If I were not running again, I could write away with impunity. So this is my roundabout way of admitting I might just seek another four years of mayoral fun and games. And that news is as stale as flat ginger-ale.

The same reason lies behind our decision to delay the library opening until after the election. Believe it or not, the costs of any such self-congratulatory event with its attendant tub-thumping, back-patting, and flesh-pressing could be considered to "favour, directly or indirectly, the election of a candidate" and thereby be an unauthorised election expense.

The library project has to be this Council's finest achievement. Three years ago, I said "it's time to reset and polish this jewel in Westmount's crown". But you can't polish a jewel without friction, and the history of the library project is fraught with conflict.

To mark the library opening, we will be printing a handout that will describe how the project came about and got done. So I spent last weekend putting together and summarising my seven thick binders on the subject.

What struck me was how often I had to employ closure in the face of conflicting advice and opinions. There were three aspects of the library project that were usually at odds: matters architectural, functional, and financial. Architects said to build two separate pavilions, library planners said to build one big box with movable walls and one entrance, and taxpayers told us to spend anywhere from nothing right up to \$12 million.

It was our job to balance these three forces without coming up with a building that was an awkward compromise. Then there's the question of taste. Do I rely solely on the architect's? Council's? My own? How can I presume to decide aesthetic issues on behalf of 20,000 people?

A few architects may feel we have compromised the integrity of the architectural concept, a few librarians may feel we have sacrificed operational efficiency on the altar of architectural elegance, and a few taxpayers may feel we can do without the leather chairs, bronze chandeliers, and slate roof. But most of you will find the balance just right.

Cynics might also say it's nice I have got so much satisfaction out of spending other peoples' money. But to use tax money wisely, you have to treat it as your own. Public money is squandered when no one is accountable, when buildings go up without passion, without confidence.

I am unabashedly proud of our new library and what Council, staff, and some dedicated citizens did to achieve it. The final verdict rests with you.

Ta-ta for now.

November 2, 1995

CANADA IN THE BALANCE

*How come we can't talk to each other any more?
Why can't you see I'm changing too?
We've got by far too long to end it feeling wrong
And I still share too much with you.*

*Why can't you understand I'm glad you're standing proud;
I know you made it on your own,
But in this pride you earned, I thought you might have learned
That you don't have to stand alone.*

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- Ian Tyson and Peter Gzowski

The sentiment expressed in *Song for Canada* thirty years ago is more than ever valid and needed, especially after Monday night's cliffhanger.

But maybe it's too late.

Too often, English Canada had resorted to rational language, and the French to emotional. We should have long ago empathised with the hopes and fears of people who would demonstrably go to any lengths to safeguard their culture. Including the destruction of a country.

Had the right overtures been made then, francophone Quebec's position would not have hardened into today's almost cool-headed desire to run their own show. Many Quebecers actually believe that separation would lead to better economic conditions! Now it's going to be a hard slog.

I was in the crowd at the Place du Canada rally and saw a glimmering of what was needed years ago. Why did the rest of Canada wait this long?

* * * * *

Closer to home, the editor of THE EXAMINER, basing his comments on a four-line quote in the Gazette, speculated last week as to why I seemed to have taken a neutral position in the referendum debate. I would have thought I didn't have to spell it out, as Westmounters *I've* talked to have all understood implicitly, but here goes anyway.

As vice-chairman of the MUC, and, more importantly, as president of the Montreal Suburban Mayors (representing 27 cities), I had to stay neutral. This is why Vera Danyluk also kept a strict neutrality. Some might say I could have exploited these positions to further the federalist cause. Believe me, the Mayor of Westmount, using his title as head of the suburban mayors or vice-chairman of the MUC, pronouncing for the NO would have been a media godsend for the YES camp.

Indeed, had I felt my support would have helped, I would have resigned both posts and campaigned as Mayor of Westmount, *tout court*.

And that leads me to the crux of my reasoning. The editorialist reveals a rare streak of political naïveté in expecting the Mayor of Westmount to declare on the referendum question. He ignores the resonance that the name Westmount still arouses in Francophone Quebec. I know. I spend half my time there, and have for 25 years.

Of course it would have been far easier to nail my colours to the mast, but that mast could have become a lightning rod for anti-English sentiment. Both before and after the referendum.

The point of the exercise was to win, not for me to preach to the Westmount converted, no matter how good it might have felt.

The referendum was going to be won or lost in the francophone media, not in the Gazette. And the Mayor of Westmount denouncing sovereignty in La Presse was hardly going to convert any votes in Terrebonne.

To provide fodder for the OUI camp, to reinforce the image of a wall-to-wall Westmount voting bloc, to put up an Anglo straw man for Parizeau to knock down: is this what I should have done?

Pierre Bourque and other francophone mayors were put under tremendous pressure to come out for the OUI. Yet I didn't read any anglo editors exhorting Bourque to scrap his neutral position! (In point of fact, Bourque was far from being a Yes-man.)

Yves Ryan, the veteran mayor of Montréal-Nord, cast aside his time-honoured neutrality two weeks ago by coming out clearly for the NON. This brave move helped. Ditto for Mayor Labrosse of Montréal-Est. But the anglophone Mayor of Westmount beating the drum for the NON would have had the opposite effect.

* * * * *

Now back to the future. Where do we go from here? With the voting over, I am freer to express my views - without hurting the federalist cause.

What Canada now has is a short reprieve. I'll continue to try to keep Quebec in a renewed federal Canada. In my own way. If that does not always involve flag-waving and public pronouncements, you'll just have to trust me. Jingoism will not win the day.

And I'll continue to fight to preserve Westmount and its unparalleled way of life. Which I was elected to do.

P.S.: Thanks for the vote of confidence in re-electing me by acclamation.

November 9, 1995

WHERE DO WE GO TO FROM HERE?

At Pierre Bourque's insistence, I watched the October 30 referendum results in his office. Bourque holds court in a high-ceilinged, over-lit room on the second floor of Montreal's City Hall. The windows are elegant and the view magnificent. He didn't spend much on decor.

(Jean Doré's celebrated yet Spartan office, all white gyproc and wood trim, was carved out of a large garret on the fourth floor, necessitating a window. It has metamorphosed into a conference room. With shower.)

Mayor Bourque had asked me to be there in case the vote went YES, and he needed help in dealing with an apprehended anglo panic. Most of the people watching his TV were rooting for the NO. So as the early results filtered in, I was not alone in feeling nonplussed. I certainly had little idea of what to tell my fellow Anglos. Mercifully, I was spared that ordeal.

I am sure that none of you want to be put through this wringer again. We have to short-circuit this pattern of holding successive referenda that pose increasingly ambiguous questions until Quebec finally comes up with the "right" answer - like an obstinate student who at last sees the light.

As a country, we can't afford this chronic uncertainty. If it means picking at the constitutional scab once again, so be it.

Since the referendum, we have been presented with a Kama Sutra of possible constitutional positions: the revival of the idea of anglo Quebec hiving off and joining what remains of Canada ("if Canada is divisible, so is Quebec"), a binational Canada with two equal partners, recognition of Quebec's distinct society and traditional veto, or just simply hacking off federal powers and giving them to provinces.

In my view, these solutions, even given the remote possibility they could be sold to our present partners, have a fundamental flaw: they don't resolve the other Great Canadian Malaise: congenital overgovernment.

Many of these solutions also skirt around the cultural divide. Much has been made of the "ethnic" voting in the referendum. The problem is that some francophones in Quebec want uniculturalism, anglophones in Quebec want at least biculturalism, and the rest of Canada wants multiculturalism. What sticks in French Quebec's craw is the fact the "two founding nations" concept - a concept that sat well with their sense of history - has been superannuated; all people talk about now is multiculturalism. French is now just one culture among many in the Canadian mosaic.

Anglos, the grit in the Quebec oyster, have produced a shining example of a well-adapted minority. In our view. Yet these anglo pearls are only to be found near the confluence of the St Lawrence and Ottawa rivers. Of the 125 ridings polled in the referendum, only 56 have a non-francophone component of more than 10%, and most of these ridings are in the MUC and Laval. The rest of Quebec remains essentially unicultural.

To be continued.

November 16, 1995

PROVIDING LEADERSHIP NOT SERVICES

At the risk of adding to the growing miasma of ideas floating around about post-referendum restructuring of Canada, I present you with yet another. It at least has the attraction of addressing our problem of overgovernment.

And as far as I can make out, the sovereignist "project" would not even have had the advantage of cutting the total costs of government.

Au contraire. Witness the solicitude the PQ heaped upon those poor federal bureaucrats living in Quebec who would be out of a job in the event of separation. Bill 1 ("an Act respecting the future of Quebec"), in article 23, actually *guaranteed* these people jobs.

One could only wish for the same level of concern for private-sector workers who would have been rendered jobless - victims of an economic tailspin that would have followed a declaration of independence.

The PQ also cuddled up to public-sector unions. Sovereignty forever. It's fine for them. Those unions represent people blessed with job security that insulates them from the economic vicissitudes of independence. The private sector, which pays their salaries, bears all the risks of separation.

On to my proposal. Our government structures go back to when one had to centralize both policy-making and service-delivery - before computers and modern communications made central service delivery unnecessary.

And that is the essence of what I am suggesting: we have to divorce the policy-making from the delivery of services. Federal (and provincial) services should be delivered locally (or privatized). This is the principle of subsidiarity, which holds that services should be provided by the lowest competent level of government. Germany is the best example of this principle at work; there, it's the city that delivers most services.

Federal programs such as unemployment insurance, old age security, and job training would be far better delivered at the local level, along with similar provincial programs. Economies of scale (which I've yet to see happen in government) would be replaced by economies of proximity.

The feds should also get out of the business subsidy business, along with transport and farm subsidies. Canada Post should be privatized.

Uniform standards would be set nationally, whether environmental, cultural, or economic. The only *services* Canada should deliver would relate to the military or to criminal law. There would be no cut in powers.

Why would this be an alternative to separation? If we kept the same national standards as today, but all services were delivered locally, it would allow for local distinctiveness and personalization. When Quebec says it wants to run its own show (but not its own passports, currency, or tariffs), it is really referring to how services are delivered. I still think that, overall, Canadians have surprisingly similar standards and values.

Canada would be no less of a country if service delivery were decentralized. But it would be better run. More flexible. And just might survive.

November 23, 1995

QUILICO, COHEN, AND THE PURPLE CONEFLOWER

One of the great things about mayoring is that you get exposed to a lot of different people. Unfortunately, you also get exposed to a lot of different people's germs. Getting colds becomes an occupational hazard.

I'm gregarious, but viruses are downright promiscuous. Viruses shamelessly attach themselves to my person, where, in spite of my prophylactic handwashing, they reproduce at a Malthusian rate.

At last Saturday's open house, I gave the library a book. It was a compilation of my EXAMINER columns of the last four years. Anyone with the stomach to read that book will not likely learn much of value. (Of course, what do you expect of someone who reads with their stomach?) But, today, dear reader, you will learn something worthwhile.

I'm about to tell you how to avoid the common cold; or, if you get one, how to cut it back to a one-day wonder. I have but one word to impart:

Echinacea.

Having a bit of a scientific bent, I pooh-poohed my wife's assertion some years ago that echinacea (purple coneflower) can prevent colds.

Then Gino Quilico, both a Westmouter and a famous opera singer, told me that, thanks to a tincture of echinacea taken daily in winter, he hasn't had a real cold in four years. Gino used to get them all the time, especially when travelling. An opera singer regards a cold with the same enthusiasm with which a ballet dancer contemplates a sprained ankle.

Speaking of singers: Leonard Cohen sounds as if he has a permanent cold, yet he makes it sound sexy. I had called Leonard Cohen in California just before the library opening to take him up on his offer to commission a bust of Irving Layton as his contribution to our new library. We had started corresponding, as I had invited him to the opening (he nearly did come, actually), he being an ex-Westmouter and ex-library user, and all.

When I got colds, I never sounded like Leonard Cohen.

So after the noon press conference and the evening reception for 500 library donors and dignitaries on the 9th of November, after a RMR mess dinner the next night, after a six-hour library open house for 4,000 on the 11th, and after the Remembrance Day parade with various mess visits....I got a cold: having shaken too many hands and given too many air-kisses. After taking echinacea every four hours, my cold disappeared in a day. Really. It immediately kicks the immune system into high gear.

Stress and fatigue makes one more susceptible to colds. I don't mind admitting to you I was a bit nervous about the public's reaction to the restored and expanded library. After all, I had spent six years of my life making it happen. But the enthusiastic response made it all worthwhile.

So, to all of you who said hello at the reception or the open house: I appreciate your kind words. Even if one of you gave me a rhinovirus. After all, it only lasted a day. Thanks to echinacea. And thanks to Quilico.

November 30, 1995

A MAIRE USQUE AD MAIRE

As far as I can make out, there are three qualifications for membership in the PQ inner circle: 1) You must believe in the independence of Quebec; 2) you must be a product of the labour movement; and 3) you must smoke.

Last Friday night, I was seated at dinner next to Guy Chevrette during the third annual *Colloque des Maires*. He is an incurable sovereigntist, unionist, and smoker. He is also the PQ House Leader and Minister of both Regional Development and Municipal Affairs.

Guy Chevrette, a man true to his beliefs, is feisty, frank, and unvarnished. The haze of smoke around him made an apt metaphor for the philosophical barrier between us, so I had to work at keeping the conversation going and my gorge from rising. I like smoked food, but not particularly food flavoured with Player's Light.

Minister Chevrette has a lot in common with other PQ stalwarts, many of whom are prisoners of the past, when workers were indeed exploited, more often than not by their Anglo masters. How the tables have turned! The teachers' union known as the CEQ (Chevrette was once its V.P.), along with the CSN and the FTQ, have openly supported independence. So the PQ is hardly an ally in the mayors' attempt to inject reality into municipal labour unions, whose workers make 28% more than the rest of the public sector. And who get paid for literally sleeping on the job. Labour movement, indeed!

The *Colloque des Maires* is the annual meeting of all the mayors on the Greater Montreal Region - representing 3.2 million people. I am on the executive committee of the Mayors' Round Table which meets monthly to come up with projects that can lead to cooperation among this disparate group. We recently made a regional transportation proposal, for example. We're working on regional economic cooperation. And Chevrette, to his credit, has made this Round Table the official voice for Montreal regional concerns.

Most mayors are waking up to the fact that the region has to take itself in hand. Whether it's to compete better with other regions of the world, or whether it's to decentralize power as a solution to the wrangle between Canada and Quebec - the move toward regional cooperation is inevitable.

How to do it? Unfortunately, a multiplicity of organizations have sprung up to overfill the breach: starting with the Round Table on Metropolitan Transport. Then you have the Regional Development Council (CRD) that only covers the Island of Montreal, and only has one-third of its votes going to local elected people. The CRD has become a talk shop, a bureaucratic boondoggle costing \$1.2 million to run - and a \$3 million-a-year honey pot for double-dipping by cultural and business groups.

The hiring and overpaying of some public servants just hurts our regional economy. We must work with what we've got. Even if it's a *maire's* nest.

December 7, 1995

EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT COUNCIL

Plato said that democracy ("which is full of variety and disorder") dispenses a sort of equality to equals and unequals alike. G.B. Shaw was much more acerbic, calling it "the substitution of election by the incompetent many, for the appointment by the corrupt few".

Is democracy thriving in Westmount?

At first blush, you might reach the conclusion that with so many acclamations to Council positions and such well-mannered public debate, Westmount is run by a tacit oligarchy, rather than a boisterous democracy.

On further investigation, you might arrive at a very different conclusion. We don't have "disorder", it's true. That's because I cleave to the rather Pollyannaish idea that consensus is better than conflict. This makes for dull press. A Council that is at each other's throats makes for exciting news. It must be tough to put out a Westmount newspaper with mostly acclamations to report during election time. And paint-drying and grass-growing make for more interesting news than some of our pacific council meetings. (Of the seven members of the 1991-1995 Council who stood for re-election, six were acclaimed. Was it the sound and fury of the referendum that put a damper on any incipient election fever? Or were Westmounters generally happy with our performance? We'll never know.)

A Westmount Council-member wears a bunch of hats: he or she represents a ward, is a commissioner of something, and, lastly, sits on standing committees.

In 1885, the first standing committees were struck. There were the Roads Committee, the Light Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Police Committee. Later, the Library (1898) and Parks (1910) Committees were added. These committees actually *did* things, not just advised. Then, in 1913, Westmount was the first city in Canada to put into place the General Manager system of local government - which probably was the reason the committees were subsumed into an overall General Committee in 1916.

But you can't keep good committees down. Over the years, a thicket of committees sprang up, and by the late 1980s, there were a dozen or so - including the rather ominous-sounding Public Information Committee. All these committees reported to General Committee, *not* to public Council.

Meetings and minutes of all committees were private. "We do not want reports of sessions [of General Committee] because we feel that the dignity of the city might be lessened by the publishing of controversial statements by various councillors" said A.D.W. Swan, the city secretary-treasurer in 1957. This was the same year in which one of the regular monthly public meetings actually took all of 1½ minutes! *Autres temps autres moeurs*.

Then, in 1990, the hodgepodge of committees reporting to the private General Committee was replaced with four standing committees reporting directly to public Council. More on this next week.

December 14, 1995

EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT COUNCIL - II

Since 1983, the mayor presides over Council meetings while installed in a ponderous throne-like chair. Beautifully hand-carved in solid oak, this Speaker's chair was given to the city by J. Richard Hyde, who represented Westmount in the Quebec Legislative Assembly from 1955 to 1970 - and who was Speaker from 1962 to 1965. The custom was that the outgoing Speaker would take his chair with him (even if he kept his seat!).

Unfortunately, this chair is the only piece of furniture in the Council Chamber that honours the promise of historicity given by the Tudor exterior of our City Hall. All new visitors experience a letdown on seeing the 60s interior. Before 1965, the Council Chamber was barrel-vaulted, with wainscoting that matched the individual oak desks of the councillors. There was something missing, though: a space for an audience of any size. That's because in those days, nobody really came to Council meetings. During the 1965 renovations, the wall between the Chamber and the entrance hall was demolished, in order to give greater audience capacity. The huge skylight and open gallery over this hall were inexplicably blocked up.

Council meetings, in my mind, are more than just a necessary exercise in getting city business done as expediently as possible. They should be a monthly manifestation of our accountability to our citizens. This is why I let the public question period go on longer than is done in most other cities. I have seen no real reason to impose constraints like "written questions only", or "only one question per person", or "no debate", or "no preamble", or "Westmount citizens only", or time limits on questions.

We are the court of last resort for citizens frustrated by City Hall. I remember the delightful Norah Plenderleith, the "pigeon lady" who in 1982 came back time and again to Council to complain - justifiably - about "pigeon shit" on her apartment building's window sills. The next year, it was the "shower lady" Christina Myler who kept on about the crummy showers at the pool. Both got their way, but it took far too long.

I have to fight the natural tendency to make council meetings perfunctory. For first-time visitors, it seems we approve without explanation, but many items have already been explained in prior meetings, or are covered in publicly-available background material. But we are open. As far as I know, we are the only city around to give the media copies of our committee minutes, excepting legal, personnel, zoning, or budget matters.

In most cities, many public Council topics are pre-rehearsed in General Committee. We try to avoid that. We have debated publicly topics as diverse and divisive as parking, pesticides, smoking, traffic, dogs, and zoning. We also try to have public meetings on major issues - outside the confines of a Council meeting. Please let us know of subjects you would like to have discussed at a "Town Hall", rather than a City Hall meeting.

December 21, 1995

THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT

*In the bleak mid-winter, frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone.*

- Carol by Christina Rossetti

I was going to write my usual up-beat Xmas column - or a poem, as I did last year. But I can't get myself in a chipper enough mood. Even the Christmas parties I attend seem to have a kind of a gratuitous gaiety, as if to combat Anglo post-referendum Weltschmerz. So Xmas spirits are flowing, but the Xmas spirit is a bit chastened for members of *genus* Bloke Quebecois. It's a passing melancholia, however. We ethnics are made of sterner stuff.

At least you will have a break from the chattering asses - your weary and worry-ridden politicians who are shutting down for a while.

In doing my rounds of Holiday parties, I got some reaction to my speech last week on Canada's lamentable and labile political condition. Some still felt, for example, that the threat of partitioning off Montreal was a useful offensive tactic in the event of a unilateral declaration of independence of Quebec. Others pushed for a island city-state.

In Gulliver's Travels, Swift describes Laputa, a flying island inhabited by impractical theoreticians who lorded over the mainland below. But Montreal is not Laputa: the idea of a city state, while intellectually satisfying, flies in the face of reality. Our island is connected by 16 bridges that bring in commuters who live off-island and work here. The island of Montreal has 57% of the Region's population, yet 73% of its jobs. The urban grid is continued well beyond its perimeter. It is not a discrete, autonomous entity. And many east-end ridings went strongly for the YES. But I'm all in favour of a special status for Montreal. The *region* of Montreal. This will benefit us regardless of what happens to Canada.

What I tried to point out is that the nation-state is a outdated concept, and that national boundaries are the Maginot lines of the 21st century. Artificial old-style power bases like Ottawa and Quebec City make little sense. The province of Quebec, for example, has inherited political structures from a period when muscle-power dominated the economic landscape. Now it's brainpower. And brainpower resides in urban agglomerations. It's the organic, unstructured, unfettered entities called urban regions that should serve as the basis for political division. The rural fixations of Quebec have to be got rid of. This is why I suggested a Montreal Regional Party. Provinces and even countries will be less and less relevant as urban regions compete with each other.

So who knows? Maybe we can pull ourselves out of this slough of despondency and try to remake Canada and Quebec according to the new set of realities: one that puts urban agglomerations first, not last.

Oh, by the way: Happy Christmas and Chanukkah!

January 11, 1996

MOVING THOUGHTS FROM A SEMICENTENARIAN

Last Friday was my fiftieth birthday. It says on my birth certificate that I was born at Lockington Hall in Leicestershire - a stone's throw from the River Trent. Now, I definitely was not to that manner born: it seems that, during the war, Lockington Hall was converted to a temporary hospital. And, although our home was in London, my father was working for the Air Ministry in connection with the derequisitioning of properties after the war. That's how I got to be born near the River Trent.

I was born on my mother's birthday. Her side of the family - the Percivals - are a bit of an eccentric bunch. My uncle Will was an inventor at EMI who worked well into his eighties. My cousin Ian, a physicist, supposedly invented a thing that magnified the feel of a surface. Another cousin, a professor of languages, is big on "cut spelling". I get letters from him like: "finaly we'v sucumd to th mecnization of Crismas greetngs". Uncle Edward, a writer, quit the British Communist Party, calling it too revisionist. My mother decided we would emigrate to Canada as she was convinced there would be less of a chance of nuclear war here. My dad just wanted a better job.

Up until 1979, each year saw more immigrants to Canada from Britain than from any other country, with the exception of 1958-1961 when the Brits were eclipsed by the Italians, and, in 1971-1972, by the Yanks. Europe itself was Canada's biggest source of immigration until 1979. Ever since, Asian immigration has been double the rate of European. The US has seen similar trends: in the 1981-1990 decade, four times as many people came from Asia than from Europe.

People still come for the same reasons: they don't like it where they are. Wars help: North America looked like the land of opportunity to displaced persons in war-scarred Europe. Likewise, Viet Nam gave us boat people.

But we still think somehow that all the world still wants to come to Canada. Well, most Europeans certainly don't. We don't have the architecture, the culture, the weather. But we also don't have the class system. Still, some Westmounters I know have decided to go the other way: they are emigrating to England or France.

North America is no longer the place for Europeans to get a leg up in life: they can do that back home just as well. The cost of living here is cheaper, but that's if you think the essentials of life include a lot of land around your bungalow, or that multiple cars buy transcendental happiness. Using other yardsticks, the quality of life in Europe could have more to offer. Mind you, you'd better be rich to live in London, for example.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that post-war Canada was the place of choice for people from all over the world. If we wish to remain attractive, we'd better sort out who we are constitutionally and get on with the job of improving our economic condition. And a Happy New Year to you, too.

January 18, 1996

GETTING ONLY NEWS THAT IS PRINTED TO FIT?

Should Westmount do what many MUC cities do and issue a newsletter? Every new Westmount Council grapples with this question in it's own way. And, so, over the years, Westmounters have been treated to city-printed bulletins that flourish for a while, and then disappear as quickly as they sprang up, only to rise again a decade later in some other guise. The contents, name and writers change: the idea is as old as Westmount's hills. Most other places, such as Outremont, Pointe Claire, and Pierrefonds, seem to have more stick-to-it-iveness: they put out quarterly newsletters with regularity, without Westmount's fits and starts.

In the mid-80s, when I was a member of Gallery's Council, after much hemming and hawing, we announced with a flourish (in THE EXAMINER) that THE EXAMINER would be our way of communicating with citizens! In the 90-91 Cutler years, we actually put out a quarterly bulletin.

As many of you know, I've sent out mayor's letters on specific issues as they crop up over the last four years, such as the impending police station closure, the library project (three letters), a new parking policy, information on recycling, and so forth. Plus taxpayers get a yearly letter from me with my take on the city's budget. John Lehnert wrote a bulletin in the Light and Power bill. We also send out semi-annually a thick brochure on Recreation and Cultural activities. Will a newsletter add anything to this information stream? I'm not totally convinced. But I'm open.

And then there's THE EXAMINER. THE EXAMINER gives this community a tremendous informational advantage over other places such as the West Island, where many cities have to share THE CHRONICLE. This may be why some West Island cities put out their own newsletters.

Now THE EXAMINER has a new publisher. I hope the current editor stays, as he is starting to understand Westmount. And I have found him to be a fair, thoughtful, and decent sort. He is the third editor since 1992.

With many changes in THE EXAMINER staff since the departure of the Sanctons and Sweeney, this paper has struggled to maintain past standards. It's not for want of trying: the problem is often one of not having local background. That and money for staff. People who work for local papers are poorly paid and have zero job security. And producing a good paper or producing a good profit are often mutually-exclusive activities.

But a city-published newsletter, aside from the cost (around \$40,000 a year), can become a self-serving puff piece that a sophisticated readership will soon transfer unread into the blue box. (A shared fate of THE EXAMINER if it doesn't succeed in putting out a quality newspaper. And that's assumes it's delivered: I rarely get it delivered to my house.)

So if the city did publish a newsletter, we would have to ensure it was truly readable, and not just a trumpeter of the good deeds of Council and city staff. And should it be monthly? Or quarterly? What do you think?

January 25, 1996

GRUDGING A NURSE

A few dozen women were successful in garnering some pretty good media coverage for their "breastfeed-in" staged in the shopping concourse of Westmount Square. They got the issue of public nursing into the public eye. They told *La Presse* they were disappointed I could not be there to show my support. Had I been available (and I wasn't), I would have gone to show I have no problem with such a natural act. I envisioned the rather discreet breastfeeding featured in photos accompanying the coverage in *The Gazette* and *Le Devoir*.

But the large photo that *La Presse* ran was far more revealing: it showed two women who had four babies nursing at each, quite bare, breast. Just what was needed to complete the picture would have been your chief magistrate standing near, my gaze cast demurely downward, examining the fissures in the travertine floor. Or, more likely, I would have thrown caution and my natural modesty to the winds and watched the smiling madonnas with children at their bounteous breasts. *La Presse* would have loved that picture. Front page material.

The demonstration was organized to show solidarity with Ann Martin, who, in 1994, had been told by a Westmount Square security guard to cover up while breastfeeding. Purportedly, some shoppers in the food mart were offended by such an act.

Why would anyone be offended? Was it the sight of a breast or the suckling of a breast? The forces for the delactation of Westmount Square - were they driven by a concern for tastefulness (a motive shared no doubt by the infants), or did they find it bordered on the erogenous? Or were they just misogynous?

But if they found that offensive, they should see the window displays at a shop on Sherbrooke that occasionally go over the top. It's not the nudity in the displays that bothers me, it's the underlying message of violence (usually to females) that I find repugnant. The owner says he's making an artistic statement. That may be, but he uses the medium of violent images.

Our powers to deal with such brutal displays are not clear - the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (oh, how I wish we had a Charter of Responsibilities and Obligations!) could render a by-law *ultra vires*, which happened when Montreal wanted to ban bar signs displaying nude females. Freedom of expression, y'see. We do have the power to regulate the display of "erotic images". Ten years ago, Council had a field day defining "erotic". I don't think it includes breastfeeding, somehow.

So I'll stick with my definition of what is publicly offensive: displays of violence. And what could be less violent than the tableau of a mother nursing her child? But it's not necessary to do it almost topless; and, if you do, don't be surprised if it bothers a couple of people. But not me. I'll be busy studying the floor tiles.

February 1, 1996

AMALGAMATING WORDS AND CITIES

The English language has always allowed nouns to form couples quite indiscriminately. They start off as an unlinked pair, as in "train station". Many nouns later get hyphenated ("blood-pressure"), and some finally wind up in an indissoluble union ("minefield"). In the case of that obnoxious 80s term "lifestyle", the two words quickly found welded bliss.

I hereby report the sighting of a relatively new term: "city-region". This verbal couple seem to have also skipped the courtship phase and have gone on to a state of hyphenation, possibly using "city-state" as its model.

Now, is a city-region a region that's urbanized, or a city that is regionalized? The usual convention in English is the attributive noun comes first, so the operative word becomes "region". In French, it's reversed. *Club soda* is the name of a nightclub, *soda club* is a drink.

When the Pichette report on Greater Montreal came out in 1993, it used the term city-region. But the French term *ville-région* scared off many suburbs, as it puts the emphasis on "city". They thought it was another imperialistic takeover attempt by Montreal. In fact, the one thing the report did *not* recommend was amalgamations or annexations.

The Montreal region has to take itself in hand. But by stirring up the regional reorganization pot, the issue of amalgamations comes up. In any such rejigging, Quebec will probably want to seize the opportunity to reduce the number of municipalities in the MUC. No matter that the real problem is the fact that two-thirds of the 1401 municipalities in Quebec have less than 2,000 people, and that they are just about all rural, and that Quebec's endemic rural fixation means the minister of Municipal Affairs has to spend most of his time on rural matters - any talk of the Greater Montreal Region brings with it the threat of amalgamations.

Yet, not to push for regional cohesion would be to relegate our urban region to the role of a backwater in the North American economic ocean. And, you see, I don't happen to believe that amalgamations are a necessary way-station on the road to Montreal Regional unity.

Last Friday, the then-minister of Municipal Affairs, Guy Chevrette, said that he would produce a list of potential mergers in the MUC this autumn. "There is good reason to combine a multitude of services. We could make extraordinary economies of scale," he says. *I* always say that if coalescing cities led to such cost savings, then the City of Montreal - itself a product of many amalgamations, would be the leanest-run city around!

"Amalgamations can create diseconomies of scale" says the recently-released report on the Greater Toronto Area "city-region". It refers to a study that predicted the Ottawa-Carleton mergers would result in a 5.5 to 16.5% increase in operating costs. Another study by Brock University economists found that costs increased with the size of municipalities.

We always have to keep a weather eye open for signs of merger mania.

February 8, 1996

REGIONOMICS

My pleasure on learning that we would get a cabinet minister just for the region of Montreal was somewhat diluted when I heard Serge Ménard (the newly-minted minister in question) talking about amalgamations of cities in the MUC. Even Pierre Bourque was quoted as saying it was "obvious" to reduce the number of MUC municipalities. When I confronted Bourque on that, he said he was misquoted - he was referring to cities off-Island.

Why should we worry about such talk? Well, I don't think anyone is suggesting annexation of Westmount - if they did, they would have the fight of their lives from this mayor - but smaller cities in the MUC might get pressured to merge. As the PQ pushes for decentralization, Quebec City bureaucrats - relying on their habitual omniscience - may deem some MUC towns just too small to deliver the wider range of services needed.

But who knows? It might even be in the interest of certain towns to merge. For example. The 12 cities that make up the West Island (Dorval and points west) share many demographic similarities and municipal services. Imagine if they all voluntarily amalgamated into one powerful city with a population of 210,000. Such a city would be wealthy (only 4% of their population get government income assistance compared to 14% for the MUC); and, not unimportantly, it would be 66% non-francophone. And federalist. Quebec might not be so happy with such a response to their perennial call to arms for MUC mergers. Talk about handing the partitionist movement an anglopolis on a silver platter!

But Island amalgamations won't solve the problems facing the Greater Montreal Region: certainly it won't help curb the urban sprawl caused by fiscal imbalance, over-zealous highway-building, and a collapsing core. And it does nothing to attack the economic gangrene that's set in while Quebec agonizes over its destiny. Indeed, any change in local towns could further upset an already-anxious anglo population. Yet Ménard has made it a point to make warm and fuzzy overtures to Montreal anglophones.

Ménard also wants to resurrect the 1993 Pichette Report that recommended a light regional structure for the Montreal region. Many recommendations of the Greater Toronto Task Force have an eerie similarity with the Pichette report. Their problems are different, but Toronto is in danger of beating Montreal past the post in getting their region to work as a team. The GTA task force said get rid of Metro (Toronto's MUC) and the four Metro clones that surround it. Pichette said get rid of the 12 counties surrounding the MUC and turn the MUC into a true intermunicipal service agency. Guess where that idea came from?

The GTA Report came up with the mandatory vision statement, but used some pretty ungainly syntax: "Greater Toronto will be the place where people and businesses that can choose to be anywhere, choose to be".

M. Ménard also must realize the time to create Greater Montreal is now.

February 15, 1996

MIRABEL: NICE NAME, DUMB IDEA

I spent some time last week with Serge Ménard, shortly after he was appointed Minister for the Montreal region. Ménard is boyish-looking (i.e., he is older than I, but looks younger), and is quite soft-spoken. He was formerly the Minister of Public Security, after a career as a criminal lawyer and law professor. He's bright and candid.

Ménard really put the cat among the pigeons when he mused publicly about a uniform business tax rate, amalgamations, and closing Mirabel. The off-Island mayors promptly called a press conference, upbraiding the minister for not including them in his round of social calls, and lashing out at Montreal and the Island suburbs for favouring "fiscal sprawl".

I'm president of the Conference of Montreal Suburban Mayors. A few years back, we considered adding the word "Island" to our already-cumbersome name, in order to distinguish (and distance!) ourselves from the off-Island suburbs. Are they really suburbs, anyway? Perhaps a recent coinage, "exurbs" could best describe them. After all, the "sub" in suburban means "adjacent" to the city - hardly a term that fits St Thérèse or Chambly. Maybe they should be called "circumurban" or "posturban".

So when I read The Gazette headline "Don't trample us to boost Montreal: suburbs", I winced. It was not *my* group who made bellicose statements such as "You saw the Mohawk revolution at Oka. Well, there will be a suburban revolution". That little gem came from Hubert Meilleur, mayor of Mirabel. On radio, he went on to say that Westmount should disappear and revived the old Drapeau slogan of "*une île, une ville*". What had Westmount done to him? Never one for honey-coated words, Meilleur was especially out of sorts because Bourque appeared to favour the removal of international flights from Mirabel.

Mirabel airport was a colossal waste of money and good farm land. We are lumbered with a galling memento of the expansive and hubristic 70s. The damage the region's economy proceeds unchecked while we pretend that two can live as cheaply as one. When Mirabel adopted the white elephant as its logo, it was a pathetic attempt at self-mockery. We should have had the gumption to shoot the Mirabel elephant (and the Olympic albatross, too), rather than trying to keep this distant monster alive.

In 1986, in spite of strong pressure to eliminate the inconvenience of two airports, the Mulroney government opted for the status quo. Another deal was struck in September 1993 to keep both airports open but privately run. Daniel Johnson said at the time "we must seek to make both sites profitable and stop the debate". A nice big report recommended exactly that. All it did was paper over a problem. The flight of businesses continued while flights to Mirabel plateaued and more and more carriers abandoned the white elephant. Toronto's gain. Our loss.

Over to you, M. Ménard.

February 22, 1996

ANOTHER REFERENDUM POST MORTEM

It seemed like a good idea at the time. It was 1994. I had managed to keep our police station in Westmount. I also had managed to get Claude Ryan to give us an extra \$900,000 grant (over and above our allotment under the infrastructure programme) for a combined fire/public security/ police building to replace our 100-year-old building on Stanton. All we needed was a place to put it.

In Montreal, their city council could have put it anywhere, as they don't have to subject zoning changes to public approval. We do, even for essential services such as police and fire. And it's only those residents who live in or adjacent to the zone who can vote. This is provincial law.

Any other Council would have simply rebuilt on Stanton. We, however, decided to take the politically-difficult route of trying to find a better location for it. We eventually came up with four possible sites - Gladstone, Hillside Lane, Bethune, and the old CP train station site. To avoid Council involvement, we decided to hire an independent real estate professional to negotiate with the owners of three of the sites, using identical criteria.

Because of a short fuse on the grant, we had to rezone all four sites concurrently, rather than sequentially. At the same time, prices had to be negotiated. This gave rise to confusion, but it kept the vendors honest - knowing they were not the only game in town. In retrospect, I think we should have gone with our two top choices (Bethune and CP), rather than trying to zone four sites at once. But we had no idea that some people would capitalize on our complex task by producing a mass of red herrings.

The Gladstone site was dropped early on, as it was really too close to the superstation in Montreal. And, because of citizen opposition, the zoning would never have gone through. Bethune was later dropped, as the best deal - a 99-year lease - came out at double the value of the land. Again, the nearby residents were solidly against the zoning. That left Hillside, with its poor location and (it turned out) high price, and the CP site.

I downzoned the CP train station site in 1987, along with the entire Glen Yards site, in order to preserve that fragile residential enclave at the bottom of Victoria. Now I'm hoist with my own petard. Zoning is like a ratchet: you can downzone, but citizens can stop even minor modifications.

Some time ago, Council decided it would be better to have a community, not a commercial, use for the train station, considering the residential zone near it. So the question was simple: do you want a Protective Services station *or* a small community centre in order to recycle the old station?

In the Great Train Station Referendum, emotions ran high on both sides. The "No" vote won by a close margin. Now, you would think that the leader of the "No" would accept his victory and spare us his rationalization *ex post facto* as to why he voted against the zoning change. But no. He has left a trail of questions that I feel duty-bound to clear up. Next week.

February 29, 1996

INFORMATION? YOU WANT INFORMATION?

Puzzled citizens from all over Westmount ask me why local residents voted down the zoning change that would have recycled the old CP train station into either a Protective Services Station or a community centre.

It seems the most frequent accusation levelled at Council by some voters was the "lack of information". No information? Are they serious? After the zoning change sailed through with no opposition last summer, and after residents complained they had 1) not read THE EXAMINER, 2) not read the posted notices, and, 3) not gone to the public information meeting, we *voluntarily* went through the whole process again. No other city around would have given residents two kicks at the can. And did we get thanked for that? Not on your nelly.

We then had *two* more public information meetings, and Karin Marks held three Ward meetings. I sent a four-page letter on the whole issue to everybody who could vote. Councillor Marks sent at least two letters, not to mention those sent by local residents. Combined with extensive media coverage, it was a case of information overkill.

But *misinformation* abounded, with an absurd rumour about carving into the grass escarpment, or that a methadone treatment centre was possible.

Some voters complained they didn't know what the building would look like. Well, zoning changes never go into that detail - they just define the building envelope. We said it would be three stories high and take up one-quarter of the site. We were not about to hire an architect to design two different buildings before we even knew if the zoning would go through!

For some residents, it was important to know what the other sites would cost the city. This seems like fair request. But think. Could the city reveal the prices for the three different sites before we had an acceptable iron-clad deal? You can't negotiate these things in public. That is why we hired a professional to do it for us. And even if the voters knew that one site costs, say, \$2 million, and another, say, \$1.5 million - why would that affect their choice? Their objections to the zoning had little to do with saving the city money and everything to do with noise, traffic, and so on. Besides, if the cost of alternate sites was so important, why did they not just vote for the community centre, for which there was no other site?

To add to the muddle, it was reported three weeks ago that staying on Stanton would cost \$2 million more. I never said that. But we are in danger of losing our grant, now that an extension is no longer possible.

It Burns me that the best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft a-gley. Given the chance to do this all over again, I would have done some things differently. Such as polling people near the various sites before embarking on the long and convoluted zoning change process. Such as looking at fewer sites to avoid confusion in the public mind as to what was going on - a confusion exploited by some opponents of the zoning changes.

March 7, 1996

THE GREAT WHITE BEAR AND THE LITTLE BROWN SLUG

In common with stock market players, I'm not bullish on bears. And that includes polar bears who gain currency. Much has been made lately of the unplanned divisibility of the new \$2 coin, with those tales of bears who lost their bear rings. But the real question is: do we want yet another clunky coin in our pocket or purse?

The government will save \$12.5 million a year by shredding \$2 bills and making metallic bears. That's less than 50c per Canadian. Now, I'm all for saving money, but what about the offsetting inconvenience? I find it irritating enough to carry around the product of the last bit of government cost-cutting when they introduced the loony in 1987. Now I'm going to feel like an ambulatory slot machine. Or Mr Bojangles. I liked the \$1 and \$2 bills - they were feather-light, they were silent, and they did not alter the drape of my trousers. I think I'd pay a buck a year to get them back.

Or maybe the way to save weight is to make *all* \$2 coins detachable: the inner bear could be worth \$1 and the outer ring another \$1. People who wrapped them at the bank would be known as holey rollers.

If our government is so hell-bent on saving a mint, why don't they rid us of the tiresome cent? *That* would save them \$20-25 million a year. Inflation is particularly corrosive to copper. It's robbed the cent of any real value. The penny is a relic from the days when it was worth something: in the 40s, it had the purchasing power of today's dime. In the last century, it was the equivalent of today's quarter. Imagine back then if one had suggested minting a coin worth one twenty-fifth of a cent!

So our cents sit there uselessly in jars and boxes across the country. There are more people out there rolling pennies than joints.

Pennies are the silt in our monetary system that never gets sluiced out. Yet we keep on producing them as if they had some value. In fact, it costs more to mint them than they are worth. Britain got rid of the farthing in 1961. Today's cent is worth less than a farthing was worth then.

Last weekend, we went to the cinema. The ticket was \$4.99. I purposely left the two cents on the counter to show my contempt for such inane pricing and for the worthlessness of the coin. If we got rid of pennies, we would eliminate such prices, prices that do not even dupe the most rustic yokel. How would it work? Easy. \$4.98 would be rounded off to \$5.00 and \$4.77 to \$4.95. No overall gain and no overall loss.

While I'm in this Andy Rooney mode, I would like to know why so many of our coins have animals on them: loons, bears, caribou, beavers. It's a monetary menagerie. I do, however, like the idea of resurrecting such antique names as doubloon for our new coin. But why not call them pieces of eight (as in eight quarters)? I also like the sound of the Canadian crown (half-crown in Newfoundland, of course). Closer to home, we could call it the Quebec sovereign.

March 14, 1996

BOUCHARD: FRONT AND CENTAUR

Tyler to the right of them,
 Bantey to the left of them,
 Bouchard in front of them
 Volleyed and thundered;
 Their's not to make reply,
 Their's not to reason why,
 Their's but to say "good-bye!":
 Into the Centaur Theatre
 Went the Four Hundred.

M. Bouchard made a theatrical Premier this Monday when he addressed some 400 Anglos at the Centaur. I think he decided to talk to us while it was still possible to *find* 400 Anglos in Quebec.

Are we quislings, those of us who went to hear him speak? Have we sold our English-speaking souls by openly fraternizing with the enemy, even if it was in an Anglo sanctuary? Well, I don't see things in those terms: Bouchard is not "the enemy". He represents what a good number of Quebecers think. If he were the enemy, so are millions of people we share this province with. I don't agree with them, but I'll talk with them.

I had much more of a problem in establishing a dialogue with Parizeau. For Bouchard, separation is a means to an end; for Parizeau, it was an end in itself. Parizeau's obsession with only a "pure" solution made any discussion with federalists impossible. But I think Bouchard sees the end not to be separation, but the preservation of French language and culture in North America. Separation he sees as a *means* to that end. Our job is to convince him and his supporters that there are other ways to achieve their goal.

Bouchard, with his saturnine demeanour and portentous phrasing goes down very well with many francophones. He strikes a chord. But most Anglos find his manner somewhat disturbing, even threatening. The other night, while he did not charm nor convince his audience, he did come across as being a little more human.

Most of what passes for political debate in this country is nothing more than posturing. So on Federal budget night we were once again treated to interviews with the opposition who not surprisingly find the whole budget a load of codswallop, and with Bob White ranting about "job cremation".

But here in Quebec the debate between federalist and separatist politicians is not a bunch of empty words. We are playing for keeps. So when the leader of the separatist party wanted to open up lines of communication, I didn't get diplomatic flu.

The gauntlet is thrown down. Now will we see the real charge of the Bloke Brigade?

March 21, 1996

CONCENTRATING FIRE POWER

"Who *are* you?" yelled a woman in the crowd on seeing us drive by atop a Westmount fire truck in the Saint Patrick's parade. Decked out in top hat, chain of office, and various green things stuck on my coat, I didn't have any sort of identification about my person. I shouted back to her who I was and was rewarded with a smile - one of thousands of smiles that lit up the faces of people lining the parade route.

All of us, wan and winter-weary, look to St Pat's parade as Montreal's rite of spring. And such a non-political event.

But it takes a politician to smell out a trace of politics even in a parade. The trace took the form of the unusual and interminably long line of fire vehicles from the city of Montreal. It was a bit like tanks parading before the Soviet people. This red parade was flexing firefighter muscle.

Let me explain.

Last week, I got a call from *Le Journal de Montréal*, asking what I thought of the idea of the MUC taking over all the fire brigades on the island. I said I didn't need to consult the mayors: it made no sense. With the MUC police finally moving in the other direction by decentralizing to get closer to neighbourhoods, who would argue for centralizing fire services? Well, Roméo Noël, that's who. He is the director of Montreal's fire department, and he says we suburbs will have no choice but to allow integration of our fire departments in order to get better fire protection and - get this - "save money". Imagine. Montreal telling us that combining with them will save us money! It would save *them* money, that's for sure.

The troubling thing in all this is that when I confronted the minister for the Montreal region - Serge Ménard - with the fact he was cited as being favourable to merging fire departments, he did not deny it.

Centralizing municipal fire services is an idea whose time has gone. Long gone. M. Noël had to reach back to 1972 to find a report that recommended the MUC take over fire services. Both the Pichette Report on Greater Montreal (1993) and the Golden Report on Greater Toronto (1996) recommend that fire services stay with individual cities.

Bourque, who keeps a tight rein on even his councillors, surprisingly let his chief speak publicly about this subject. City employees should never pronounce on policy yet to be even discussed by their elected officials.

If we centralized fire services under the MUC, we would be half-way to total amalgamation of all the cities on the island, having lost our police forces in 1972. This is assimilation by stages. And we know Quebec is in favour of mergers: the Minister of Municipal Affairs will, in a couple of weeks, reveal a list of MUC cities that *they* think should be merged.

The last thing we want is to merge anything, let alone merge our fire brigade with the overstaffed Montreal fire department. Besides, I need a nice red Westmount truck to ride on for St Paddy's Parade.

March 28, 1996

A GUN CONTROL SUCCESS STORY

Late last year, the MUC moved out of their digs in Complexe Desjardins - that huge concrete pile pullulating with provincial bureaucrats - to set up shop in Les Cours Mont-Royal. It was a bit of a culture shock. MUC employees now rub shoulders in elevators and restaurants with people who actually work in the private sector, some of whom even speak English!

Not only did this move result in a smaller space and much lower rent, but Vera Danyluk has seen to it that the MUC's new offices are the very model of government restraint. The furnishings (mostly recycled) and decor are subdued, almost severe.

We executive committee members meet in a virtual room; that is, it is part of a multipurpose area delineated by moveable partitions. The boardroom table is ad hoc, being assembled together from a stable of smaller tables. The moveable walls give a sense of impermanency, and, along with the low-ceilinged gyprocked offices, they contrast with the Italianate exterior that was the Mount Royal Hotel. This inside/outside stylistic shock is often found in gutted buildings of this type.

Last week, this multipurpose area was used to host a reception for those who helped in getting Bill C-68 passed - the bill on gun control. Allan Rock, the federal minister of Justice, was there. But the real stars were Wendy Cukier and Heidi Rathjen who, unremittingly since 1990, have campaigned for meaningful gun control legislation. Two mothers of victims of the Polytechnique massacre spoke of their gratitude to Wendy and Heidi. When Mrs Edward talked, and her voice faltered for a second, the lump in my throat did not come from scoffing an hors-d'oeuvre.

Of the few dozen in the room, I was the least deserving to be there: all I did for the cause was write a couple of columns in THE EXAMINER, get a Council resolution passed, and send letters to an assortment of senators. That evening, Rock came in for totally deserved praise; Wendy and Heidi thanked him for having the guts to tell a crowd of 12,000 gun owners to their faces that they would have to henceforth register their guns. Rock returned fire. He said he'd rather confront gun-owners than have to go back to Wendy and Heidi and face *them*. But, you know, what made these two so successful was their quiet confidence, their reliance on carefully-researched facts, and their distaste for *ad hominem* arguments. And even their Christmas cards were personalized. It all worked.

This was not just another cocktail. This was not just another series of speeches. This was a celebration of the fact that, through the selfless efforts and determination of people like Wendy Cukier, Heidi Rathjen, and Allan Rock, there is always a chance of making this place just a little better, or stopping it from getting just a little worse.

These intrepid three have managed to translate the wishes of most Canadians - especially Quebecers - into reality. We owe them a lot.

April 4, 1996

O MONTREAL!

*Dusty, cobweb-covered, maimed and set at naught,
Beauty crieth in an attic and no man regardeth.
O God! O Montreal!*

Samuel Butler, 1884

It was one of the biggest Board of Trade luncheons I have ever attended: 1200 business types flocked to Hotel Bonaventure last Friday to hear Lucien Bouchard. They had the longest head table I have ever sat at, too: there must of been 30 of us.

During the meal, Serge Ménard showed Premier Bouchard a March 21 Washington Post article entitled "O Montreal, City of Exodus" that luridly exposed how separatist tension and urban sprawl were devastating Montreal's economy, leading to another Anglo exodus. The reporter had followed in the heels - literally, as she interviewed the same people, including me - of a March 4 Maclean's article about "Anglo Angst".

It's one thing to have our dirty laundry displayed to the rest of Canada, but to have the Washington Post trumpet "Separatist tension, weak economy, drive Montreal into steep decline" made Ménard and Bouchard wince. Well, I'm not unhappy about reality concentrating their minds, although I, too, hate negative reporting on Montreal.

Bouchard's speech was upbeat, conciliatory, and larded with three big hunks of English. He even mentioned how much Montreal owes to the Molson family. I can't help but compare his speech to the two that I heard given by Parizeau at the same Board of Trade; the former premier was opaque, aloof, and rarely a word of English soiled his lips.

(So far, my theory holds: there was never a dialogue possible with Parizeau, as his *goal* was sovereignty. For Bouchard (according to my theory), sovereignty is a *means* to an end: the end being the preservation of Québécois culture in North America. As long as we English can agree with that goal, we can at least open up a dialogue with him.)

On Friday, Bouchard did not even mention the "S" word. He even said he actually talks with Paul Martin and Jean Chrétien. But on Sunday in Rimouski, as a kind of political counterpoint, he was quick to deny any apostasy. Sovereignty with or without association was still his creed.

During Friday's lunch, I chatted with Bouchard. He said there were far too many municipalities in the region, saying that is one problem the PQ can't blame on the federalists. We agreed on the linguistic distortions caused by urban sprawl, as francophones flee to off-island suburbs, resulting in an eventual francophone minority on the island.

The above quote from Butler referred to a statue, but I think it can also serve as a metaphor for Montreal's condition: we need to uncover to the world the beauty of Montreal. But there's lots of housecleaning to do first.

April 11, 1996

PRIMAVERA

A figure in Botticelli's Spring has flowering sprigs sprouting from her mouth, while dancing Graces form a handholding triad. Chaucer talks about April with its sweet showers and small birds making melody. Here in Westmount, what is the symbol, the Litmus test that Spring is here? Well, it's probably our lawns.

Two weeks ago, our lawn was a beige expanse of frozen tundra. Rakes just bounced off its surface of matted thatch - nature's Kevlar. A week later Spring was almost here: the Trent turf was a gelatinous squidgy bog. At this critical stage in its metamorphosis from rigid to resilient, walking on a lawn can leave indelible spoor, imprints that will remain as fossils traceable to early Spring.

(Another sign of Spring really drives me nuts. When the time of the singing of birds is come, the voice of the leafblower is heard in our land. The incessant whine of those useless machines, wielded by contract gardeners too lazy to rake, also signals the blowing of dirt and debris into the street. At least I got a law passed restricting them to the months of April and October. I would have liked to ban them outright.)

On April 3, I actually saw some yellow wildflowers in bloom on the sunny side of Sunnyside. Did you know we have a microclimate here in Westmount? According to Perron's, it's the mildest zone (6a) in Quebec.

But the formal harbinger of Spring is Westmount's Annual Spring Flower Show. Last week, we held our 64th. The inside of the Palm House was full of the earthy and flowery smells of Spring. There were 15,000 bulbs, with 32 varieties of tulips. The rabbits ambled, the fish silently swam, and spirits were universally raised.

At the suggestion of Tewfik Kamel and Councillor Bercovitz, we started the tradition in 1994 of inviting new Westmount residents to the Spring Flower Show reception. (With this Council, if we do things twice, it's a tradition.)

It's a nice idea to invite newcomers to a flower show when they are just putting down roots themselves. To continue the horticultural theme, and to get newcomers to mix with more established residents, we also invited the winners of the "Maisons Fleuries" contest to the reception. Each got a plaque with a photo of their winning garden emblazoned on it.

The reception itself was done in Westmount informal: wear what you will, take a glass of wine, and munch on delicacies artfully presented, by George! And you know, our dowager Victoria Hall doesn't look half bad when the lights are turned down.

So Westmount does not escape the the changing of the seasons. Like parentheses, the Spring Flower Show and the Autumn Crysanthemum Show bracket the warmer seasons, reminding us all of the immutable rhythm of nature. And the transience of our lives.

April 18, 1996

NOT COMING OUT OF THE CLOSET...YET

Whenever Spring cleaning comes around, and I'm supposed to throw things out, I rationalize and temporize, but do not exorcize. I keep the oddest things. If I were a bird, I'd be a magpie. If I were a rodent, I'd be a pack-rat. (Note my use of the subjunctive, please.)

For example, I never use after-shave lotion. But for some reason, I've kept a few bottles from the distant past. Had they been claret, I could understand it. But cologne? I have a bottle of Arden For Men (circa 1965), Jovan Musk-oil For Men (circa 1970): both virtually unused. I also hang onto some "Hawaiian Surf" my sister gave me when I was 18. It came in a cork-covered bottle, looking like those floats the fishermen use to hold up their nets. I suppose the idea was, if your Kon-Tiki raft capsized, your cologne would float on the surface of the sea, and you could slap some on to attract rescuers.

So if any of you Hawaiian Surfers out there want to get your hands on a real collector's item, let me know. Meanwhile, it'll probably stay in my medicine cabinet, along with the little boxes of hotel soap from Brown's, the Stafford, and weird places like the Due Torri in Verona. We try to use up these soaps by cleverly placing them in the powder room, but it seems our guests are singularly unhygienic.

I have the same reluctance in getting rid of ties. Thrown up as some kind of silken flotsam and jetsam from my slow sartorial progress through life, my collection starts with my father's cricket club tie, then a vivid green and yellow number from Carnaby Street, followed by flashy Liberty paisleys, a raft of geometric early 80s Chanel and Hermès, some sturdy Dunhills - then the Italians took hold of my neckwear.

I thought these ties were all so artistic and the height of good taste at the time; now, most of them look like strips of upholstery that have been too near a window. I do try and give them away, but they seem capable of auto-generation. At least I no longer have the oh-so-thin ties from the early 60s, nor the woollen 70s jobbies. I still have a few pseudo-regimental ties that were the staple of a gentleman's dress for decades. (They're called "rep" ties in the U.S., where the stripes in ties go the other way. Really.)

And to round out my collection, I still have tie pins and clips, collar pins, and clunky cufflinks bestudded with jewels never found in nature.

Then there's the magazines. Architectural Digest from the 80s, Guitar Player from the 70s. Horizon from the 60s. Country Life from the 50s. And auction catalogues. I even have my old pipes, including a hookah and a nice little hash pipe. But I never inhaled, to be sure.

For people like me, these useless articles are like sandbags piled up to stop the erosion of time. They are harmless. And they're things a burglar will leave alone. After all, I don't collect cars like Councillor Laidley.

I just hope we don't have to move for a while.

April 25, 1996

MUC-KING AROUND THE ISLAND?

In last Saturday's *La Presse*, the new Minister of Municipal Affairs, Rémy Trudel, floated the idea of expanding the Montreal Urban Community's territory to include Laval and Longueuil. Although I had met with him the day before, he did not mention such an idea. What he did tell me, though, is that he is less enamoured over amalgamations of cities on the Island of Montreal than his predecessor. Which is excellent news.

But expand the MUC? The reaction of Laval came fast: "no way!". Mayor Vaillancourt even pointed out that some Montreal Island politicians would like to see its role reduced. (Thanks for thinking of me, Gilles.) At least we'll have a chance to discuss the whole issue at a workshop retreat on "decentralization" called by the minister for the 23rd and 24th of May.

Before I give you my views on the matter, some history might help.

The legislation that gave shape and substance to the MUC and defined its powers was hurriedly cobbled together in less than two months after the notorious Montreal police strike of October 7, 1969. It was this strike and its generous settlement that caused the city of Montreal to convince Quebec to ram through legislation that would so radically change our local municipal scene.

The MUC was born of Montreal's desperate need to get bailed out of its parlous financial state. The MUC was not created through consultation, consensus-building, or careful planning. In fact, given the changed political climate, the MUC could never have been imposed today in the abrupt and cavalier way it was done twenty-five years' ago. Or at least, one hopes!

In 1982, under strong pressure from the Conference of Suburban Mayors, Quebec agreed to a major overhaul of the way the MUC was governed. We got parity with Montreal on the MUC Executive Committee, a double-majority vote in the Council, and other improvements.

Now, the initial indigestion caused by the swallowing up of local services by the MUC has mostly gone away. But some discomfort remains. While we got an effective remedy in 1982 to Montreal's overbearing power, no real change has been made in the MUC's make-up since it was born. In fact, the MUC has picked up some new responsibilities over the years.

I have always felt that some MUC services would be better handled by local municipalities. Some should be regionalized. The assumptions and conditions that led to the MUC being so hastily knocked together have surely changed.

To be fair, the chair of the MUC's Executive Committee - Vera Danyluk - has also proposed that the MUC take a hard look at itself. And she has managed to get its spending really under control. But whenever a public organization such as the MUC looks at itself, it usually does not contemplate doing anything too radical. Grooming is OK, but not major surgery.

More on the MUC next week.

May 2, 1996

ORGANIZATIONAL OVERKILL

Whenever government thinks it has a problem, or whenever voters tell politicians they must "do something" about something, officials often fall back on a time-honoured nostrum: the creation of a nice new structure. They'll give the new body some highfalutin generic name such as Agency, Council, Board, or Commission. The voters are happy because the "problem is being addressed". The politicians are happy, as it gives them another soapbox from which to remind the public that "something is being done". And the bureaucrats are happy, as they have yet another opportunity for promotion, new titles, more control...and, therefore, pay raises.

Sometimes, a new organization *is* the right answer; but the agencies, councils, and commissions that were created by previous responses to "do something" about the same problem are still very much with us. And each body winds up being run by bureaucrats. A board of directors is often a nice touch which lends the appearance of public control and accountability.

The absurd notion shared by the electorate and politicians alike that governments can actually "create jobs" has led to an orgy of creating structures with precisely such a Pollyannaish goal in mind. The only thing these bodies accomplish is a convoluted form of income redistribution - after, of course, skimming off a goodly amount for operating costs.

An example of such a body is the Regional Development Council of the Island of Montreal. Put together a few years ago to act as a socio-economic planning device and to dispense government handouts, the CRDÎM wasted no time in building up the requisite encrustation of bureaucrats. It costs them \$1.4 million to give out \$5.1 million of largesse - often to smaller organizations doing the same thing. Apathy at the top level has been such that they had to reduce quorum to only one-third of their 52 council-members. And I'm vice-chairman of this thing!

But I was supposed to talk about the MUC (of which I'm also vice-chairman). While nobody denies the need for an island-wide structure to furnish some common services, the MUC is a rather heavy-handed and sclerotic body that suffers from a structural overburden. It is beset with outgrowths, overlays, and appendages such as public commissions more noted for poor attendance and no media coverage than for any real debate.

Stripped to its essence, the MUC provides police services. Its sister (daughter?) organization, the MUCTC, provides mass transit services. Aside from the \$300 million pass-through the MUC contributes to the MUCTC, the latter is a stand-alone body, with its own chairman and public meetings. Speaking of standing alone, the MUC Police is also pretty much an autonomous body that would suffer very little if the whole MUC apparatus that sits on top of it were to disappear tomorrow morning.

Is that all the MUC does? Well, not really. Next week, we'll talk about what else it does, and what it should become.

May 9, 1996

THE MUC UNPLUGGED

What does the MUC do, other than provide police services and collect money to pay the MUCTC deficit? It's next most costly job is sewage treatment. We are finally treating all of the island's sewage - the finest (cynics would say the only) achievement of the MUC. But since the treatment plant runs by itself, it is really no longer a locus of political concern or control. It's just *there*, quietly filter-feeding on our muck.

What remains for the MUC to watch over are the runts of the litter, financially speaking. All its responsibilities other than police and sewage treatment amount to only 5% of its budget.

The municipalities on the island pay 80% of the care and feeding of the MUC, of which amount 43% is for the police, 37% for the MUCTC deficit, 8.7% for sewage treatment. Then comes administration at 3.2%, parks (2.8%), assessments (2.1%), Arts Council (1%), air/food inspection (0.4%), economic development (0.3%), and land-use planning (0.2%). The remaining 20% of the cost of the MUC is borne by Quebec, as they pay for most of the borrowing costs of sewage treatment and mass transit.

In a way, the most significant service rendered by the MUC has to do with income redistribution - from the rich cities to the poor, and from the suburbs to the central core. Whenever people accuse us suburbs of living off the central core, they never take this little-known mechanism into account. It works this way: cities fund the MUC in proportion to total evaluation and receive services based on population. Westmount contributes as much as Montreal North, which has four times our population.

So. What to do with the MUC? Here's the way I see it:

- The MUCTC should be folded into the MUC or sever its links. I tend to favour the latter. Right now, it is neither fish nor fowl. And with the new Metropolitan Transportation Agency covering the whole Greater Montreal Region (with twice the population of the MUC), ultimately the MUCTC, the Agency, and the gallimaufry of *fourteen* other transport boards should all combine to form a true Regional Mass Transit Authority.

- Waste water management could have been regionalized; that is, before Laval persuaded Quebec to foot the huge bill for its very own plant. It would have cost far less money for them to have hooked up to the MUC's plant, and we have extra capacity. Still, environmental controls should be regionalized. Air and water pollution is not confined to our island.

- Regional parks should be (logically) a regional or Provincial matter.

- The MUC Arts Council duplicates arts funding by local cities, Quebec and Ottawa. It should become a Provincial responsibility.

- Assessments should return to local control. We can do a better job.

- Economic development and land-use planning should be regionalized.

So the MUC would then become a body providing police services only. Everything else would be regionalized or given back to local cities.

May 16, 1996

A MASS TRANSIT MESS

In my home office, I don't have a filing system. I have a piling system. On any spare horizontal surface, I create piles of documents, each pile on a different subject. When these piles reach the height of apprehended collapse, they get a permanent home in binders, boxes, or a recycling bin.

Our society has mistaken information for knowledge. If information is organized data, then knowledge is organized information, and wisdom (one hopes) is organized knowledge. The computer, along with its partner in crime, the photocopier, spews out unimaginable quantities of data - and, if we're lucky, information. I don't know if we're any the wiser for it. This may be the age of information. It's clearly not the age of wisdom.

I tend to ruminate on the profligacy of today's information generators when I do my piling. Take my pile on Bill 102 - the slow-in-coming subject of today's column. This pile took only a year to reach the height of 12". I have *trees* that grow more slowly.

What is Bill 102, you might well ask? Bill 102 was the law creating the Metropolitan Transportation Agency. This law was concocted under the then-Minister of Transport, Jacques Léonard; it was rammed down our throats by the next Minister, the unlamented Jean Campeau; it briefly became the responsibility of Minister Jacques Brassard; and recently it was inherited by Serge Ménard. All this in the space of one year. Is it any wonder that our government gets run by bureaucrats rather than elected people, when you have Ministers changing jobs so fast?

The Metropolitan Transportation Agency will supposedly co-ordinate the mass transit offering and fares in the Greater Montreal Region - be they métro, busses, or commuter trains. Originally, Léonard wanted it run by a triumvirate of government appointees. He later relented and added two people representing local authorities - one from the Island of Montreal.

Campeau, in turn, rejected out of hand a counter-proposal prepared by local mayors - input which the draft law actually contemplated. It took us six months to put it together, and was a far more sophisticated approach to regional mass-transit cost sharing than the original law.

Then it was Serge Ménard's turn. In spite of Bourque's objections, I had managed to get Yves Ryan, the chairman of the MUCTC, to be chosen as the Island's representative to the Agency. Last week, out of the blue, Ménard informed me he had reservations about that choice on the grounds of "conflict of interest". How could one seriously suggest such a thing? The head of the MUCTC is there to *protect* our interests in an Agency controlled by Quebec. You might as well say I have a conflict of interest by being both Mayor of Westmount and vice-chairman of the MUC.

I fired off a pretty caustic letter to M. Ménard. The Liberals managed to get a copy of this letter (not from me!) and brought it up in the National Assembly. Let's hope this thing ends more amicably than it started.

May 23, 1996

FAMILY PLANNING

Much has been made, especially by this writer, of the loss of 200,000 people from the Island of Montreal from 1971 to 1991, all to the benefit of off-Island suburbs. The causes are known: the lure of lower taxes, personal security, more space. Some researchers say it's also the linguistic homogeneity off-Island that attracts francophones who don't find the cultural tossed salad in Montreal quite to their taste.

Whatever the cause, fewer people are paying for Montreal's fixed infrastructure and for the costs of keeping up an international city centre.

So let's just build more dwellings on the Island to regain our population, right? Not necessarily. This Rx is prescribed by just about everybody, including the minister responsible for the Montreal Region, Serge Ménard.

The solution is not to build willy-nilly more and more dwellings. We lost that population not because the three little pigs went around huffing and puffing and blowing houses down. In actual fact, the number of dwellings on the Island has actually increased by 25% during the same period we lost those 200,000 citizens! The problem is that the *number* of people per dwelling has dropped like a stone. This is because younger families with children have been the ones to move their Penates, as the French say.

To reverse this trend, we have to make the Island attractive to young families. Concreting over greenspace, for example, is contraindicated.

Our rejection of CP's proposed eight-storey condo development in the 1.5% of Westmount that is undeveloped - the Glen yards - was not just based on the anticipated traffic and the unWestmount nature of yet another bland Nun's Island development. It was also based on our observation that young families do not in tall condos live.

Last week, I rushed to the defence of the mayor of Outremont when M. Ménard made intemperate comments about Outremont's refusal to accept CP's dense development plans for their marshalling yards: a project five times the size of Glen Yards. M. Ménard apologized to me the next day.

Mayor Unterberg has a lot on his hands, what with cost overruns on the library and theatre projects, and trying to pick his way through a maze of zoning changes. (Don't I know how rough that is!) But they're *his* problems to sort out. Even if M. Ménard was "seduced" by the project, he should not have waded in, threatening to annex the yards to Montreal if Outremont continued to hold firm, all the while belittling the mayor. But it took guts for a minister to apologize publicly.

The Island of Montreal cannot offer the suburban dream of an \$80,000 house surrounded by scads of grass (and a car for each member of the family). We *can* offer a richer, more varied, more culturally invigorating way of life, even to young families. But this means M. Ménard must address the real issues of unequal tax burdens, government subsidies for cheap (off-Island) houses, and the (perceived?) lack of personal security.

May 30, 1996

FROM HOT TO COLD FUSION

Those who document the Gallicizing of English words, especially in France, get a lot of press coverage. Anyone keeping tabs on the Anglicizing of French words here in Quebec is treated as a pretty harmless drudge. But the list of Frenglish words continues to grow, and it even includes the non-word "francisation".

Take "morosity", for example. While only a few English-speakers would be guilty of using "aggressivity", I have made a number of sightings recently of "morosity" - even in a Gazette editorial. "Morosity" exists only in the superannuated sludge of the big Oxford. And, seemingly, here in Quebec. Maybe we are unconsciously blaming French for our moroseness!

Similarly, I have noticed a tendency among anglophone mayors to appropriate the French term "fusion", meaning amalgamation or merger. Actually, "fusion" suggests that some physical force is involved in the process: "merger" sounds much more like the product of a voluntary act, a happy joining of forces. So maybe they are on to something: up until now, the proposals from Quebec City to get smaller cities to merge smacked more of coercion than volition. As of last Friday, that's all changed.

I spent a couple of days last week in a workshop retreat in Three Rivers with the Minister of Municipal Affairs, Rémy Trudel. One of the major issues was amalgamations. Trudel and his predecessor, Guy Chevrette, had been bandying about the idea of wholesale mergers throughout Quebec, even suggesting mergers here on the Island of Montreal.

Well, I can tell you we'll not be seeing any local mergers - except, perhaps, Dorval Island. For, unlike the 416 small Quebec towns they have slated for mergers - if it's not done voluntarily, the government might take away their transfer payments -, those cities in urban agglomerations have been effectively spared. Mind you, we have a year to come up with merger plans, but there is no penalty for keeping the status quo.

In government, nomenclature is everything. And even the government is trading in the word "*fusion*" for the word "*consolidation*", which sounds so eminently logical and energy-efficient.

The minister has come to a wise conclusion. The plethora of towns and villages here in Quebec is a rural phenomenon. Not only do we have 67% of municipalities in Quebec with a population under 2000, but 19 to 44% of their revenues come from government transfers. If they want to continue to exist, they'd better do it by getting off this artificial life support that you and I are paying for. By the way, documented evidence of the elusive "economies of scale" can only be found when micro-municipalities (less than 500 people) combine to form bigger ones.

So the government is taking a new and reasonable orientation. I mean direction.

June 6, 1996

WHENCE AND WHITHER THE W.M.A.?

Last week, the W.M.A. had its annual general meeting in Victoria Hall.

The Westmount Municipal Association has become a Westmount institution. Founded in 1908 - the year Westmount graduated to become a city - the W.M.A. has evolved through the years, adapting, chopping and changing. Actually, most evolution occurred in the 70s and 80s: prior to that, it was kind of an extension of Council. It was also Council's farm team: you served on one of the nine very active W.M.A. committees, then on its executive, and then, if you had the royal jelly (and the time), you served on Council. You did your bit. The old-boys' club worked well, as all old-boys' clubs work well - at least, from the old boys' perspective.

To be fair, Westmount was culturally pretty homogenous then, and liked this way of doing things. It wasn't so long ago that, in order to get on the W.M.A. executive, you had to come recommended, and fill in a form giving personal details such as your education and your religion.

So the W.M.A. ensured the city was run well in the days when "public debate" was a bit of an oxymoron. There was no dissention, because things were sorted out among friends.

In 1983, when I was first elected alderman, the W.M.A. still fielded a full slate of approved candidates. (We all got in, by the way!) Ward committees had been set up to screen people running for Council and to decide who would get the W.M.A. seal of approval.

Of course, all that's changed now. But one thing does not change: most W.M.A. directors do not stay more than a few years. Interested citizens permit themselves to come into the gravitational pull of the W.M.A., go around inside for a couple of turns, and then drift off to other things, richer for the experience. The W.M.A. is a process, not a product.

This lack of continuity used to bother me when I was a vice-president in the early 80s. I helped restructure the W.M.A.: each executive member would "shadow" a member of Council. I shadowed Mayor MacCallum, and had some delightfully-long Friday-afternoon lunches with him. He seemed to overlook my written criticisms: "the present municipal government seems to value Council solidarity and secrecy above any other consideration" and, "within Council, the Mayor must adopt a position of leadership - but not to the extent of totally dominating the scene". Hmm.

I see that John Sancton, the former publisher of THE EXAMINER has recently become a director. I still remember the rather dismissive editorials he wrote about the W.M.A. then - it'll be interesting to see how he makes out. His long experience in Westmount local politics will be very helpful to the W.M.A. - which does not always have a long-term perspective.

What should the W.M.A. be? A training ground for Council? A sounding-board? A burr under Council's saddle? An opinion gatherer and maker? All of these things, and more. I wish it a long and productive life.

June 13, 1996

KEEPING UP OUR STANDARDS

Once upon a time, throughout the length and breadth of the fair city of Westmount, one found graceful cast-iron streetlamps - lamps with ornate bases, fluted shafts, and decorative globes. Since the identical model graced the city of Washington, they were known as Washingtonian lamp standards. In scale and style they matched our traditional architecture.

You may have noticed over the last few years replicas of these old lights showing up on our streets. This is the story of how they got reincarnated.

In the middle of the 1950s, it was judged that the original Washingtonian light standards with their incandescent light source did not give off a sufficient standard of light. Not really for the pedestrian, mind you, but for the car. The enlightened burghers of the day called for the gradual extirpation of these relics, starting with the main arteries. Forests of the old-style lights were felled, getting replaced by cobra-head highway-type lights that were twice as high. They were trademarked "Styletone". Ah, the triumph of the engineer over the architect - although I suspect the architects of the day found the Washingtonian too historical, too full of furbelows, too (horrors!) decorative. To add to this aesthetic cleansing, the new light source was mercury vapour, which made nighttime citizens look purple - thanks to this one-eyed purple-people creator.

So by 1976, two-thirds of our streets had been "modernized" by highway lights. Then, when their turn came, the doughty residents of Parkman Place refused to accept the tall intruders. The programme was suspended.

In March 1981, the relighting programme, converting the "poorly-lit" remaining one-third of the city, was to be restarted. This is where I came in, dear reader. My street, Rosemount Avenue, was the first on the hit list - our original Washingtonian lights were to go. I got wind of it and got all my neighbours to write to city hall. We got a reprieve. I wrote a report.

In reading my files to do my column last week on the W.M.A., I came across this report that I researched and wrote as a W.M.A. director. The report said that the city should stop any further installation of the tall pole, and listed sources of replicas of Washingtonian lampposts. I recommended these replicas be placed every 60 feet, and have a 70-watt high-pressure sodium light source casting the light downwards. I calculated this would give excellent illumination, and the lower height would eliminate obscuring by mature trees. The relighting programme was stopped dead in its tracks.

In 1986, Westmount again restarted the relighting programme, but this time with replica Washingtonian lampposts. In fact, 100-watt high-pressure sodium lamps are to be installed every 75 feet. I was vindicated!

Today, our policy is to replace the 30-foot highway-lights put in in the 50s and 60s with "my" lights, whenever a street is being reconstructed. The costs are similar, and, I think you'll agree, they look great.

And I never sent the city a bill for my report.

June 20, 1996

THE WILD ONES

If you went by the articles in THE EXAMINER, or the questions of City Council attendees, or my mail, you'd think the only animal species found in Westmount was the dog. It's not true. Aside from cats and such domestic animals, we have a huge resident population of raccoons, skunks, squirrels, pigeons, crows, and seagulls - and other animals who are here because we're here. They've become a real problem.

Not that I suffer from anthropocentrism - the view that we humans are the only important species on Earth. On the contrary. Our species is so successful we have contemptuously regarded all other fellow travellers on this planet as being put there for our personal utility (the Bible tells us so!). I sympathize with Pierre Foglia, who, writing in *La Presse*, says that for his wife, cats come first, then dogs, horses, and birds. Far behind, after spiders, scorpions, and black flies, come human beings.

So it is out of respect for animals that I tell you we have to do something about the unnatural overpopulation of raccoons and pigeons in Westmount. While the pathological worldwide overpopulation of our own species - *homo fecundus* - had led to the eradication of some animal species, it's had the opposite effect in urban environments. Most feral, yet urban animals owe their very existence to our cast-off foodstuffs - not to mention those misguided humans who actually feed them. Only one-third of these animals would have any chance of surviving in the wild.

So trapping that raccoon under your porch and letting it out in the country is not a long-term nor humane solution. First off, if it's a lactating female, her brood will die. Secondly, and most importantly, *it will simply be replaced by another raccoon eager to take over its territory.*

The only - repeat - only way to get rid of unwanted urban wildlife is to cut off their source of food. Put your garbage in an hermetically-sealed solid box, for example. Don't feed squirrels or pigeons.

Nick Auf Der Maur recently made fun of Westmount's by-law that says "every person who feeds any pigeon, seagull, squirrel, other wild animal or vermin shall incur a penalty". He just doesn't get it. Pigeon droppings eat away at our architecture, attracting fleas, ticks, and mites, and may even harbour fungi and bacteria. It's also disgusting.

Now, I was guilty of feeding pigeons in the Piazza di San Marco in Venice, and in Trafalgar Square. I'm told that in Trafalgar Square, you now have to buy pigeon food, food that's laced with birth-control pills. I guess they have not thought about simply moving Nelson's Column!

Closer to home, one of our neighbours has single-handedly caused a pigeon infestation on our street. She ignored our plea to stop feeding them. In Montreal, it's even worse. Homeless people feed pigeons, who are their only friends. They've given each pigeon a name.

But you can have too much of a good thing. Even wild things.

June 27, 1996

MY VACATION, VOCATION, AND VEXATION

Since the age of 25, I've always been my own boss. Still am, I suppose, since as mayor I don't have *a* boss. In the singular, that is. I have singularly 20,500 bosses - enough, you will agree, to water down bossdom to a pretty diffuse role. So I get to write my own job description, set my working hours (sort of), and take my vacation when I want - more on that later. Then there's the little matter of salary - and I mean "little matter".

I made an election promise that remains unfulfilled: to raise my salary. At the time, both the editor of this paper and city officials gasped at my bravado: imagine, warning citizens of a pay raise at election time!

But how to calculate an appropriate salary for the mayor: that is the question. By population? Then Laval's mayor should get ten times the salary of his counterpart in Lachine, when in fact it's twice. Montreal would pay 100 times the mayor's salary in Hampstead, instead of four times. How about, then, by the size of a city's budget? That simply rewards mayors for spending. By the citizens' capacity to pay? I'd make out like a bandit with that - Westmount has one of the highest average incomes of any place in Canada.

Generally, the poorer the city, the more they tend to pay the mayor - that's because richer cities produce mayors *able* to work for a less-than-average salary. In Westmount, no mayor could afford to own a house here on \$32,000 a year, plus \$5-10,000 from the MUC. Only people of independent means or apartment dwellers need apply. (The British consul-general once asked me whether the city provided a house for the mayor. I could not immediately respond, as I was doubled-up with laughter.)

But, you know, if a few local politicians are underpaid, it's fat city out there for people in the private sector. The average NBA basketball player (whose only attribute seems to be a severe pituitary problem) pulls down \$1.4 million - up from \$232,000 in 1982. The president of Bear Stearns earned \$16 million in 1992. Closer to home, the president of Maple Leaf Foods raked in \$3.6 million in 1995 - a lot of which was in the form of a golden parachute. Their profits also plummeted to earth, down 158%.

These obscene salaries are unbalancing society's sense of fairness. Even dyed-in-the-wool capitalists are starting to ask themselves whether we'll see a modern Peasants' Revolt, now that 10% of U.S. households own 67% of the wealth. Hell, 1% own over 40%! And the typical CEO of the largest U.S. corporation makes 200 times that of the least-paid employee.

In Westmount, I make less than most city employees, unless you count my MUC pay. And I don't have job security. Or a pension. And no 35-hour week. But, since we're negotiating with the unions, I'll deep-six my own salary demands. For now. Besides, I feel less guilty about taking a month's vacation this July, especially since the MUC, Conference of Suburban Mayors, and Quebec Municipalities Union close down too. Cheerio!

August 15, 1996

WESTMOUNT'S VERY DIFFERENT TWIN

Back in the palmy days of Expo 67, Mayor Tucker of Westmount was probably sitting around with a bunch of aldermen (as councillors were known in those days), debating ways our city could do its bit to perpetuate the Canadian dream that we all dreamt back in 1967.

It seems they hit upon the idea of twinning Westmount with another city. But not just any city. They rejected an offer from Moncton and a later suggestion of Sudbury. Tucker's Council held out for a francophone city - which meant a city in Quebec. Because of inter-city hockey, or through our respective MLAs (as MNAs were known in those days), or for whatever other reason now possibly lost to history, the city of Rimouski was chosen as Westmount's twin.

So it came to pass on March 23, 1968, there was a joint Council meeting in Westmount City Hall for the formal twinning ceremony. Said Mayor Tucker, "all families have problems and Canada *en famille* is no exception. Some of the problems are constitutional". Sound familiar?

Well, 27 years later, during a speech I gave to the Westmount Municipal Association, I suggested we revive our twinning with Rimouski as a positive post-referendum gesture. Our last contact was in 1984. Bernard Hogue, at January's Council meeting, suggested we take advantage of Rimouski's 300th anniversary celebrations. So we did. Last weekend.

It was well-timed. We all read the headlines on Saturday: unemployment in Quebec up to 12.4%. Yet instead of trying to find solutions to our economic mess, we Quebecers worry about the number, size, placement, and language of commercial signs. Each side wants their "reality" reflected in a bunch of letters on cardboard that tell us what to buy...or where to go. Some French people want to deny the bilingual tradition (and clear competitive advantage) of Montreal, and some English insist on prodding and picking at the most sensitive part of your typical francophone's id.

Now people ask "what's your sign?" when picking up a little something in a shop as well as in a singles bar.

Well, your Council feels we Westmounters can do more positive things. Our economic miasma is a direct result of political uncertainty and our political uncertainty is a direct result of lack of understanding on both sides of the Great Linguistic Divide. So it was in this spirit of bridge-building that some intrepid members of Council (Councillors Bercovitz, Bridgman, and Lulham, and myself, along with City Clerk and organizer Marie-France Paquet) left the cacophony of the sign-language debate behind, and hauled ourselves to Rimouski, venturing into *pure laine* territory.

Watch this space for more about our visit.

Meanwhile, following the suggestion of a number of Westmounters, Councillors Marks and Lulham are organizing various ways we can help the victims of the floods in the Saguenay, especially with new clothing.

August 22, 1996

WESTMOUNT'S VERY DIFFERENT TWIN - PART II

How long is the St Lawrence River? "600 or 725 miles", says Encyclopaedia Britannica. "800 miles" says the (American) World Almanac. "1900 miles" boasts the *Canadian* World Almanac. It's 1950 miles long according to Whitaker's Almanack. "2100 miles" says Pear's Cyclopaedia, generously including the source of its headstream, the St Louis River.

The tale of the geographer's tape can be long or short. Does the St Lawrence begin at the Great Lakes (prosaically called its "drainage area") or begin at Kingston? Does it end at Cap Chat, or at Anticosti Island?

Our twin city Rimouski unwittingly weakens Canada's case in any fluvial one-upmanship by poetically claiming their city is sited "where the river becomes the sea". That chops 100 miles off even the meanest estimate.

Whatever its length, the St Lawrence defines Quebec - historically, geographically, economically, and, certainly, emotionally. Rimouski's sweeping beauty comes from this majestic river-cum-sea.

No one can accuse Rimouski of over-much town planning. But its natural setting makes that comment seem like so much cavilling. Like Westmount, Rimouski has a wealth of heritage buildings going back three centuries.

The cultural energy and sophistication of places like Rimouski put a lot of small-town Ontario to shame. For their 300th anniversary, Rimouski staged a rock opera that would not be out of place on Broadway. We Anglos often write off much of the Quebec hinterlands as being Quebec's answer to L'l Abner. A lot of the ebullience of Montreal's francophone cultural stew comes from talent coming in from the regions of Quebec.

It must be said, though, that the 32,000 *Rimouskois* benefit from largesse from Quebec. As a percent of tax revenue, they get three times what we get from government buildings. The Quebec obsession with its regions is no more evident than in the case of Rimouski. So the permeability between levels of government is a fact of political life. Unlike Westmount, a number of mayors went on to, or came from, careers in provincial government. Mayors are proud of how much dough they managed to shake loose from Quebec. They know which side of their bread is buttered.

Our host city pulled out all the stops for our first visit in 12 years. Even Maurice Tessier, the mayor who was party to the original twinning with Westmount in 1968 was on hand. M. Tessier, a quintessential *notable*, is descended from the last *seigneur* of Rimouski. He was both a mayor and MNA at one point, later becoming a cabinet minister and then a judge.

We spent most of the visit casting out stereotypes (they were quite surprised how good our French was), and got along famously. One PQ supporter even said he felt like revising his position on sovereignty after a particularly warm and friendly debate with us. Or was it just the wine?

I would like to invite a Rimouski delegation down to Westmount. Dare I hope that eventually we could put up some families here and vice versa?

August 29, 1996

GIVING THE ARMY A FIGHTING CHANCE

Last week found me dressed in my army combat uniform, boarding a Hercules transport plane. I and two dozen other honorary colonels were on our way to the Valcartier military base near Quebec City. We probably looked like a rather raggle-taggle collection of over-the-hill officers trying to relive their glory days. The turboprop Hercules, another relic from the 50s, provided, ah, basic flying services.

We sat on canvas benches stretching the length of the plane, thoughtfully supplemented with orange nylon webbing to support our backs. Parachute paraphernalia and crash survival gear festooned the interior, which is two storeys high, dimly-lit, and so noisy that all passengers are issued serious ear-plugs. Toilet facilities consist of a small metal urinal affixed to the bulkhead. This is how we send our troops to Bosnia - a 16-hour trip.

After these labours of Hercules and a briefing, we took a bus and then helicopters to get to our respective units. I think the idea of honorary colonels visiting their troops in the field during war exercises is supposed to be a morale-booster. I dunno. After these guys had dug foxholes, slept fitfully in tents on hard ground, eaten dry rations and launched night attacks in pelting rain, I'm not sure having me ask inane questions of them upped their morale all that much, especially since they knew I was going back to a hotel to eat and sleep. But they certainly won my esteem.

Morale is a big problem in the armed forces these days. Soldiers are faced with the spectacle of the Chief of Defence Staff ducking and weaving before a commission. In trying to decide between General Boyle's performance or the indignity of having our highest-ranking officer grilled this way, I don't know which makes me sadder. And all the great things our armed forces did in Cyprus, Oka, Bosnia, and the Saguenay fades from memory and is supplanted by reports of this daily interrogation. The lack of leadership, the bureaucratization, the abysmal behaviour of a few diminishes our otherwise dedicated military in the public's eye.

Another morale-killer is budget cuts. Not the normal budget cuts that we all expect our military to take in view of changes in the geo-political scene and the need to cut our deficit. We're talking cuts that will savage the very existence of certain militia regiments. And the militia only costs us 5% of military spending, which in turn is only 6% of all federal spending.

Why should you worry about the decimation of our military? Aside from guaranteeing Canada's prestige and security, it is a particularly Canadian institution that helps bind this factious country together. There are no linguistic tensions in the forces; francophone regiments and headquarters in Quebec operate in French, yet with an evident pride in Canada.

I'm proud to be the honorary lieutenant-colonel of the Royal Montreal Regiment whose associations and even beginnings are so closely tied with the City of Westmount. And pride is in short supply these days.

September 5, 1996

THE TEMPER OF OUR TIMES

Running a city well means taking care of the little things *and* keeping people informed. I must confess to you we fell down a few times in August in fulfilling one or both responsibilities. But, you know, sometimes citizens are just plain on edge. Read on to find out why:

Item: When Councillor Thompson announced minor changes in the dog licensing law, it precipitated an avalanche of letters from dog owners, with long paeans of praise for our four-footed friends and pleas for no changes in the dog laws. They don't take too kindly to a bowser wowser.

Item: The rules in our annual (perennial?) garden contest had to be changed mid-stream because so few people entered in some categories it would be a no-contest garden contest. A few entrants were very upset, claiming it was unfair. They did not go so far as to suggest pistils at dawn.

Item: We turned off the electricity for 16 hours in parts of Upper Westmount in order to carry out major repairs. Trouble is, we didn't warn anybody about it. I got a real blast from a friend living on Westmount Avenue who suggested we might as well have Hydro-Quebec take over our Light and Power Department. Well, at least they throw better parties.

Item: We started applying our helmet bylaw without any signage to that effect on our bicycle path. Our PSO managed to nick Professor Graeme Decarie who took it in good humour, suggesting we only make the adults pay, as they should know better. *His* head is screwed on right.

Item: Councillor Karin Marks got a petition from residents on Somerville after they saw little marks (not little Marks) on the road surface, painted on by the city to show where one is supposed to park. For them, such road runes are "too commercial". Parking spots must not be defined by spots.

Item: The width of Edgehill Road is 25 feet throughout except for a small section 37 feet wide. Our Public Works decided to make it uniform, narrowing that section in line with the rest of the street. Residents went ballistic. I received quite a few rockets myself.

I can't help but think that, while in many cases we should have kept citizens better informed, it was the jitteriness in Anglo Quebec that caused some people to react more strongly than they otherwise would have done.

Local politicians become the lightning rod for any charged atmosphere - and not always of our own creation. We are the political ground that attracts static created by other forces - the negative energy between the minority and majority groups in Quebec's firmament. This sour corona all around us explains the public's hair-trigger reaction to anything we do.

So our Director-General, Bruce St Louis, has instructed city employees to inform the public of even seemingly minor decisions of the administration. Mind you, we should do it anyway. And we're looking for better ways to keep you informed, especially if it involves roads and cuts in power, or rules and things in flower. And dogs on leash at any hour.

September 12, 1996

ONE BRAIN, TWO TONGUES

I consider myself articulate in French, but it does require somewhat more effort. Sometimes, it's a bit like swimming with your clothes on: progress is slow and inelegant, but you manage to get to your objective. Switching back to English becomes the linguistic equivalent of putting on a Speedo. I can then slip along nicely, unencumbered by French grammatical formalities, its tyranny of word agreement and arbitrariness of genders.

But, usually, I just take the plunge in French, unmindful of committing grammatical solecisms. And I'm getting better at the sex of words, even picking my way through those that swing both ways, such as *mémoire*, *poste*, and *poêle* - which has three meanings, depending on gender.

By the time the cameras were rolling last week for an interview on Radio Canada's *Le Point*, I had once again shucked off any linguistic diffidence, and I engaged M. Serge Ménard in his own element - or at least in his own language. As you probably know, M. Ménard is Minister of the Montreal Metropolis.

Poor Minister Ménard. After a successful stint as Minister of Public Security - where he exploited his background as a criminal lawyer - his new job is no piece of cake. As *Le Devoir* said editorially, in trying to deal with the mayors of the region, he won't have a marijuana field to cut down in front of the cameras. The grass must seem greener in his old stomping grounds. Now his job is to stop the whole region going to pot.

My French is not always up to word games and puns, so during the televised discussion, and while M. Ménard was extolling the virtues of creating yet another commission for our region, I was wasting valuable mental time in deciding whether "my preference for sins of omission rather than sins of a commission" translated well into French.

It must be the Cartesian side of our francophone friends that puts them at risk to bouts of structuritis. We've got a problem? Let's create a government structure to deal with it. Maybe it comes with the language: a language as elegant, as structured, and as internally logical as a minuet.

One thing that M. Ménard said that really got my goat: he referred the parochial rivalries in the region that supposedly prevent any kind of regional cooperation. The media, too, are always going on about "squabbling" among municipalities. Why is it that any difference of opinion in the Quebec legislature is referred to as "debate", yet when there is a genuine difference of opinion between, say, the Island cities and the off-Island towns, it's called "squabbling"?

Besides, when asked to give an example of such "squabbling", M. Ménard is hard-pressed to give examples. Certainly, as president of the Conference of Suburban Mayors, I've made it a point to forge a consensus. Believe it or not, we also get along with the city of Montreal.

Like everything in Quebec, maybe it's his choice of language.

September 19, 1996

401 "CITY OF WESTMOUNT" SQUADRON

From the comfort of late 20th century Canada, where fighting for a country's survival seems to involve such things as the language of indoor signs in a K-Mart, it is sobering to look back over one-half a century ago, when the whole world really had something to worry about: when Hitler was poised to finish off Britain and gain total domination over Europe.

Back in 1940, the main thing stopping Hitler was the 67 squadrons of the Royal Air Force that defended Britain itself. There was just one non-RAF squadron: the only Canadian unit to fight in the Battle of Britain - No. 1 Fighter Squadron, RCAF, which was later to be renamed 401 "City of Westmount" Squadron. All air and ground crew in this squadron were Canadians. And not just any Canadians. Many of its pilots were from Westmount, among them were Hartland Molson and A. D. Nesbitt. Frank McGill, who became Air Vice-Marshal, actually created the squadron.

I imagine 401's pilots sitting in wicker chairs outside the wooden dispersal hut, wearing Mae West life jackets, waiting for the call from a black Bakelite telephone that would send them up on yet another sortie. What did they think as they scrambled, running toward their Hawker Hurricanes? The Hurricane was a plane with a top speed of 335 mph. Parts of its wings and fuselage even had a fabric skin. It was the mainstay of the RAF in 1940, but getting replaced with the faster Spitfires.

Many 401 pilots had to bale out over the sea, becoming members of the "Goldfish Club". Survivors had to go back in the air the day after being fished out of the drink. And then there was the red tape. RCAF headquarters ordered that sweaters and scarves were *not* to be worn in place of collars and ties. Nor could you tuck your pants into your flying boots.

As well as being the only Canadian unit to fight in the Battle of Britain, 401 was also the first Canadian squadron to engage the *Luftwaffe* and the first RAF or RCAF squadron to score a victory over a jet fighter. 401 flew more sorties (10,527!) and downed more enemy planes (195), than any other RCAF squadron during the War. This came at a heavy price. 53 of its pilots were killed.

So it was understandable that, at the Battle of Britain parade that was held in the Westmount arena last Sunday, and where the laying-up ceremony of 401's colours was held following its disbandment in June of this year, that at least one hundred vets showed up on parade. They marched alongside serving Air Force members and cadets. During the parade, a few cadets fainted, but no old-timers.

So the 401 is no more. The 401's colours with their battle honours have found their only appropriate resting place: Westmount City Hall. So when you see that glass case, think of the sacrifices our brave airmen made, and think of the Westmounters who fought in the skies above a little island during the darkest hours of the Battle of Britain.

September 26, 1996

WESTMOUNT CREATES: ART RENOUVEAU

The first time I met Kathleen Duncan, she trembled. Actually, she was shivering from the cold, riding in an open calèche we shared, which silently rolled along Sherbrooke Street while layer upon layer of fat snowflakes settled upon our persons. The driver had thoughtfully provided lower central heating in the form of a buffalo rug that smelled as if it had just been removed from its unwilling donor. We two figured in Westmount's first Santa Claus parade, which was Kathleen's brainchild.

Kathleen Duncan is the sparkplug energizing another community event: Westmount Creates, which is an all-day arts festival taking place this Saturday, culminating in a jazzy dinner, by George! Westmount Creates is a celebration of music, literature, photography, film, and art - all with a Westmount twist.

While the city is helping out - providing a bit of money and a venue - the concept and its execution is all thanks to Duncan and a few volunteers.

One criticism levelled at this Council is that we actually get along with each other, that we actually agree on things. This state of affairs has the drawback of not providing much in the way of entertainment, such as is found in Côte St Luc's Council meetings, where every drop of blood that is publicly spilt transubstantiates into an equal drop of printer's ink.

For example, your Council has reached agreement that our most important goal is to reinforce a sense of community in Westmount. As we West-mounters 1) dig in our heels, or 2) grit our teeth, or 3) thumb our nose, or 4) stiffen our upper lip to what is swirling around us in the rest of Quebec, it's doubly important to be able to feel part of a community. So the role of City Hall transcends just the provision of cultural and recreational services: our main purpose is to develop a sense of community.

And that is precisely what Westmount Creates will do.

Council is also aware that community reinforcement means modifications to our city buildings and policies. Take Victoria Hall, for example. In the early 90s, 70% of rentals were to groups who were not residents of Westmount. It gave us a paltry \$45,000 a year in revenue, which hardly covered wear and tear. Victoria Hall should be *our* community centre, not some anonymous commercial facility. We have to make it into the image of what it once was: a place for Westmounters to meet each other.

Those of you who remember Arts Westmount in its heyday will embrace Westmount Creates with enthusiasm. Then it was the redoubtable Edythe Germain who produced a few magic days of celebrating culture in Westmount. Duncan is her spiritual successor. Maybe Westmount Creates will lead to a Westmount Lecture Series in the Westmount Room of our library, or Westmount amateur theatre in the Lodge Room of Victoria Hall, or art exhibits by Westmount artists. Who knows?

See you there at Victoria Hall on Saturday.

October 31, 1995

MUNICIPAL REFERENDA: ON THE AGENDA?

A number of frustrated federalists, who can't get no satisfaction - nor even much reaction - from provincial or federal Liberals, have turned to their most responsive layer of government and are trying to dragoon local city councils into the battle for the future of Canada.

We are being asked to pass a resolution that requires our city to hold a referendum just before a future Quebec referendum on secession. The question would be: "do you want our city to stay in Canada irrespective of the results of the upcoming Quebec referendum?".

The fact that such a resolution is clearly outside the municipal ambit, and is even *ultra vires* does not dissuade proponents of municipal referenda. They say such an action would be a political statement on the subject of partition; and, anyway, unusual times call for unusual measures. A kind of *force majeure*. Besides, if the separatists threaten to ignore the law, they argue, why can't municipalities?

And would such referenda really be illegal? Well, according to the Supreme Court, "municipalities are entirely the creatures of the provincial statutes. Accordingly, they can exercise only those powers which are explicitly conferred upon them by a provincial statute". The key word here is "explicitly". Nowhere in Quebec legislation can be found the power to conduct referenda of this sort. Unfortunately, we municipalities can only do those things we are expressly authorized to do.

Mayors have long deplored this manacled, subservient role that is the lot of Canadian municipalities. We should be emancipated and given the freedom to act as a true level of government. But that requires a constitutional change. Breaking the law is not making the law.

I have always said that municipalities should take on more responsibilities, but I did not have constitutional matters in mind. We should deliver a wider range of services, but not get embroiled in national policies.

I have also argued that, more and more, urban regions are becoming the international nexus of power and that nation-states are less and less important. This still does not mean we should exercise national powers. (At least, not yet!) But a municipal right-to-life clause in the constitution would make us feel a whole lot more secure.

Indeed, Quebec can technically wipe out Westmount with the stroke of a pen. Succeeding politically, though, is another matter. But the spectre of amalgamation with Montreal never quite goes away. The way I see things, ensuring the survival of Westmount is my principal job. Putting the Westmount pawn in the federal-provincial chess game could prove to be a pretty dangerous move. I would do it if I thought it would help the future of our country. But I don't think it will.

Next week, I'll give you the non-legal arguments why municipal referenda on partition are not really the route to go.

November 7, 1996

MUNICIPAL REFERENDA (PART II)

Last week, I explained how municipal referenda on the partition question are not legal. Today, let's look at the practical and political side.

What if we damn the legal torpedoes and just do it? While this would provide a splendid cathartic release to most Westmounters and constitute at least some form of action while everyone else seems to be sitting on their hands, I'm not sure it will advance the federalist cause.

In my view, the battle for Canada will not be won on the playing fields of Westmount. Nor on the greenswards of the West Island. It will be won in the east end of Montreal (where 55% voted for the YES), in the off-Island suburbs (56% for the YES), in the hinterlands of Quebec, and, equally importantly, in the rest of Canada. While Quebec Anglos tie up telephone lines to English radio shows, they are just selling to the sold. The 18% of Quebec that is non-francophone needs to get out and go after the soft federalist underbelly of the francophone population.

We also have to convince Canadians in other provinces that an attitude of "let the bastards go" will result in their joining the United States.

In other words, rather than passing resolutions in those cities that have already pronounced for the NO a year ago, let's channel our energies towards convincing the rest of Quebec and the rest of Canada that we collectively can find a solution other than the carving up the country.

The Herculean task of getting scores of cities and towns to pass such resolutions not only saps energy and sends a defeatist message, but it is not practical. That's because it is based on what one could call the "freckle theory": as individual cities declare, they supposedly coalesce with others, thereby creating a contiguous territory requesting to remain in Canada.

One look at the map shows this aggregation idea won't work: in ridings that barely voted in favour of the NO there must logically be found many cities in which a majority voted YES. They won't go along with the idea. And in the Salaberry-Soulanges riding that sits between Montreal and the Ontario border, people voted 57% for the YES. Dozens of towns there such as St Timothée (99% French), Les Cèdres (98%), Coteau du Lac (100%) would never pass such resolutions. So what's the point?

And if the city of Montreal doesn't go along with it, how can Westmount, which is surrounded by Montreal on all sides, maintain connections with "loyalist" cities without mounting a second Berlin airlift?

My personal view as to how we can purge the corrosive climate of uncertainty in Quebec is to either get a 10-year moratorium on a secession referendum; or, once the Supreme Court has established the ground rules next year, precipitate a definitive, jointly-or-federally-sponsored referendum with a clear question whose result would be binding for decades. And, in the extremely unlikely event of a YES win, it would be up to the feds to have predetermined the map of post-referendum Quebec.

November 28, 1996

WHY WOULD ANYONE WANT TO BE MAYOR OF MONTREAL?

Naturally, I have been following the reports of Pierre Bourque's troubles with his campaign financing with more than just a passing interest. It's a bit like watching the scene of an accident: the sudden wave of nausea, the sad evidence of human fragility. And, like witnessing an accident, I can't be of help, and, boy, aren't I glad I'm not involved. Of course, I didn't cause it either.

I empathize with a fellow mayor, but I also worry about the repercussions of these accusations swarming all over the mayor's party. It is not good. And while so much time and energy is expended on such - undoubtedly necessary - stuff, who's running the city?

Over the last two years, I have spent hundreds of hours working with Bourque. He is not an easy man to know, but I have never seen a scrap of evidence of dishonesty. And the man is just not motivated by money. But his centralized management style means he doesn't have much control of his people. I can believe that the strange campaign of Vision Montreal, a campaign that was born out of nothing, could have thrown up a welter of irregularities. But I have trouble believing Bourque was directly involved. He has to accept responsibility, though, and there's the rub.

When Jean Doré was elected mayor, his party had already been in opposition and was well structured and disciplined. Whenever a new party springs up from nowhere, especially one created around one person, it does not hit the ground running. In fact, it trips over itself, staggers around, and spends a great deal of energy in sorting itself out.

One of the reasons for Montreal's political lability is the middle-class flight to the suburbs. Poor people have other things to worry about than local politics. 38% of Montreal households make less than \$20,000. The average income in 1991 was \$34,144, compared with \$49,362 for the Island suburbs. 74% of dwellings are rented, compared with 56% for the suburbs. Tenant turnout at elections is low, partially because Montreal tenant turnover is high.

The problem of Montreal not having a dependable and knowledgeable political tradition means that ad hockery prevails. Parties rise and fall. We see the repeated problem of getting good mayors to run for office. Also, Montrealers seem to like their mayors larger-than-life (a fitting adjective for Camilien Houde). Suburban cities tend to like their mayors without too much flash, possibly even a bit avuncular. But all rightly insist their mayors be above reproach in their decision-making.

As I watched Bourque trying to retain his dignity last week when journalists started asking for all his personal bank accounts, I winced. Since Bourque brought a lot of this on himself, the journalists, once having drawn blood, were naturally merciless for more. Perhaps when this whole sorry spectacle is over, *nobody* will want to be mayor of Montreal.

December 5, 1996

SAYS LANDRY: WATCH MY SNIPS, NO NEW TAXES

In politics, as, I suppose in everyday life, it's how you do things - not what you do - that reveals a person's principles. As a politician, I am prepared to admit my policies, aims, and actions could be wrong, no matter how much I may believe in them. But it's how I went about achieving them that is the moral litmus test. I can *be* wrong, but I mustn't *do* wrong. Ends rarely justify means in my book.

I am moved to offer you this homily after watching the PQ government in action recently. In order to achieve their goal of sovereignty, they see the need to clean up Quebec's financial mess. But they are capable of going about it almost dishonestly. Just take the "watch my lips, no new taxes" claim that puts the PQ in the Bush league. Sure, they're not raising *income* taxes. But they are sure as hell raising other taxes. And I'm not just talking about the non-voluntary "contribution" of \$250 million.

School taxes are going up. Ditto electricity rates and payroll deductions. But the most insidious fiscal sleight of hand is the PQ's downloading of over \$200 million to cities over the last year. Cutting transfer payments to municipalities is a great way to slough off both costs and blame. When you get a tax bill from Westmount that reflects only part of this cowardly buck-passing, many of you will be blaming it on Council, not on Landry.

In French, this downloading is called *délestage*. It means to jettison ballast. You get the image of a balloon - a hot-air balloon, of course - throwing overboard all kinds of weights to make it go higher. Or a ship of state going faster, once freed of deadweight in its hold.

But did you know that the provincial government doesn't even pay their own taxes? Did you know that Quebec pays only 25% of property taxes on schools? Ah, but they - again - don't call them taxes. They pay what it pleases them to call "in-lieu-of-taxes"!

The PQ government today is not the same beast we saw in the early 80s. Then, in spite of their fixation on having their own country, the PQ governed fairly well. There was a certain competence and honesty that is now lacking. The temperament of today's governing party leans more towards improvisation and panicky decisions.

Two years ago, Guy Chevrette and, later, Premier Bouchard promised that there would be no cuts in transfer payments without equivalent revenues. They have broken their word. And it's clear they have little more than contempt for our level of government. They would do well to remember that we enjoy the confidence of 56% of the population, compared with 34% for either the provincial or the federal level.

Bouchard recently took a courageous stand and defended what was, after all, a Liberal bill on language - Bill 86. At the PQ convention, he stood firm against howls from the PQ hard-liners and most French editorialists. Why can't he show the same moral leadership in fiscal matters?

December 19, 1996

A SEASONAL RAMBLE THROUGH TWO WESTMOUNTS

Last Sunday, I went on one of my - mostly daily - walks: up from Sherbrooke St to the Summit and back. I started off in Green Westmount. By the time I got to the Boulevard, I was entering White Westmount. Our city was colour-coded by the 450-foot difference in altitude.

No snow was in sight on the green lawns of Westmount-on-the-flat, where a mist lent a luminosity to those Westmount colours of limestone grey and warm red brick. The jumble of Edwardian architectural exuberance and restraint was unified by this clinging damp.

Yet at the Summit, snow covered everything except the wet black roads. The traditional Scottish masonry of many of the houses made the scene even more countrified. I went from city to country by walking upwards.

I notice more and more Christmas lights are cobwebbing houses or their trees. Maybe next year, I'll light up our house a bit. But that means installing an outdoor plug next summer when Xmas lights are as far from one's thoughts as de-icing salt.

The one existential question the Trents ask each other at Christmas: shall we put up a tree this year? If we got a tree and no one saw it, would it really exist? Is it worth the candle, so to speak? You see, in the 28 years I've lived in the Montreal area, I've never had any blood relatives living in town. I had to import them. Either that, or we would go to England for Xmas. Then my parents' generation started dropping away, thereby reducing the familial critical mass. When they were alive, they tended to drop off during the festivities anyway. So Christmas becomes crowded with the memories of those who are absent - owing to distance or death.

Actually, as all our families get smaller, friends become more important. And Xmas becomes a time of reflection, of slowing down. One person I get re-acquainted with is myself. It's not always a pleasant experience.

My wife says I'm a difficult person to buy presents for: either it's because I don't really want very much, or if I did want something, I'd have got it myself.

How about a present to all of us language-war-weary Quebecers: that we will start to turn the corner, realizing that there are many more things that French and English have in common than things that divide us. That the Quebec whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Division in Quebec is now found in the PQ cabinet, where internal bickering between the doctrinaire and pragmatic wings is starting to bubble up to the surface. But too many of them regard the actual running of a government as something of a banality: the real fun is to put into practice their pseudo-socialist ideas.

The stage is set for some new players, for whom linguistic pillow fights hold no attraction. Dare we hope for this in the New Year?

Across Canada the only irreconcilable differences should be climatic. Just like upper and lower Westmount.

January 16, 1997

THE SIX-IN-ONE SOLUTION?

Whenever I write about regional issues in this column, I get the feeling I should somehow apologize for veering off from local Westmount topics. Yet ever since I've been mayor, I've been convinced that whatever is happening around us regionally will not only affect our city, but, in the extreme, could threaten its existence. This is why I see my job, not - as was the case in the past - just running the city, but also trying to influence whatever is happening in the Greater Montreal Region.

Right now, there is a triad of dramas unfolding on the regional front that could directly impact on Westmount: the current political crisis in the city of Montreal, the tabling of legislation in Quebec creating a Metropolitan Development Commission, and the weirdly radical "solution" being pursued by the Harris government in Ontario for the Toronto region.

Urban regions worldwide are slowly eclipsing nation-states in importance. Canada, Britain, and the U.S. will become less important than Toronto, London, or New York. But how do you go about configuring these urban regions? How many layers of government can you pile up before you insulate the voter from any meaningful decision-making? Or is that the goal? Or do you pull a Maggie Thatcher and wipe out any regional structure, as happened to the Greater London area in 1986. Why not just amalgamate cities in an urban region all together - the classic 60s solution? What I've called an idea whose time has gone.

Well, over in the Toronto area, a real power struggle is being played out, pitching the six centre cities - Toronto, North York, East York, Scarborough, Etobicoke, and York - against the Harris government's intention to amalgamate them all into one mega-city of 2.3 million. Currently, these six cities make up Metro - their equivalent of the MUC. Metro said, let's expand to cover the Greater Toronto Area of 30 cities. The six centre cities said, no, let's eliminate Metro. (Sound familiar?) Well, the Harris government said a plague on both your houses, we'll get rid of *both* Metro and the six cities, and fold them all into one entity. And they don't care whether local citizens want it or not.

What has all this got to do with us? Well, when Ryan set in motion the Pichette report, he looked favourably at the sextet of Toronto cities compared to our 29 on the island of Montreal. Will the creation of just one city give Quebec even more radical ideas? Let's hope we stay distinct.

There is a counter-argument to this merger mania. You don't have to go farther than look at the city of Montreal, which has become known more for its spotty management and endemic political turmoil than for anything else. You see, Montreal is itself the product of many mergers. The pro-merger forces will have to square this fact with their bigger-is-better nostrums. So rather than having a mismanaged city of 1.0 million people, they would seemingly prefer an even bigger one of 1.8 million.

January 23, 1997

WHAT'S AT STAKE FOR POLITICIANS: A MEDIUM WELL DONE

Rivers of printer's ink have flowed onto newsprint and miles of mylar tape have passed through videocameras in an effort to bring you, the media consumer, the daily soap opera unfolding at Montreal city hall. All along, Mayor Bourque maintained what was happening consisted of media-manufactured, or media-magnified events. Is he right?

The media are so all-pervasive today that, for some people - including me, when I'm not careful - the word "media" has become a singular noun. Now, the French have gone one step further, concocting a weird double plural - *medias*. Oh well, we both say "agendas".

To what extent do the media manipulate and manage the news, actually creating stories rather than reporting on them? Ideally, the media should play the role of a catalyst, whose presence, as any chemist knows, facilitates a reaction but it does not become part of the end product.

And some editorialists find it so easy to criticize and second-guess: they remind me of Brendan Behan's observation: "Critics are like eunuchs in a harem; they know how it's done, they've seen it done every day, but they're unable to do it themselves". Yet a few media types manage to masculate themselves - to coin a phrase - and try their luck at politics. René Lesveque and Claude Ryan are two successful examples.

In an interesting piece in *La Presse* last Saturday, Claude Masson makes the point that Bourque was well-treated by the press when he was running the Botanical Gardens or creating the Biodome. What happened? Did the press turn on him or did he bring it on himself?

Well, It doesn't matter. All those damning editorials and blow-by-blow reporting of city hall shenanigans in the print medium are not read by most voters. They watch TV. And Bourque has not quite mastered the secrets of a good TV persona. You have to talk to the TV camera as you would talk to one individual. It is an extremely intimate medium.

La Presse, for example, has had it in for the mayor of Laval, Gilles Vaillancourt, for some time now - subjecting him to hard-hitting articles and editorials. Yet so far, he has weathered anything *La Presse* can throw at him, because he is a great communicator on TV.

Most politicians make the mistake of not reviewing TV coverage of events they are involved with: they don't watch TV news broadcasts because their schedules don't permit it. It's much easier to scan press clippings whenever they get the time. Tapes are so much more clumsy.

So even if the "elites" do read newspapers, and even if the press is the solid alternative to what passes for information in the severely sound-bitten world of electronic media, it's on TV - and to a lesser extent - radio where politicians have to worry about how their public image is evolving.

Hmmm. I wonder if CBC TV would give me a weekly time slot to talk about Westmount municipal affairs.

February 6, 1997

THERE'S NO BUSINESS LIKE SNOW BUSINESS

This little essay could be subtitled "everything you ever wanted to know about snow removal, but were too uninterested to ask". Your curiosity about the translocation of agglomerated crystalline frozen water is probably as piqued as it will ever be, thanks to three storms that dumped a total of 50 cm. of snow last week on our 62 km. of streets and lanes.

Getting rid of last week's accumulation cost us about \$600,000, eating up a quarter of our total annual budget - which may now have to be boosted. We hauled away some 60,000 cubic metres of what the media like so wittily to call "the white stuff". That's the equivalent of one acre of snow piled 50 feet high.

And how do we get rid of this collected avalanche of snow? Unlike most cities we *don't* blow it all over your lawn. No. We truck it all away, except for the Summit Circle area. Now, sister cities like Outremont or Côte-St-Luc have enough dump sites within their own territories to handle all their driven snow. But Westmount has to take most of it to a pier near the Jacques Cartier bridge. By taking it all away, and by taking it to a place a long way away, the result is snow removal costs that are double those of similar cities. We are not helped by our hills, which require lots of salt; again, we use double what cities on the flat have to use.

We try to get the salt down as quickly as possible. This is because ice bonds tenaciously to pavements, and, once formed, is difficult to remove. The salt stops this bond from forming. But salt (sodium chloride) doesn't really work below -10°C. Calcium chloride does, but it costs 10 times as much. We take 8,000 tons of salt that's kept in a hive-shaped dome in the City Yards. It's our salt cellar, so to speak.

We clear fire and bus routes, main arteries, school zones and hills first. We plough snow when it gets to be about 5 cm. We try to clean up after a storm of, say, 20 cm. in three days; we base our planning on weather forecasts that come in three times a day.

In a fit of misplaced zeal, Quebec's Environment ministry will require us next year to stop dumping our snow in the St Lawrence. We'll either have to dump it on land, or put it into the sewer system. This will cost us a fortune, and severely slow down snow removal. But even if we dump it in the sewer, the stuff winds up in the river, anyway - with many pollutants coming along for the ride. This is because the wastewater treatment plant was not really designed to remove them. Besides, because we remove it quickly, and because we're a residential community, our *neige usée* - while perhaps not "as chaste as unsunned snow", as Shakespeare put it - is still pretty clean. So what's the point, Mr Minister? We spend more on snow removal than in operating our library, and two-and-one-half times what we spend on garbage collection. It's 7.5% of all local expenditures. I hope you think you're getting your money's worth.

February 13, 1997

COMPETING WITH CHEWING GUM FOR THE EYES

Last Saturday night, I went to the Westmount Winter Carnival family dinner that was followed by a movie for the kids and a comedy show for the adults. (I really mean for adults: last year, the jokes were so blue, they would have even offended Bowser.) I usually go, not really to glad-hand -which I'm not good at doing, anyway - but because the comedy show is as professional as the dinner is, ah, familial. You don't go there for the food, certainly, but you do go there for great comedy and good fun.

The turnout this year was a bit disappointing. Maybe we could have sprung for more promotional dollars, and maybe Saturday night a lot of Westmounters are in the country. But also I think it reflects the temper of our times: we are turning inwards. I bet a lot of citizens just decided to watch TV that night. It's a shame.

The other day I read that we watch TV 26 hours a week, and listen to radio 24 hours a week. Since few do both simultaneously, that's a whopping 50 hours a week devoted to such passive media. These numbers are, of course, average. For each person such as I who never listens to radio and rarely watches TV (except for Masterpiece Theatre, 60 Minutes, and sometimes Austin City Limits), there has to be someone out there who is listening and watching nearly 100 hours a week. It boggles the mind.

I then made a few calculations. A week has 168 hours. Assuming we sleep 56 hours, work 35 hours, and listen and watch 50 hours, that leaves only 27 hours - just enough time to eat, shop, shower, and perhaps talk on the telephone.

So, according to my calculations, the average Quebecer has no time to read, see films, socialize, play sports, listen to records, or travel.

What's wrong with this picture? I can't figure it out, can you? Maybe each of us has a doppelganger who's busy doing all these other things.

One thing is for sure. We emancipated ourselves from the slavery of working 60 hours a week in the last century, only to occupy the time gained in chaining ourselves to the TV. In fact, in the U.S., people are now working on average 1609 hours a year...and watching TV 1636 hours a year. Job sharing just frees up time for people to watch more television. This is progress?

Ernie Kovacs defined television as "a medium. So called because it is neither rare nor well done". Frank Lloyd Wright called it "chewing gum for the eyes". It's really just a vehicle for commercial messages. And with viewers watching the news 24% of the time, the rest devoted to sports, game shows, comedy, and drama, TV's become a homogenizing cultural Waring blender producing a pretty thin gruel.

So as we continue our search in Westmount for a Community Events Coordinator, whoever we hire will have his or her work cut out: getting more people to participate in Winter Carnival family night for starters.

February 27, 1997

PROVINCES WITHIN A PROVINCE

Warning: the separation of Quebec has already occurred. In the minds of the apparatchiks in Quebec City, separation is more than just a working hypothesis; for them, Quebec is, for all intents and purposes, an independent country - it just needs the formality of another referendum to give it the weight of law.

The strategy is cunning; *de jure* independence will be so much less painful if the government structures are already in place to manage the new country of Quebec. And that's just what's happening. Under the guise of "decentralization" and "regionalization" - policies that have not even been covered by the Anglo media - the 16 administrative regions of Quebec are being slowly turned into 16 "provinces".

While a significant number of responsibilities (and not necessarily powers) are being transferred to the regional level, and while this is going on under our very noses, most of us are on snooze control. Very soon, we will wake up and see a very different Quebec.

The architect behind this Quiet Regionalization is Guy Chevrette, the minister responsible for regional development. He, along with a number of other cabinet heavyweights, has a dyed-in-the-wool union background. So it is not surprising that they have based their governmental structures on the union model: the "*centrale*" being the province - which is now being referred to as "*L'État*". Their communiques are liberally sprinkled with union cant about "*solidarité*" and "*concertation*".

These people actually believe that strong government control is necessary and desirable. They are married to the belief that the government creates jobs. (The only jobs the government creates are government jobs.)

The homogeneity of Quebec's government apparatus, the fact that 82% of the electorate is francophone, the Quebec tradition of trust in the state - all conspire to create a high level of tolerance for state-controlled activities, something that Anglos intuitively regard with suspicion.

Another concept dear to the hearts of the PQ ideological movers and shakers is the involvement of socio-economic groups in decision-making. Not, mind you, to help in *their* decision making in the National Assembly. But to meddle in regional government. So the common pattern is to dilute local elected officials with a goodly dollop of union types, business people, social workers, and leaders in the educational and health sectors. Sometimes, we elected people get only one-third of the votes in these Byzantine structures. But we are the only ones answerable to the public.

In a few weeks, Chevrette will make public a white paper on regionalization, followed by a road show in the regions. He will table a law in May. This law will create a hundred "local development centres" and "local employment centres". As if we don't have enough structures already.

More on this next week.

March 6, 1997

SYNCHRONOUS SUCKING AND BLOWING HERE IN QUEBEC

Last week I talked about how Quebec is being carved up into 16 "provinces" through a government policy that assumes the *de facto* separation of Quebec. This strategy could ease the transition from the province of Quebec to the country of Quebec - at least in the minds of the PQ cabinet.

Swimming weakly upstream against this regionalization trend is Serge Ménard, who is supposed to be strengthening the Montreal metropolis. The two concepts - regionalization and metropolization - cannot co-exist, as the former treats the 16 Quebec regions as being all equal, and the latter regards the Greater Montreal Region as unique, indivisible, and the true economic guts of Quebec. You can't suck and blow at the same time. What makes the two ideas even more incompatible is the fact that the Greater Montreal Region - which was one region prior to 1988 - is now part of five different regions - one of which goes as far south as the U.S. border and another goes further north than even Mont Tremblant.

What I call the tyranny of the rurality still holds sway. With all this attention being paid to the backwaters and boondocks of Quebec, no energy is left for that area that pays most of the bills - Montreal.

(Another policy that presupposes independence is the slow metamorphosis of the *Sûreté du Québec* into a kind of *police nationale*. And I'm not just referring to Quebec's attempts to cajole small municipalities into using the SQ. Recently, the MUC police made a bid to furnish police services to Dorval Airport. Great pressure is being brought to bear to have the SQ provide such services - a most illogical choice.)

Quebec, already suffering from a surfeit of structures, will see the imposition of "metropolitan" structures such as Ménard's new commission that will be layered over existing structures. But that's not all. We will also see a series of equivalent and competing government structures that reflect Chevrette's regionalization policy. These two together will have achieved the bureaucratic equivalent of two parallel universes. Kafka meets Alice Through the Looking Glass.

We will be lumbered with structures that could asphyxiate countries ten times the size of our province. Four - count them - four levels of government: one province, 16 regions, 96 counties (nearly one-half of which have a population under 25,000), and, finally, some 1400 municipalities. Within the Greater Montreal Region, we'll have all that, plus Ménard's Metropolitan Development Commission.

I believe in voluntary associations that spring up from the milieu - they evolve with changing times and die off when no longer relevant. A company, a club, even a city has its roots in the desire of a group of people to band together. Government-imposed structures - especially those imposed by doctrinaire, meddling ideologues - are always unnatural, unwanted, and unremovable.

September 11, 1997

SOME SEPARATISTS HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOUR

After a six-month break in writing this column, I'm back in harness. Or is it back in the saddle? The first - equine - metaphor puts me in a servile role; the equestrian metaphor puts me in charge. Having to grind out this column once a week, in my view, makes me more of a servant than master. Ah, but people do read my column, right?

Anyway, a lot has happened in the mayoring game since I last put my pen down: renewed threats of amalgamation, a half-billion downloading bill from Quebec, a Montreal mayor with crumbling support. And, I might add, quite an upheaval in my personal life.

But, on the lighter side, I'm sure most of you missed a little gem published in the Journal de Montréal in August. A columnist - whom I've never met - actually suggested I should be the next mayor of Montreal. I (bashfully) quote from this obviously observant journalist: "I like this man. I like this mayor. Intelligent, competent, level-headed, with a quiet strength and a pleasing sense of humour". He goes on to say that I would not leave the verdant slopes of Westmount for the infernal politics of Montreal, but one can dream, can't one?

Well, dream on. It won't happen, chum.

By the way - and this is the best part - guess who wrote that piece? Why, it's none other than Pierre Bourgault. Imagine. It's as if Mordecai Richler encouraged Josée Legault to run for mayor of Westmount.

Was his tongue imperceptibly in his cheek? Was he damning me with feigned praise? Doesn't he know that a blessing from such as he is the kiss of death in these parts? But you must admit it's kind of fun to have such whimsy from an ardent separatist.

Speaking of Josée Legault, whimsy, and separatists straying into federalist territory, most of you also missed a great evening of Bowser and Blue humour at the Just For Laughs Comedy Festival in July. Following Legault's deft (and, to some, controversial) take-off on the Queen offering her sovereign services to an independent Quebec, the audience was subjected to fifty anglo celebrities singing: "We are here to stay, and we are têtes carrés and we are proud to say that we're here". (I guess you hadda be there.) Yours truly, who bellowed with the best of them, seems to have been elevated (or reduced) to the status of an "Anglo icon" by inclusion into what could be called the Fed Army Chorus.

But last week, Pequistes proved they can take both themselves and Howard Stern seriously. Not that I find Stern's brand of buffoonery up my alley, but when Serge Ménard threatens action under the criminal code for Stern's scatological hatemongering, he risks being accused of having an amputated funnybone. And going way too far. Had Stern been a Montrealer, this tempest in a toilet bowl would have taken on biblical proportions.

A sense of humour should be a prerequisite for membership in the PQ.

September 26, 1997

THE DAY WE LEFT THE U.M.Q.

Last week I quit as member of the executive committee of the *Union des Municipalities du Québec*. My colleague, Georges Bossé, the Mayor of Verdun, did likewise. We both felt the U.M.Q.'s actions had left us no choice: this organization could no longer represent the interests of the citizens of the Island of Montreal. At the end of the year, all the Island cities (except Montreal) will quit the U.M.Q. We henceforth will be represented in all matters by the Conference of Suburban Mayors (CSM), of which I'm president. The CSM members backed our decision totally.

How did things come to such an unpretty pass?

Let's start of with: what is the U.M.Q. - and why should you care?

U.M.Q. cities and towns make up 80% of Quebec's population, 87% of total municipal budgets, and 92% of municipal labour costs. Up until now. Our quitting removes 11% of the population and 14% of total budgets.

For years, I've felt that the U.M.Q. was rurally-dominated. After all, there is another union that represents the interests of the really small towns - the UMRCQ. And we're talking small. It is a measure of the rural fixation of the Quebec government that they tend to treat the two unions as equals. So we urban cities are doubly diluted, because within the U.M.Q, Montreal Island is just a region like the other sixteen.

On July 25, the U.M.Q. Council formally resolved that the \$500 million downloading from Quebec be equally distributed - *n.b.*, not equitably distributed - all over Quebec. (The original proposal let the Island off fairly lightly, in view of costs we bear that off-Island cities don't.)

We were only told after the vote how much this would cost the Island. Luckily, I had made rough calculations during the meeting and warned everybody that we would never accept the idea. It sailed through anyway.

Then, on August 2, the entire assembly of the U.M.Q. voted for "equal" sharing of the \$500 million. Again, we warned them we can't accept that.

Next, Quebec set up a negotiating table to discuss the matter. We did not want to sit as U.M.Q. members, as we would be bound by their anti-Island policy. We were refused a seat. Imagine. Not one person from the Island of Montreal, which represents a third of Quebec's economy. But the UMRCQ got five out of the ten seats! Five hamlets beat out a metropolis.

Then Bossé and I simply invited ourselves to the table. We went up to Quebec and marched into the room where the meeting was to be held. After waiting an hour with no one showing up - the media had told them of our presence - a flunky came to see us sheepishly requesting we see the Minister. Trudel was all at sixes and sevens. After hastily checking with the U.M.Q., he awkwardly declined us a seat at the table in view of their objection. In the event, the table never did come up with a solution, and now he is imposing a method that is even more penalising for Island cities.

See you at the Verdun Auditorium for the monster NO rally this Sunday.

October 2, 1997

TAXATION BY MISREPRESENTATION

The Gazette said there were 3,000. *Le Devoir* and *Le Journal de Montréal* said there were over 5,000 who showed up at the Verdun Auditorium last Sunday for the rally to say NO! to Quebec's craven downloading of \$500 million. What's going on here? Typical English understatement? Why would the anglo media downplay the turnout and the sovereigntist papers report things accurately? Gazette reporters seem to have adopted the habit of minimizing the initiatives of local mayors. At least the Gazette gave its editorial backing to the rally on two occasions.

How about asking numbers of the organizers of the rally: the Conference of Montreal Suburban Mayors? We estimated the attendance to be about 5,000. We, at least, took the trouble to count the seats. I was especially proud when I learned that more than 250 Westmounters took the trouble to come. By chartered bus. By car. You have no idea how important it is for me to feel I have the solid support of citizens behind me.

It was an overwhelming turnout, given the exceptionally beautiful weather for a Sunday at the end of September. With the sun pouring down like honey - as Leonard Cohen put it - it warmed my heart to see 5,000 people who decided to forget the cottage, the golf links, or the tennis court to come out to support their mayors in sending a message to Quebec that we've had it up to here with their constant downloading: \$700 million a year since 1992. Plus this \$500 million. Plus \$600 million in increased school taxes. \$1.8 billion per year that Quebec has asked the property taxpayer to shell out since 1992. And what have they done? Why, they've cut their own \$40 billion budget by a measly \$250 million, or 0.6%. Quebec is balancing its budget on the backs of the municipalities.

During my speech at this rally, I quoted an American jurist, John Marshall, who said in 1819: "the power to tax involves the power to destroy". I'm not too sure I made my point well, but what I was trying to say is that this cowardly downloading is a method of converting potential provincial taxes into actual municipal taxes. A kind of fiscal alchemy. And that any increase in municipal taxes on the Island of Montreal will work to destroy it, as more and more people flee the Island to lower-taxed suburbs off-Island.

This buck-passing is what I called "taxation by misrepresentation". Some people asked me what good this rally will do. I said that, if the suburban cities on the Island did not protest, we could look forward to more of the same next year. We had no choice but send a message from all the Conference's 800,000 citizens that we will not stand for such an irresponsible, improvised, inequitable way of balancing Quebec's budget.

I also feel that, right across Quebec, after three months' of dithering about this \$500 million bill, even the YES supporters are starting to realize that these guys can't even run a province, let alone run a country!

October 9, 1997

WESTMOUNT AND I LOSE A FRIEND

"Lay heavy on him earth, for he laid many a heavy load on thee"

The above was the suggested epitaph for Sir John Vanbrugh, who designed Blenheim Palace. And a favourite quote of Richard E. Bolton, architect. Dick died less than two weeks ago at the age of 91. I will far from being alone among Westmounters who will miss him.

Dick, in many ways, was an exemplar of a typical Westmouter of years gone by, a man given to understatement, Briticisms, and unostentatiousness. These were the very qualities that make Westmount what it is today: not just in bricks and mortar, but in its social patterns and sense of community. The style has changed; the substance hasn't.

Dick had a slightly raspy, clipped, precise way of speaking. He spoke in what broadcasters used to call the mid-Atlantic accent. He looked at you though transparent eyes. Eyes were of cardinal importance to him. He always said you see though your eyes not with your eyes. Unlike most architects, his sense of aesthetics applied everywhere, right down to his Windsor-knotted tie, spread collar, and discreet windowpane-pattern suits.

Architecture was Dick's profession and passion - for under the imperturbable exterior, Dick had passion. He bemoaned the lack of education in aesthetics. He valued craftsmanship and honesty in construction. An architect should be an artisan first. He once wrote: "an architect soon learns (if he has any sense of his own unimportance) that his profession has existed for a little over a century and a half and that much fine building has been done during the last five thousand years".

Dick in the early 80s inveighed against the parking policy favouring house owners to convert their lawns and gardens into parking aprons. He plumped for reduced road widths. For fewer signs and traffic lights - calling their steel supports "examples of the plumber's art". He worried about a neglected cenotaph, highway-style lamp standards, over-pruning ("hedges with crew cuts"). Most of these pet peeves have been dealt with.

In 1975 he started an inventory of buildings that were to be protected by heritage legislation. He called his list "a very personal selection". When he was chairman of the Architectural and Planning Commission, he sought "visual harmony". He knew his city. Give him an address in Westmount and he might draw you a sketch of the house from memory.

As alderman in charge of the A&P Commission in 1983 (by that time Dick had become "member emeritus"), and, later, as mayor, I was the recipient of many letters from Dick, poking gentle fun at all sorts of things. Dick wrote in a flawless, spare script - with a fountain pen, of course. I opened a file called "Bolton". It will now never get any thicker.

I note the passing of a man, but also the passing of a way of life, a way of seeing things, and a way of marrying gentleness with firmness.

October 16, 1997

A MEETING WITH BOUCHARD

Last Thursday, I was summoned to Quebec City for an emergency meeting with Premier Bouchard. He had taken over from Minister Trudel the whole mishandled matter of the \$500 million downloading to (read: tax grab from) municipalities across Quebec. Mayors Bossé and Zampino joined me, along with Marc-André Vaillancourt, the director-general and the real brains behind the Conference of Montreal Suburban Mayors.

After scoffing down a 20-minute chicken-sandwich lunch, we made it to "the Bunker" by two o'clock. The Bunker is almost an annex to the *Assemblée Nationale*, and a concrete hulk that is as ugly as the parliament buildings are beautiful. It's where the real decisions are made. We were greeted by two of Bouchard's henchmen, who told us of his "final" offer.

We left the Bunker with its concrete coffered ceilings and incongruous pine chair rails and fetched up at the Hilton, another architectural victim of the 70s mania for in-your-face concrete and boring rectilinear furniture.

Our meeting at the Hilton was with Bouchard and the UMRCQ - the union that represents tiny towns. The UMQ - who supposedly represent bigger cities - had their own meeting, as they had refused to sit in the same room as we. The UMQ is still in a snit because the Conference left them after they passed a formal resolution that treated all cities uniformly - and could have raised our share of the tax grab by \$23 million a year.

Later that night, we four had a private audience with Bouchard. During that meeting, my mind wandered for a few seconds. I was trying to decide whether Bouchard more resembles a bear; or, because of his thick eyebrows and glowering eyes, he looks more like a bird - a raptor, say. And, as suggested by either an ursine or avian resemblance, he does hold his interlocutors captive. Bouchard actually thinks before responding, a quality quite rare in political circles. And he does smile. Sometimes.

Why should Bouchard care about the Island of Montreal - where he gets so few votes? He knew all about the rally, calling it a "*sortie virulente*". I told him that he should not further distance the 770,000 people we represent. If he thinks we're anti-PQ now, wait till the tax bills come out!

We made a pitch for the uniqueness (distinctness?) of the Island of Montreal. How we already pay for services the rest of Quebec gets for free. And that any tax increases would just contribute to urban sprawl. We also took issue with his new - uniform - formula for divvying up the \$500 million - now cut back to \$375 million. (The Island still pays the same, with the rest of Quebec getting a \$125 million break.) This formula is based on 5.8% of a city's "compressible" costs - as if costs were some kind of cheap foam rubber cushion. So now debt service costs are removed from the calculation - which penalizes cities like Westmount that have little debt, and favours heavily-indebted cities like Laval.

After a media scrum, we left for Montreal. I got home at 1:30 a.m.

November 6, 1997

DETAIL OF TWO CITIES

When I had planned months ago to treat myself to a bit of R'n'R in Paris and London the last two weeks of October to see relatives and friends, I had thought that the sorry saga of tax transfers from Quebec would have long since reached a conclusion. I should have known better. But, because this was my first real vacation away since being elected mayor in 1991, no one can accuse me of overdoing things in that regard.

Even though on holidays, I couldn't help seeing these cities through mayoral eyes: civic architecture and screetscapes got my special attention. Once again, I came away impressed with the *Service de propreté* of Paris. How they sluice down the gutters daily. These are the gutters between what North Americans call the pavement and what the British call the pavement. Green-clad men with green carts sweep detritus into green cans, using twig brooms fashioned from polyethylene twigs coloured green. And there's lots of detritus: les Champs-Élysées now incongruously consort with the likes of Haagen Dazs and Big Mac. Tommy Hilfigered and Nikeed Americans seem more at home there than do Parisians, who are mostly dressed in chic black. But you have to walk in Paris with downcast eyes if you want to avoid stepping in dog poo. And graceful old buildings have been attacked by graffiti, especially on the Left Bank.

But it's the British railway commuter who is assaulted with unremitting bands of coloured graffiti applied to every single brick embankment, electrical box and tunnel. And decades of grime cover the sober symphony of wired glass, cast iron posts, and wood that make up the standard British railway station. Even when I took the Chunnel train that is so grandly called the Eurostar, the seediness of British railway infrastructure was painful. And, of course, British Rail is now privatised. So some railway liveries are emblazoned with old-time railway names such as the Great North Eastern Railway - which I took to Scotland; others sport such weird new names as Virgin Trains. (Do they go no further than Maidenhead?)

Beggars are everywhere, even in métro cars. Is it any wonder, given the costs of living in Paris? And London's worse. A meal in London is now double the cost of a meal in Paris, and is still one-half as good. A decent hotel in London costs over \$400. In 1969, as an impoverished 23-year-old, I paid exactly £4 4s 3d for a room at the Charing Cross railway hotel in London. Today, the same poky, unrefurbished room costs £135 (\$310) a night - 30 times as much, or about six times as much after inflation.

And I have to slip in something about the underground travertine-clad shopping mall - complete with food court - that one has to go down through to get up to the Louvre. This troglodyte entrance capped by an absurd glass pyramid proves even the French have lost their sense of style.

In both cities, banal post-war architecture blemishes the beauty of older buildings. It's the same here, but we are cursed with so much more of it.

November 13, 1997

AM I LACKING IN JOCKULARITY?

Last week I got a letter - along with a petition signed by 45 Westmounters - that made a plea for fixing up the arena and swimming pool. The petition stated that, if a choice must be made between work on Victoria Hall or on an improved sports centre, the latter should be our priority. While the letter writer had nothing but praise for the library renewal project, he said it was time for other things. The pool and rink are overused and in poor shape. He went on to say he has "fully supported most if not all of the policies City Council and you have adopted during the last few years", so this was a letter written in a friendly and fair tone.

My correspondent did aim a gentle zinger in my direction: "to become involved in the public sports complex would represent a particular challenge to you, in that your personal lack of interest in sports activities is legendary". His use of the word legendary is "colloquial", or so harrumphs the Oxford Dictionary. So I prefer a purist's definition of legendary: "connected with a popular but unfounded belief".

No, I'm not interested in sports, if by sports one means the vicarious act of watching a bunch of males sweat together. My interest, therefore, in professional hockey, baseball or (God forbid) basketball is nil. I never read the sports pages. Taxi-drivers or well-intentioned lunch companions often assume - based solely on the evidence that I'm male - that I must be upset when the Habs lose, or that I can't wait to know all about the batting average of some tobacco-chewing American dressed in an Expos uniform.

But I do believe in playing sports oneself. I also think sports are great for kids, and serve as a way of knitting together our community. So upgrading our sports facilities falls right in line with Council's objective of boosting Westmount's community feeling and trying to attract young families. My correspondent has obviously never seen me race at Family Day, or do over one hundred laps of the rink in 40 minutes at the Scout's skate-o-thon. He, mercifully, has also never seen me play tennis. Or jog.

So maybe I'm not a real jock. Neither am I a library-user. Yet it's fair to say that I was instrumental in making the \$7.5 million library project happen. So not being a jock in no way stops me from getting behind the idea of renewing our sports facilities. Even if I may not always use them.

And it's not a question of either Victoria Hall or the arena. In fact, in 1996, we developed a rough draft of a plan to upgrade all city buildings. The arena was slated for a \$5 million upgrading in 2002 - only four years away, folks. Since we will have to spend \$650,000 replacing the refrigeration system in 1998, we have decided to start the planning process now. After all, six years elapsed from the time it was decided that work needed to be done on the library and the date of its completion. Ditto Vic Hall.

Under Councillor Lulham, an internal committee has been formed to report on options regarding the arena. We'll then start public consultation.

November 20, 1997

A TAX HIJACK AND A RED HERRING

The \$500-million tax hijack by Quebec - reduced by popular demand to a mere \$375-million - is slowly fading out of the news. But the story had legs - it lasted six months, long enough to inflict quite a bit of damage on the PQ, enough damage to cause Premier Bouchard to step in and take over the management of this downloading exercise from Trudel.

Well, it's still not over. We are still saying NO. The Conference of Suburban Mayors is even looking into the possibility of a legal challenge, on the ground that we municipalities can't take taxpayers' money and turn it over to Quebec to do with it what they will. The way I see it, we, by law, must return local tax money in the form of local services.

I am also suggesting to my fellow mayors to adopt 1998 budgets that do not take into account this bill from Quebec. It would be most illogical to continue to refuse our share of Trudel's bill, and, concurrently, make provision for it in our budgets. In extremis, if all our efforts come a cropper and Quebec just takes the money from us, we can always adopt a supplementary budget sometime next year that would also take into account any savings in employee costs that Trudel originally said he would help us with. This way, we would send out a "Trudel tax bill" (or a "Bouchard bill") that would clearly reflect the cost of this craven shirking of provincial responsibility. I just hope the mayors representing cities in PQ ridings off the Island do likewise. Nothing concentrates the voter's mind like an extra tax bill just before election time.

So, worst case, we're now looking at a tax increase of around 6.5%.

I can claim partial credit for getting Westmount's bill cut by \$1,093,000 per year, thereby avoiding an additional 2.5% increase in your tax bill. This is because the original calculations included Westmount's purchases of electricity. I made the case to the deputy minister that, for the eight cities in Quebec that distribute electricity, the downloading formula of 5.78% of our expenses should not include our utility operations.

However, Westmount does get penalized for good management. The formula finally adopted - thanks to the Union des Municipalités du Québec - removes debt service costs from the calculation. So cities with very low debt like Westmount pay more, and heavily indebted cities like Laval, where 36% of the budget goes for debt, pay less.

A "red herring" refers to the practice of dragging a smoked herring across a fox's trail, destroying its scent for the following hounds. The new minister of the Montreal region, Robert Perrault, has come up with a dandy red herring to get the media loping off in another direction: he is hell-bent for leather on merging the three transit corporations.

If you can stand me partially mixing smelly fish metaphors, Perreault thereby hopes to turn the downloading story into a shotten herring - a herring that had voided its spawn, and is therefore useless. We'll see.

November 27, 1997

BUNDLING UP FOR WINTER

Americans are sensible in celebrating Thanksgiving today - or rather over the next four days. Faced with the prospect of winter, they can fold in on themselves a bit, reflect, and generate a mutual warmth. Up here, we confront the oncoming bleakness without the benefit of a family holiday.

Last week, though, brought a mild spell. A walk around Westmount revealed a very late autumn pretending to be very early spring. What gave it away were the fallen maple leaves on the street surface, macerated by passing cars, layered over by a mush of brown and white melting snow. Here and there, some dried leaves clung to branches. And, by the way, are those clumps of leaves high up in tree branches really squirrels' nests?

It was mid-November: no longer autumn, not really winter. Undone work outdoors seems to stand out, without the artifice of summer foliage and flowers. While the lack of make-up shows the rugged beauty, the good bone structure of nature, it's the man-made things that look a bit worn. Peeling paint, crumbling mortar in crazy paving, dirty windows: they look at me accusingly, stuff I should have seen to before winter set in.

I did tie up some bushes into straggly fascicles. I fought with strips of recalcitrant snow fence, forcing them around the yews, getting not just a green thumb for my pains, but also green fingers. I managed to cover some plants in burlap. I like its musty smell and honest no-colour look. But the cocomattng remains rolled up, and not rolled out. And there are still clumps of desiccated flowers with brown deadheads, and a yellow carpet of Norway maple leaves covering the grass. A larch - the only deciduous conifer, I'm told - insists on dropping its beige needles well after the snow falls. They get tracked in all over the house.

I'm beginning to think that the annual wrapping-up of bushes for winter should be considered a minor art form. After all, you have the geometric school - all rectangles and pyramids. Then there's the deconstructionists with their exposed iron posts clearly supporting tautly-draped canvas. The minimalist school makes do with a simple hempen string to tie up bushes - like the understated single-strand necklaces of Country Life brides-to-be. The modernist school goes in for orange polyethylene snow fencing or new white tarpaulin. The arty-crafty bunch likes open-weave homespun and old broom-handles. The aboriginally-inspired school opts for wooden-slat teepees and white polystyrene-foam igloos. The religious school can be identified by sackcloth and sashes, or water-stained and blackened burlap shrouds that look as if they'd been handed down through generations.

We could give out prizes for the most artistically-wrapped bushes in the same way we judge ice sculptures or Xmas tree-trimming.

Ah, but I think ahead to next spring when all this greenery is released from its winter confinement, and the world looks fresh again.

December 4, 1997

MUC, MERGERS, AND MEGACITIES

According to some, we must, lemming-like, follow the "lead" of Toronto and be stampeded into creating our very own, made-in-Quebec megacity. One city covering the island of Montreal. The glories that would be ours had we just had the courage to take the plunge, are, once again, being touted by a hardly disinterested party - the mayor who would be mayor of us all: none other than Mayor Bourque. Even if overcome by nausea, please, dear reader, forge on.

Last Sunday, under the headline "Bourque would like to be mayor of all the island and its suburbs" our would-be leader managed to share the following gems with *La Presse*: "Amalgamation can bring about so many advantages that (Ontario Premier) Harris is ready to do the same thing to Hamilton and Ottawa. And meanwhile, we (in Montreal) will continue to tear each other apart". He then was moved to make the following observation: "take the residents of Westmount. They are, above all, Montrealers. They work downtown, they have a Montreal culture. In fact, you can't get more Montreal in nature than the people of Westmount!".

Which brings me - slowly - to the point of this column. The way I see it, Harris managed to get away with the highly-unpopular merger of the six Toronto cities owing to a very popular by-product: it meant the elimination of Metro Toronto, their bloated version of the MUC. Harris killed seven birds - especially the peacock - with one stone.

Fortunately, back home, the MUC is not as hated as Metro Toronto. (Although, as you know, I am far from being its biggest fan.) Had it been otherwise, we would see even more support for a one-island one-city concept as a way of getting rid of the MUC. If we regard the MUC as a service co-operative, there will be little pressure to get rid of it through Island amalgamations. On the other hand, if the hegemony of the MUC continues to grow, aided by talk of an MUC fire brigade, the island would be that much closer to becoming just one megacity.

Is the MUC juggernaut under control? Because of tight budgeting, member cities' contribution to the MUC has dropped by \$39 million since 1993. But \$21 million of that will come from cutting its contribution to the MUCTC, plus another \$10 million of new user-fees. So the real cut to our apportionments to the MUC is only \$8 million. And that assumes the MUC will find the \$19 million that is needed for a break-even 1998 budget. And even those "savings" came at the cost of cutting our police force from 4384 in 1993 to a mere 4022 in 1997.

And the MUCTC made a lot of those savings by upping metro and bus fares, revenues for which went up by some 15% since 1993. But busses travelled 8% fewer miles, and the metro moved 11% less. Meanwhile the MUCTC debt will go from \$217 million in 1993 to \$482 million by 1998.

Is the MUC really under control? What do you think?

January 22, 1998

COMMUNITY WARMTH DE-ICES WESTMOUNT

During one of my recent Westmount walkabouts, I ventured into Summit Park to get an idea of tree damage from the ice storm. I quickly discovered that trees growing close together, branches intermingling, suffered less damage. Similarly, a cedar without any nearby companions was usually bent double; a cedar growing in the serried ranks of a hedge stayed a ramrod straight. So such mutual support stopped a heavy coating of ice from breaking their backs: perhaps an apt arboreal metaphor for a closely-knit community like Westmount and how neighbourliness allowed us to get through the worst of the ice storm without buckling under.

What our trees got was a radical pruning, by God. (Or a radical pruning by God?) We will live for years with the effect of the ice storm on our vegetation. But we will benefit from the solidifying of our community.

Weird things happened, though. During the blackout, I could not rid myself of the habit of pointlessly turning on the light switch each time I went into the bathroom. When the power came back on, I automatically reached for a flashlight before opening the bathroom door. How quickly and yet how slowly our reflexes adapt to changing conditions.

And I still can't get used to the sight of bulldozers in our streets, their caterpillar tracks chewing up asphalt, shearing off great blocks of frozen snow as if they were ice floes grinding over one another in the Antarctic.

Another unusual sight was to see soldiers clearing Sherbrooke Street of branches. If only Quebec had permitted it, the military could have given much more sophisticated support than just manual labour. The image of Van Doos hacking away at trees with blunt machetes stays in my mind.

Bernard "Black Belt" Landry, reaching for a bizarre metaphor, suggested we use judo in dealing with the storm. He wants to redirect the negative economic blows inflicted by the power blackout in a positive direction: the repairs and rebuilding will inject lots of money in the economy. Well, then, maybe Hydro-Quebec should continue to underbuild its transmission system, so we can reap the economic benefits of putting the Hydro Humpty-Dumpty together again each time we have an ice storm. But, according to a Hydro-Quebec expert, an ice storm of this intensity occurs once every 10,000 years. Sure. And I've got an iced-up bridge over the St Laurent I want to sell you.

Of course, the story last week was not just about deforestation and underengineering: here in Westmount, as in most smaller communities, an army of volunteers sprung up to help those less fortunate. When Westmount still had power, I invited people from outside our city to come to our shelters. Councillor Cynthia Lulham became the major-domo of the Victoria Hall shelter, and Councillor Karen Marks ran the shelter that the Shaar Hashomayim so generously made available. Next week, Councillor Lulham will write about her experience and share shelter stories with you.

February 26, 1998

DUELLING VISIONS

Last Wednesday, The MUC Council spent hours trying to thrash out whether Vera Danyluk's mandate as chairman of its Executive Committee should be renewed. A compromise proposal of a one-year extension missed by a razor-thin margin. A full four-year renewal got Montreal's support, but most suburban mayors turned it down. So the meeting concluded inconclusively. What, you might well ask, is going on? Why not just renew her mandate and be done with it? She is, by all accounts, a feisty and thrifty chairman.

Well, the whole issue turns on Danyluk's vision of the MUC as compared with that of the suburban mayors. She, in essence, wants to convert the MUC into a level of government. We see the MUC's role as an intermunicipal provider of services. She would like to see the MUC given an additional role: that of a centre of political power.

Political power, like matter, can neither be created nor destroyed. Any centralization of power will be effected at the expense of individual municipalities. We will lose power; the MUC will gain power. But that's not all. Danyluk also wants to expand the MUC's monopoly to include Laval and the south shore. For regional services such as public transit, that makes sense. I've been advocating for years the merger of the MUCTC, the Laval transit corporation, and its equivalent on the south shore. And Minister Robert Perreault is determined to make it happen this year.

But to expand the MUC's police monopoly would be very unwise. For one thing, a single police force (and police union) right across the entire metropolitan region would mean even less service that we get now.

So, once mass transit services are regionalized, whatever remains of the MUC does not need all the trappings of big government: a full-time Executive Committee chairman in addition to a Director-General, in addition to a police director - all reporting to an 80-member Council with five sparsely-attended commissions.

In sum, Danyluk sees the MUC as a regional force; we see the need for a regional co-ordinating body that would cover the entire metropolitan region, not just the island. But that body should not deliver services.

The media have tried to personalise this debate, intimating all kinds of dastardly motives to the suburban mayors in their refusal to renew Danyluk's mandate. Hour even quotes her as suggesting it's because she's a woman - neatly ignoring the fact that it was we males who put her there in the first place: are we only very recent converts to mayoral misogyny? The Journal de Montréal and the Westmount Examiner (a strange pair, that) said it's because I want the job. (Please. Give me anything to do but run the MUC. Besides, I'm not eligible, as I am now on the board of the MUCTC.)

The problem is conflicting philosophies, not conflicting personalities.

March 12, 1998

FROM SOLID WATER TO LIQUID ICE

Two weeks ago, on putting my ear to a bathroom wall, I heard a gurgling sound that made me happy. Now, I'm not usually given to listening to bathroom walls, let alone finding in them any source of pleasure. But, you see, there, entombed by plaster-and-lath, is found my main drain - or "main stack" as it is known by plumbers, who obviously have no ear for rhyme. The sound of burbling from the main drain meant my flat roof was finally de-icing itself the natural way: molecules of water, once ordered in a rigid crystalline corset were now free to gambol around in liquid form, percolating noisily down my cast iron drainpipe.

This natural physical transformation saved me well over \$500. With unprecedented ice load on roofs following the January ice-storm, some of my more risk-adverse neighbours engaged a team of icebreakers to chainsaw through layers of ice (and, in some cases I suspect, roofs).

I got at least three phone calls from companies I'd never heard of offering to de-ice my roof. Anticipating the reluctance of some homeowners to setting loose chainsaw-wielding strangers on their roof, one company boasted ice removal by steam. Now that sounds as benign as getting your carpet cleaned. So a kind of cottage industry sprang up - or, rather, an industry for cottages. (By the way, why in Quebec does one call a two-storey house a cottage, when for everyone else in the English-speaking world a cottage is a humble, usually one-storey affair? While I'm at it, whence came the curious Montreal habit of describing apartments using fractions? What is the $\frac{1}{2}$ in a $5\frac{1}{2}$, anyway? But I divagate.)

My roof, like most Westmount roofs built before 1919, is built to withstand 60 lbs per square foot, with probably lots of overdesign. Now, of course, progress dictates that engineers scoff at overdesign, so there were some new commercial steel roof trusses that did collapse under the weight of ice last month. Possibly their designers went to the same school that taught Hydro-Quebec engineers.

The real test of my roof's strength occurred during the rainstorm of July 1987. Successive summers of broiling sun had caused roof tar to flow like magma, all but blocking the entrance to my main drain. I had a foot of water, weighing 62 lbs per square foot, on much of my roof. Water came cascading in all over the place. That's the disadvantage of a flat roof.

Pitched roofs present another sort of danger. Last week, great sheets of ice fell three storeys from a sloped roof I have in the back, hitting the ground with a loud crump. (Yes, that is a word. Really.) As well as things that go crump in the night, one hears the grunt of the sump pump (another rhyming pair). The manual calls its function "dewatering", which is not a word. But it is essential to suck up melted ice and snow pooling around the house's foundations, pumping it into our old friend, the main drain.

Owning a house involves a great deal of solid water management.

March 26, 1998

THE M.U.C.: HOW IT ALL STARTED

It was October 7, 1969. There were 4,000 policemen in the streets of Montreal, shaking their fists against anyone in authority. The police were actually on strike. Gathered at Paul Sauvé arena, they booed and even threatened Lucien Saulnier, Mayor Drapeau's right-hand man. The army and the provincial police had been called in. Then a late-night telephone call from City Hall to the premier of the day, Jean-Jacques Bertrand. The provincial government promises to come to the aid of the City of Montreal. Financially. Early next morning, Montreal caves in to the police and their salary demands. Things get back to normal. Or do they?

This promise to help Montreal took its form in the creation of the MUC. It was nothing less and nothing more than a way to force the suburban cities on the Island of Montreal to bail out the City of Montreal. The pretext was the pooling of services, notably police - and in doing so, hide the police bad apples in a bigger basket. But the real goal and the real result was a recurring fiscal transfer. There was no consultation. No give and take. The MUC was imposed on the Island on December the 23rd - less than three months after the police strike.

For years, Montreal was set on annexing the suburbs. In 1964, Drapeau told the Blier Commission what he wanted: "une île, une ville". So, by 1969, it was either annexation or the imposition of the MUC - take your poison - according to Robert Lussier, the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Of course, back in the twilight of the 60s, everything was possible: not just police strikes and student riots, but a better world, too. The glow of 60s optimism had still not faded. The worship of eternal growth. With no Malthusian misgivings, expansionism was still the prevailing model. Costly mega-projects were the order of the day: those ever-increasing future generations would pick up the tab. A financial chain-letter was started.

The MUC was therefore a product of its times. Projections of growth for the Island of Montreal were geometric. What happened? Our population dropped. We're stuck, for example, with a massive sewage treatment plant designed for 3 million people - nearly double today's population.

Even if the MUC had been created to manage growth - which it wasn't - it instead witnessed the Island's decline. Even the most tentative attempt at land-use planning happened only in 1987 - but Montreal doesn't have to respect it. Even back in 1969, trying to control urban sprawl by dealing only with the Island was like putting toothpaste back in the tube.

So the MUC remains an elaborate mechanism to subsidise the City of Montreal - which is in no better financial shape for all that - and an intermunicipal provider of services. It has not and cannot deal with the major regional problem: urban sprawl.

I give you this sketch of the beginnings of the MUC following a colloquium on the MUC I attended last weekend. To be continued.

April 9, 1998

MORE ELECTED BODIES? FEWER BODIES WILL VOTE

Whenever I'm searching for the French version of an English acronym, I often get it right just by putting the letters in reverse order. For example, PIN (personal identification number) becomes NIP (numero d'identification personnel). QLP (Quebec Liberal Party) becomes PLQ. NATO becomes OTAN. Even ICAO becomes OACI. Perhaps it's symbolic of the Gallic versus Britannic way of seeing the world. (Except when you monitor the media. The CRTC can meddle away, unchanged in either language.)

Another linguistically palindromic acronym is MUC, which becomes CUM in French. (Which, we are reminded rather tendentiously by that organization, is Latin for "with".)

Certainly, the MUC is a peculiarly Quebec/French invention. And, in spite of my frequent dyspeptic broadsides aimed at it, the MUC is a far better concept than most of the second-tier municipal structures found in the rest of Canada. This is because, at least in theory, it's the member cities that control it. There is no direct election. You vote for a mayor, who in turn votes at the MUC. The focus is on your local city, not on some amorphous construct forever remote from a voter.

In a recent poll, 53% of Island residents thought the head of the MUC should be elected by universal suffrage. Well, you can bet if that ever happened, most of these same people would never get out and actually vote. Such an election would have all the sizzle of School Board elections, where a corporal's guard turns out to vote.

In that same poll, only 22% of residents knew Vera Danyluk heads up the MUC. (A poorly-informed but clearly discriminating 3% thought that I ran the MUC.) So, say some, let's institute direct election and thereby raise the profile of the MUC. Well, in the case of the Toronto version of the MUC, Metro Toronto, their Council was directly elected. And guess what? Only 24% of the population knew who their representative was. Hmm. Some improvement. Besides, Metro is no more: it got buried at the same time as the six cities that comprised it got forcibly amalgamated.

In my view, direct election of the MUC Council would lead, not just to making it yet another level of government, but to the eventual amalgamation of all the cities on the Island. That's what happened in Toronto.

Giving power to the people is fine as long as they are prepared to wield it. It has been my experience that most electors are content to vote for a maximum of only three levels of government. And at the municipal level, we're lucky if we get even a desultory 50% turnout.

Creating additional directly-elected bodies is paradoxically anti-democratic: so few people get out and vote that these structures become controlled by small ideologically-uniform cliques. Eventually, of course, it's the bureaucrats who take over. Or, to put it more accurately and more cynically, the hegemony of the functionaries becomes complete.

April 30, 1998

SPRIG CLEANING, ANYONE?

There was Allan Aitken, quietly and methodically wheeling barrows-full of collected twigs along the banks of the water-course in Westmount Park. A little further up, Jim Griffin, a Westmount Rotarian with talents agrarian, was hauling dozens of beige bags stuffed with his very own harvest of dead leaves. Jim and Nancy Wright had staked out a territory near the wading pond, where they meticulously cleaned up a sizeable section of park. Seen making frequent sorties from her headquarters at the Comfort Station was Councillor Cynthia Lulham, officer commanding the Westmount Twig and Leaf Irregulars. (It was her idea, folks.)

It was a week ago last Saturday when more than a hundred volunteers came out on a blustery day to do their bit to rid our two parks of the sad detritus of the ice storm. My perfunctory contribution there was just a prelude to tackling the mess in my own garden. I spent the rest of the day raking *chez nous*, where wet leaves were the devil to remove. I had to peel off layers of clotted leaves, mindful of any green shoots underneath. Each layer revealed an underside that was slightly iridescent and liver-coloured. Dry leaves are fun. Wet leaves are slimy and smell awful. Then I had to clean out my pond: the sodden leaves there are positively sulphurous.

At least I had already pruned my trees, and the city truck had passed twice to collect huge piles of fallen limbs. (I almost expected a muffled bell and a plaintive "bring out your dead branches" as the truck went from house to house.)

Up in Summit Park, the city so far has left things alone. It looks like an arboreal boneyard, with greying branches lying every which way. Some citizens have suggested we organize a clean-up bee for that park, too. I don't know. Our policy so far is to try to spare this "urban wild" from too much human meddling. Nature can take care of itself.

But this mass dismemberment of Westmount's beloved tree stock still has the power to shock. Yet, what we regard as a deforestation without precedent, nature sees as not even a minor setback. Just dirt and water can produce fresh life. When all our personal agonies and tortured destinies are long forgotten, nature will continue to regenerate - as callous in ending life as it is generous in creating it. All with a supreme indifference.

We forget the latent power hidden below the ground: those complex root systems that escaped any effect of the ice storm. No matter how hairy, rubbery, or gnarled, it's roots that ensure a tree's survival. In the same way, our community roots continue to keep the city alive and blooming, in spite of the vicissitudes inflicted on us by outside forces. We lose a few branches of our civic family (to Toronto, say), but there will be new growth, or scions to be grafted on to the main trunk - all as long as we respect our roots. If we do, there will always be citizens ready to demonstrate their love of their city by showing up to tend our legacy of parkland.

May 28, 1998

FROM SOAP BOX TO TINDER BOX

It was May 8. A man named Richard Hugo came to Westmount City Hall to get a permit to deliver circulars "between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. above Sherbrooke". We, in common with just about all municipalities, have a by-law to regulate the distribution of pamphlets door-to-door: you know, they must be completely inserted in the mail box and not left on the porch. The carrier must not ring the doorbell or walk on the lawn. That sort of thing. The clerk asked what was in it. "Reflections on Canadian Unity" came the reply. After paying the \$5.00 fee, M. Hugo left.

On the sunny Sunday morning of May 17, I got a call from the police. They said that people were indeed distributing a pamphlet of that title. Problem was, it was written by the "*Mouvement de Libération Nationale du Québec*". After the police faxed me a copy, I asked for an immediate inquiry. The contents were threatening, especially since it pointedly reminded the reader of the letter-box bombings of 35 years ago here in Westmount.

The next day - Victoria Day - I learned about the permit. Furious, I got on the phone to our Director-General and demanded what the hell were we doing giving out a permit to distribute this kind of tripe?

After I calmed down, I realised that there was some sense in a by-law that regulated delivery, but stopped short of regulating content, of pamphlets distributed door-to-door. Would our citizens agree to a by-law that allowed the City to refuse distribution of a flyer on the ground that we deemed the contents to be inflammatory, irresponsible or incorrect? That's called censorship. If it contains threats, it's up to the police to lay charges. It's the police that have to determine when a political tract turns into a criminal act.

Mind you, to dignify this pamphlet with the term "political tract" is stretching a point, even if it were free of gratuitous psychological threats. Its "thesis" was that, in the event of partition, the enclave of Westmount would suffer from being cut off from the City of Montreal that engirds us: we would have no water, electricity, garbage dumps - not even firefighters. (We have our own Fire Brigade, but I nigger.) It warns we could be reduced to collecting rainwater to survive. References are made to the Americans in Tehran and the plight of West Berlin.

Now, even 18 months ago when I made public my objections to the partition strategy as being unworkable (as well as unwise), I jocularly referred to a Checkpoint Charlie at Murray's Restaurant and passport control for students entering Dawson College. But the writer of this pamphlet takes such a scenario seriously and used it as his basis for threatening a "living hell" in post-partition Westmount. It would be laughable in any other context.

The Achilles heel of the partitionists' approach - at least with regard to getting individual municipalities to declare they will remain with Canada in the event of separation - is its inherent impracticability, which the writer of this pamphlet has unwittingly proven. But the absurdity of his thesis does not mitigate the despicable nature of his veiled threats.

In its press release, this group said "depending on the reaction of Mayor Peter Trent and citizens, other operations are planned in the months to come".

It was only later that their leader, Raymond Villeneuve, learned that Westmount has never adopted a partitionist resolution and, moreover, that I personally have always been against a partitionist strategy. He therefore exhorted my citizens to support me. Talk about being hugged by a viper! Well, if it makes him go away, I suppose can live with such comments.

Unfortunately, the media covered this event like a blanket. I got no calls from citizens, but I spent Victoria Day fielding calls from five TV stations and four radio stations. Media coverage and call-in programmes had the effect of boosting the total calls to Police, Public Security, and City Hall to about fifty. Not an avalanche, but not a light dusting. Some callers were unhappy with my relatively mild public stance. They also insisted we "do something". Well, I had decided at the outset not to add fuel to the flame by overreacting. That just plays into their hands. A fire-and-brimstone reaction, combined with that heavy media play, would have easily raised the temperature. Which is precisely what this bunch wanted.

Which brings me to a larger issue. Because it is so approachable, the municipal level of government is increasingly called on to serve as standard-bearer - or stalking horse - for any number of causes clearly outside a city's jurisdiction. Witness the well-meaning group who recently wanted us to pass a resolution in favour of bilingualism, and to take Ottawa and Quebec to task for not defending our language rights.

Virtually alone among anglophone cities in the Island, Westmount refused to adopt a partitionist resolution, in spite of attempts to press-gang us into the cause. I felt and still feel that using the city as soap box can turn it into a tinder box.

June 10, 1998

PARKING NAPRONS

Funny language, English. Take the term "parking apron". Sounds nice and domestic, soft and neat - hardly concrete-like. Some people talk of "parking pads". Sounds even softer, almost huggable. I've even heard them called "parking slips". Now if that doesn't evoke an image of softness, I don't know what will. All these terms, though, belie their birth: parking aprons were for aircraft, pads for rockets, and slips for boats.

Whence came the word "apron", you might ask. (You might ask.) Well, sloppy speech patterns in the 15th century led to the n-shift: a nadder became an adder, a nauger became an auger. Even a nonper became an umpire. (Ah, but the "n" swung both ways: an ewt became a newt.) So it was that the "n" in napron divorced it to join the article, giving us "an apron". Interestingly, the "n" in napkin - a word from the same French root - remained faithful. And at least no one talks about "parking napkins".

Maybe they should be called "personal parking spaces", or PPS.

Whatever their name, over the last few decades some 500 of these things have been built in Westmount, most of them illegally. This creeping blight has meant the death of many a lawn and doubled the effective width of some streets. Between houses on opposite sides of the street, one is faced with a vista of concrete and asphalt, with no room for large trees. Looking up the streets, the viewer sees ranks of cars parked longitudinally. And when the cars are not there, the concrete very definitely is. And because of access ramps, on-street parking in front of aprons is eliminated.

But the city allowed this to happen. We rarely issued notices of infraction, even when parked cars were blocking front doors - a fire safety problem. Even in the case of the handful of aprons built legally, some have copied their illegal neighbours: they have been extended to accommodate two or even three cars. The simple apron grew to become an overall. (Or a noverall?)

Our recent attempt at banning future aprons while coincidentally cracking down on existing unsafe aprons was, to be fair, a pretty clumsy initiative - compounded by a great deal of misinformation about what we were up to. This is why we have regrouped, yet we have not lost sight of our aim to stop aprons. The same law will be passed in a few months, thereby allowing a window of opportunity for people to get permits for new ones. But don't worry. There will not be a rash of new aprons cropping up: applicants will find even under the existing laws, it's not easy to get a permit. This, of course, helps explain the plethora of illegal aprons all over Westmount. We will also be "grandfathering" existing aprons, except those cases where cars wind up blocking front doors.

So we can't (and never wished to) eliminate most of the existing parking aprons, but we will be putting the blocks on any further spread of a ugly phenomenon.

September 3, 1998

SOUND BEGETS FURY

Mighty strange job, this. Two recent letters were published in THE EXAMINER: one referring to my arrogance and irresponsibility, the other saying my attitude "borders on the immoral". What had I done to precipitate such invective? What was my crime? Well, it's all because I'm against building a \$4.2 million sound barrier when only one-third of the residents clearly said they want the thing built.

Talk of a sound barrier to mask the noise of the Ville-Marie autoroute goes back to the 80s, but concerted pressure started to build up in 1992. Since then, there has been two petitions, two polls, two simulations, one study, and two public meetings on the matter - not to mention dozens of committee meetings involving city staff, Council members, experts, and residents.

In 1992, a petition from about 200 households in the affected area (below Dorchester and St Catherine) prodded Council to commission a \$42,000 feasibility study. This study measured a near-intolerable level of noise from the expressway, especially for people living on streets like Hallowell, Hillside and Prospect. It also confirmed the suspicions of residents about increased traffic: in 1994 there were 154,000 vehicles a weekday using the expressway, up from 60,000 in 1982!

This study recommended a 20-foot metal wall, nearly a mile long, mounted on the parapet of the autoroute itself. The estimated cost was \$4.2 million, of which the Quebec Ministry of Transport could pay one-half. This wall would have reduced noise by 10 decibels, or from 70-75 decibels down to 60-65. The noise reduction is proportional to the height of the wall. So for a substantial drop, an even higher wall is needed.

Yet by thus taming an assault to the ear, one creates an assault to the eye: a barrier would block views. So we staged our first simulation in December 1994 by persuading CP to park 3 boxcars at the foot of various streets to give residents a chance to see what it would look like. We then conducted a detailed poll. Of 127 households reached, only 37 saw the simulation, of which 19 thought it acceptable and 14 said it wasn't.

In December 1995, we went a step further: we got Quebec to string up a ribbon from the light standards on the highway, again to simulate the effect of the wall. Another poll, with 399 households targeted. 218 were actually surveyed, of whom 33% were in favour of a 20-foot sound barrier, 28% were not, and the rest had no opinion. More importantly, when we talked to those households living closest to the highway - within 300 feet - 35% approved, 37% disapproved, and 34% would not commit.

How can Council persuade all Westmounters to shoulder a \$2 million expense - \$300 per average single-family dwelling - when the people most directly affected are divided down the middle on the whole issue?

If that conclusion is arrogant, irresponsible, or immoral...I'm guilty.

September 17, 1998

WESTMOUNT IN 1999: TWO REASONS TO CELEBRATE

On the 19th February, 1874, at 10:00 a.m., six newly-elected councillors of the village municipality of Notre Dame de Grâce met in an upstairs room of a farmhouse. Its owner, one incongruously-named Prosper Savage, rented them the room for \$50 a year, with "wood and fuel" included. This marked the founding of a new village that was destined, after substantial shrinkage, to become today's City of Westmount. The main item of business: choose a mayor. They wasted no time in electing from among themselves the Honourable Eustache Prud'homme, a member of the first Canadian Senate who became the first mayor of Westmount.

Twenty-five years later on June 24, 1899, following an "at home" in a spanking-new building, some 800 people attended the opening of the Westmount Public Library, while a military band played in Westmount Park. It was the first tax-supported library in Quebec.

Only a few months ago it dawned on me that next year would mark the 125th anniversary of the founding of our city. At least our librarians were more on the ball, as they had already started making plans for the 100th anniversary of the Westmount library.

It is a very human quirk that, in the pecking order of anniversaries, the decimal system wins hands (or digits) down: 10th and 100th anniversaries are far more important than any others. But then we atavistically revert to fractions: one-half and one-quarter centuries mean more to us than 10-year milestones. Certainly, a 125th anniversary means more than a 120th, say.

Latin had an adverb for one-and-a-half times: *sesqui* - as in *sesquicentennial*. But there's no fancy name for a 125th anniversary.

Council has struck a steering committee of citizens to plan for the 100th/125th celebrations. We will be staging a number of major events such as receptions, parades, concerts, and tours. Annual events such as Family Day, Winter Carnival, and Canada Day will have a special flavour. For those looking for more intellectual sustenance, the library will be putting on readings, lectures, and displays. A resplendently-restored Victoria Hall will be officially opened near the beginning of the year.

The idea is to get everyone involved: schools, community groups, merchants. Aside from myself and Karin Marks from Council, we are fortunate to have the following volunteers on the steering committee: Ann Birks, Beryl Bowser, Victor Drury, Virginia Elliott, Margo Hall, Sue Khan, Judy Martin, Robert Vézina, Rhoda Vineberg, and Joan Winser. Specific event committees will shortly be formed. City employees, both from the library and from City Hall are also involved.

All events we hope to carry off in style, with substance, but without too much seriousness. Watch this space and the rest of this newspaper for more news of this double-barrelled celebration. Next year, it'll be time to kick up our heels a bit.

October 1, 1998

THE SIGNS OF THE CROSS

They went up a year ago, those blue and white "NO" signs. Nine months after they were planted in strategic spots in Westmount, I began to hear from a few people in favour of their removal. The first was a sovereigntist who had, unsurprisingly, an aversion for the word NO. Him I politely ignored. Then inveterate Council-goer Don Wedge told me, if we were going to keep them up, at least paint the wood supports and clean off the graffiti. Once in a while an out-of-towner or a not-in-the-know towner would ask, "what do they mean, anyway - our city says NO? To what?" They couldn't make out the reference to the \$500 million (now \$375m) bill from Quebec.

Ah, but the federalists relished the display of that word. And the language-of-outdoor-sign freaks savoured the sight of English on signs in darkest Quebec, where the light of the language of insidious Albion is not normally allowed to penetrate. And the PQ-bashers (not necessarily all members of the latter tribe) loved the idea of Westmount thumbing its nose at Quebec.

But the signs were getting a bit shop-worn. So, on the anniversary of the monster rally in Verdun that was led by yours truly as president of the suburban mayors, we proudly retired our colours. The flags are no longer flying, but the battle continues, having moved into the courtroom. We are challenging the legality of this craven downloading. Westmount was the first city to pass a resolution authorizing taking out an injunction against Quebec. 20 other Island cities followed suit.

Do we have a case?

Well, what started out as a transfer of responsibilities (mostly the costs of school bussing - which would have cost us little), the downloading exercise degenerated into a fiscal hijack with the sole purpose of balancing the government's own budget. With utmost cynicism, Quebec, rather than having to raise income taxes, turns the cities into tax collectors - and pockets all the pelf. And they have the effrontery to call this fiscal reform.

Not so fast, say our lawyers. The 1867 Canadian constitution prohibits provinces from imposing an indirect tax. And when Quebec sends a bill to Westmount of \$2,753,794 per year with no services rendered, and expects the Westmount taxpayer (that's you) in turn to pick up the tab: why, that's indirect taxation. In other words, Westmount City Council can't be required to impose a tax on its citizens unless the proceeds of that tax go to pay for strictly municipal services.

Win or lose this legal challenge, we at City Hall have been furiously trying to see how much we can absorb of this \$2.75-million hit to our budget of \$50-million - not an easy job, as, unlike just about every other city in Quebec (and certainly unlike the government itself), we have frozen local spending for the last eight years!

October 22, 1998

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL. SO FAR.

There is only one local issue that has lasted as long as my entire career as an elected official. It has died away from view from time to time, only to burst into recrudescence with renewed vigour. This hardy perennial of Westmount politics inevitably guarantees media attention, and, very often, elicits a good deal of emotion.

The issue? The Westmount Train Station.

One month after my mandate began in November 1983 as alderman (it was so long ago we called ourselves aldermen, not that desexed title 'councillor'), I met with CP Rail about the shortly-to-be-redundant railway station. They made me an offer to sell the station to the city for \$1, on the condition it be moved. CP was also prepared to pay a small amount to take it off their hands, rather pointedly offering an amount equivalent to the cost of demolition, or about \$15,000. They would give us no land.

Over the next 15 years, that little building sat there accusingly while a whole bewildering series of schemes were floated as to what could be done with it. Art gallery, transportation museum, library annex, shop, restaurant (lots of those!), school, community centre, seniors' residence, even a chapel. And, way back in January, 1985, was a suggestion it become a permanent home for the Westmount Historical Association.

This building, which had sheltered many a traveller for generations with its generous eaves and welcoming wooden benches, didn't lack for champions, but the city was looking for a permanent solution. (And, as long as the 15-acre site to the south was up for residential development, the station could serve as its gateway. A 10% parkland contribution on 15 acres would have allowed the station to be free of any buildings around it.)

One roadblock that took a decade to resolve was CP's insistence on moving the station for safety reasons. However, common sense, historical convention, and simple economics required that it stay put.

The National Transportation Agency approved the transfer to the city in 1990. In December, 1993, I wrote to CP, offering to buy the station for \$1, a long as it included the "vacant lot to the east of the station...along with the parking lot in front". I got turned down. Then I got the idea of incorporating it into a new police and fire station: in my view, an elegant way to recycle the station sympathetically. The requisite zoning change was narrowly defeated after a bitter struggle.

In November 1997, CP also offered the station to the WHA. One small hitch. The proposed 32-house residential project that would surround the beleaguered station would have to be approved by the city.

The new deal we have brokered keeps some key views of the station (especially the important view from the Glen). The city gets two-thirds of an acre of parkland for \$250,000. And with the WHA's help, the station will be restored. And the WHA gets a new home into the bargain.

November 12, 1998

MASS TRANSIT: GLORIA MUNDI?

I have been a user of public transport ever since I climbed aboard my first bus - a red double-decker, one of those improbable beasts that lurch around London to this day. Grabbing the pole as if at a carousel ride, I jumped up onto that rubber-floored open platform that glided along inches above the pavement. A conductor cranked out tickets from a metal roll, while putting my sixpence in one of a series of chrome cylinders attached to his belt. Meanwhile, the driver remained unapproachable in his glassed-in cabin up front, across from the chattering motor that excreted oily-blue fumes.

And then the Underground. A tubular train suddenly arrived like a piston at the tubular station with a heart-stopping whoosh. But the escalators worked, the trains had corrugated teak floors, there was fabric on the seats, the strap hangers were leather, and the windows actually opened.

I then went on to Toronto, only to get nauseated by streetcars that swayed from side to side while jerking backward whenever a car got in the way. Streetcars would noisily gnash the steel rails on changing direction.

With the typical Canadian cultural subservience of the day, the Toronto subway was patterned after the London Underground, and the metro in Montreal was patterned after the Paris metro - without the bathroom-tiled stations. For some inexplicable reason, Montreal decided to go with rubber wheels on concrete track, copying an abandoned Parisian experiment. This means our trains cannot run outside.

But had not the Montreal metro been built, our public transport would be even less used than it is. In 1952, Montreal could boast a ridership of 368 million with only 779 km of two-way bus routes. By the time the metro started operating in 1966, there were only 269 million riders on 1410 km of bus routes. Today, we have 339 million riders of both metro and busses, after a high-water mark of 364 million in 1986. Ridership has levelled off.

In February I became a member of the board of directors of the MUCTC. Over the next month, we shall be under massive pressure to cut costs and up fares. Why? In 1992, when Quebec wiped out \$150 million of funding to the MUCTC (remember the Ryan Reform?), the Island cities stepped up to the plate and funded it all, mostly through the dreaded surtax. With this latest round of Quebec downloading (the Trudel Reform - oh, how I mistrust the word reform!), the cities are in no mood to shoulder all the cost themselves. They want the MUC and the MUCTC to chip in.

With monthly passes costing only 70% of the North American average - in Toronto, they're almost double - can we continue to charge only \$45.00? As for cost control, the MUCTC has cut the number of employees from 8,000 in 1990 to an estimated 7116 by the end of this year.

What about privatization? That's what happened in London. Next thing you know, those red busses might go the way of red cast-iron phone boxes.

November 26, 1998

BOURQUE REDUX

In getting elected November 1, especially by such an impressive margin, Pierre Bourque has broken all the rules in politics. Except the first one: there are no rules.

Certainly it has given the lie to what I and my elected brethren consider to be a political maxim: if the media dislike you, there is still some hope of redemption; but if they laugh at you, you're toast. For a year, Bourque was the butt of ridicule in the newspapers. This relegation to the scribbler's purgatory of derision did not seem to hurt him one bit during the election.

Significantly, the electronic media did not nor could not make fun of Bourque: TV has yet to create its version of the political cartoon, for one thing. And TV has no editorials. The point of all this is that most voters don't read newspapers. They watch TV and listen to radio. And, as well, by indefatigably working the neighbourhoods, the populist Bourque won the hearts of people. A municipal campaign is still very much a ground war.

Another received wisdom is that you need a machine, a stable political party to win. Much was made of the disarray of Vision Montreal. But Bourque is the master of the nonce party. People join, quit, or are thrown out of his party with great regularity. It's the political equivalent of Brownian motion - the random movement of particles in a fluid. But it works. That's because parties have no place in municipal politics. They are an artificiality, a construct introduced by Drapeau to suit his own designs.

The tradition in politics, whether federal, provincial, or municipal, is that a bureaucrat rarely becomes a politician (and never vice versa). It was felt an elected official should "come from the outside" to oversee the bureaucracy. Bourque certainly broke that mould. And his competitor Duchesneau, too. This phenomenon of civil servant becoming civil master is not limited to Montreal. Five Montreal Island suburban mayors work or worked for a municipality before becoming mayor. Certainly they can rely on a pension to supplement their exiguous (or, in Bourque's case, renounced) mayor's salary, and they understand the workings of local government.

However he did it, Bourque is back in the saddle - with nary a burr. And he seems to want to mix it up with the Island suburban mayors. He recently announced *ex cathedra* he would put his man in to head up the MUCTC, ignoring Mayor Ryan who, by tradition, has another four years. Perhaps the last thing Bourque the annexationist wants is peace between us. By picturing us as obstreperous and parochial, he can go to Quebec asking, "who will free me from these turbulent mayors?". The only solution is "one island one city". The Ministry of Municipal Affairs has for years planned Island mergers. So with the complicity of a more-assured Bourque and another (gulp!) PQ regime, the pressure to amalgamate will continue.

Let's hope, in this respect, the only victory he savours is his election.

January 14, 1999

O CHRISTMAS PALM

After a few decades of constant importuning from my sister, I finally broke down and agreed to spend Christmas with her and her family. Why is this remarkable? Well, you see, my sister lives in California - in Orange County. I could never imagine spending Xmas surrounded by palms, highways, and have-a-nice-days. A whole bunch of quotes flooded to mind, none of them flattering to L.A.: "It's the land of perpetual pubescence" (Ashley Montagu); "Californians invented the concept of life-style. This alone warrants their doom (Don DeLillo); and, my favourite from Fred Allen: "California is a nice place to live - if you happen to be an orange".

It was all a bit surreal, eating Christmas goose (barbecued on a spit), turkey (roasted), mince pies, Christmas pudding, fruit cake, and trifle - in a word, a transplanted English Christmas under the unrelenting sun.

Actually, Laguna Hills is a lovely community, but nobody lives there. They are either on the freeway or at work. During my long walks in streets and trails I met only one pedestrian, who looked at me quizzically. I set off innumerable guard dogs barking. Even in the "gated communities", with clusters of pretentious houses protected by a palisade of concrete walls, shutting the world and reality out - even they seemed uninhabited. During the entire week, I saw one taxi and no busses. The impeccably clean streets were deserted. The sidewalks were so white, smooth and crack-free - it takes a mayor to notice these things - they looked as if they were holystoned like the deck of a ship.

Even the garbage was removed mechanically: trucks with robot arms grab those huge, squarish plastic containers on wheels that stand guard like khaki and olive sentinels outside every house. [Woody Allen: "they don't throw their garbage away in L.A. They make it into television shows".]

Since I had a thwarted break-in while I was away, I took a special interest in policing down there. Per-resident spending for police in Orange County is \$250 Can., compared to \$225 in the MUC. But the number of police officers per 1,000 people is only 1.33 there, compared to 2.25 here.

Unlike the total dependency on property taxes here, Californian cities get a percentage of the sales tax (as we did here before 1980). Cities can even impose their own tax; again, collected by the state. There's no talk of mergers there; on the contrary, cities are threatening secession - and it's not the fault of San Andreas. San Pedro and Playa del Rey want to secede from the city of Los Angeles - where, by the way, labour unions are seriously planning to take over City Hall in next year's municipal elections.

Speaking of the San Andreas fault: it occurred to me that Canadians seem to have to live with the chronic threat of political separation; Californians have to live with the threat of physical separation. Take your pick.

I'll take our political and meteorological climate. But it was a nice break.

February 4, 1999

VICTORIA HALL: A DOWAGER REJUVENATED

One of my minor passions is refurbishing things. I love to remove years of grime and gunk from solid old objects like candlesticks or brass door knobs. I like to see an oil painting come alive while being revarnished, or a piece of architectural detailing relieved of generations of encrusted paint. So I got a small thrill of satisfaction the other day while watching workmen at Victoria Hall remove layers of cheap floor coverings to get at the $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch solid oak flooring that once graced - and will grace again - the concert hall. First they ripped off all the vinyl-asbestos tile stuck down in 1984, along with a thin plywood underlay. Next, they removed yet another covering of even older tiles by heating them and the black mastic underneath with a huge blow-torch. Tiles were then lifted off with an ice scraper.

After some heavy-duty sanding, the original floor was revealed. Aside from some blackening in the corner owing to water damage, the floor was in good shape. Not in the herring-bone pattern I hoped we would find, but a handsome floor just the same. We all asked the obvious question: why did they stick down linoleum tiles on perfectly good hardwood? I guess in those pre-urethane days, constant maintenance and waxing was a pain.

Our still-dignified dowager, now 74 years old, was in need of more than cosmetic repair. Slapping down a coat of paint or floor tiles as we did in 1984 was not enough this time around. The windows were rotting, roof leaking, the electrical system antiquated. There was no air conditioning.

Decorative plasterwork sprouted a kind of canker - an exfoliation of its surface caused by the leaching of water coming in from holes in the roof. There was surface-mounted conduit and gyproc partitions, a leftover from 1995 when Victoria Hall served as a temporary library.

And as for toilets: in the whole building, there were three(!) fixtures for women, seven for men. Total fixtures will more than double. Toilets will have traditional white tiles and marble countertops and partitions. We'll be recycling some of the old marble partitions, in fact.

There will be a gallery linking Victoria Hall to the Palm House and the library. It is, technically, a glazed loggia. With a glass roof and wall, it will be a bright, airy place to walk through, stop for a coffee, or admire art.

I have always felt that the outside of Victoria Hall was a bit forbidding - it's more like an armoury than a civic centre. But the concert hall has magnificent proportions. As does my favourite room - the Lodge Room. Its raised platforms, padded doors, vaulted ceiling, oak wardrobes and "Juliette" balcony all lend that room a mystery that recalls its original use.

New curtains and colours may soften the stern aspect of Victoria Hall, but they won't hide its endearing quirkiness and solidity.

While we are on budget with the Victoria Hall project, we're running about a month later than scheduled. But it will be worth the wait.

February 25, 1999

OUR ACTING COUNCIL

“Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue: but if you mouth it...I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines.”

When I first proposed to a highly-skeptical Council that they act in a little skit recreating the first Council meeting of 125 years ago, I coated the pill by telling them that, you know, they won't really have to memorise their lines - they could crib from a cheat sheet on the table in front of them. Little did they know that the short skit would grow into a 45-minute playlet, complete with an elaborate set, a professional stage-manager, and a real star - George Bowser. Did they ever rise to the occasion. Speaking of George, he was told his only contribution to our Victorian Soirée would be to sing a couple of minstrel songs with me and Councillor Marks. Ha!

At that point, my only worry was the Westmount Council Players might come down with a case of stage fright. On the contrary, they performed like professionals, and didn't even blow a line. But half the cast did come down with the flu at one point or another, something that really hampered rehearsals, which were held in City Hall, my basement, Karin Marks' living room, and, finally, Victoria Hall - eight rehearsals in all. Herb Bercovitz, a real trouper, was severely suffering from flu during the actual performance.

When you are out there on stage, you are made keenly aware of the interdependency of actors: one forgotten cue, and the whole fabric of the play can become unravelled. If your fellow actor performs well, so do you - and through this synergy, the quality of the production skyrockets.

How do I know? Eruptions of dramatic activity have occurred sporadically over my lifetime; like spots, they first came out in high school when I played Bassanio in the Merchant of Venice, to be followed by a few plays at university. That, plus playing the psychiatrist in Harvey and Billy in a Lakeshore Players' production of California Suite have been the sum total of my acting experience. And this was the first time I have ever written a play - if you can call it that. It took Alexandre Hausvater to come up with many suggestions to improve the dramatic quality of my script.

The idea came when I read that the first Council meeting was held upstairs in Prospère Sauvage's farmhouse. This rather bizarre arrangement suggested a rich vein of humour to be mined, with its implied contrast of francophone farmers and anglophone merchants. The real mother-lode was the by-law “concerning Decency and Good Morals and Public Nuisances”. One couldn't invent its provisions, such as the prohibition of houses of ill fame, cockfighting, dogfighting, or driving faster than at an ordinary trot.

A sense of community, like a play, is a group effort that has to be worked on. Last Friday's evening of acting, dancing, eating, and singing reflected our extended family's sense of history and sense of belonging.

March 11, 1999

DISPOSING OF HISTORY

Last Saturday, I walked up Atwater to a deserted grey fieldstone building. I examined its six acres of grounds adorned with hundreds of straight old trees that stuck out of encrusted snow like sentinels. And, on reminiscing about its glory days in full summer, I felt a bit like Charles Ryder in *Brideshead Revisited*. But this was the former Army Headquarters revisited and I was just north of Sherbrooke street in Montreal, not in Wiltshire.

In a now-rare burst of military *savoir-vivre*, "Land Force Quebec Area" used to invite various notables each Canada Day to an at-home, *style champêtre*. A huge tent would be set up on the grassed parterre for guests - both civilian and military - who needed respite from the sun. The band played, the flags flew, and the brass and boots shone. The very thing to demystify the military and to promote Canadian patriotism.

I used to attend, blue-blazered as mayor, and, after being appointed Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel of the Royal Montreal Regiment, I would show up in uniform - in summer Tans, in fact. In 1997, "Land Summer Dress" was taken out of service. That same year, in another misguided cost cutting measure, the military decided to get rid of their magnificent demesne on Atwater - an irremediable mistake. It was traded for a mess of pottage in the form of an anonymous strip-windowed industrial three-storey architectural banality that was built in the middle of the Longue-Pointe Garrison compound, safe behind Frost fences and any possible civilian contact. This well-hidden "Metropolitan Headquarters" was opened by the Minister of Defence on the 19th of June, 1998.

When, oh when, will Canada and the military understand that they should be in the public eye, not hide away from it? And when will Canada and Copps understand that it's Canada's presence in Quebec that is needed to boost Canadian unity, not the visual jingoism of give-away Canadian flags.

The loss of this precious piece of history to development is not the fault of the developer. Nor is it, at bottom, the fault of the cash-strapped City of Montreal. The blame has to be laid squarely at the feet of the federal government. You can bet that if this land (dating from 1665) and building (dating from 1803) were in Ottawa, they would never have divested themselves of it so callously. They would not have allowed the Treasury Board to declare it surplus, nor allowed Canada Lands Company to attend to its "commercially-oriented, orderly disposition".

Another villain in the piece is Ottawa's yo-yo budgeting: they slash military funding (and transfer payments!) one day, giving a bit back the next.

On a happier note, I can report to you that my and Councillor Matossian's efforts to ensure that de Lavigne remain a dead-end street seem to have borne fruit. The development plan just approved by Montreal now shows the new street going into this property does not join up with de Lavigne.

March 25, 1999

MEGACITY MANIA

There is a deliciously oddball book about mass human behaviour called *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*. Written in 1841, it chronicles things like the South Sea Bubble, the Crusades, religious relics, and the phenomenon of “tulipomania” that took hold of the Dutch centuries ago. At the height of tulipomania in 1635, people were paying 5,000 florins (about £500 - in really old pounds) for a single rare tulip bulb. That’s flower power.

Well, merger madness or megacity mania has taken Canada by storm over the last few years, with such constructs as Halifax/Dartmouth, Ottawa/Carleton, Hamilton/Wentworth - and, of course, the gigacity of them all: Toronto. Interestingly, there is no discernible equivalent movement in the U.S., where regions like Boston or Atlanta are quite happy with their constellations of around 100 cities. And is anyone bemoaning the lack of progress there?

Mergers are the solution to precisely what problem? And why this sudden craze? Now it’s our turn. Quebec seems to have experienced an *engouement* for those scorched-earth solutions favoured by Bomber Harris in Ontario - who is not normally a source of inspiration for the PQ. Oh well, the devil can cite scripture for his purpose, I suppose.

We’re dealing with a herd mentality. A herd or a flock in Latin is *grex*, *gregis* whence gregarious, congregate (with the herd), segregate (apart from the herd), aggregate (herd together), and egregious (out of the herd; now meaning outstandingly bad). I’m tempted to say Toronto is an egregious aggregation.

Nearly eight years ago, on getting elected mayor for the first time, I said “we have to defend Westmount against the homogenising and centralising forces across the Island of Montreal. Having 27 messy little cities in the MUC probably offends Quebec City’s sense of neatness.” Things have not got better.

So what is behind the latest salvo in the war for municipal aggregation? From whom came last Friday’s splashy announcement of “one island, three cities”? Well, it all started with the downloading of the \$375 million. At the time, as a sop to mayors enraged by such cowardly passing of the buck, the province promised to create a commission to look into the whole question of municipal fiscal matters. Off and running 28 May, 1998, its mandate included examining how to improve fiscal equity and efficiency, how to diversify municipal taxation powers - but certainly not how to play with municipal boundaries.

It was this body that, according to last week’s *La Presse*, will recommend Island amalgamations to create three cities. Westmount and others would be gobbled up by Montreal to create a city of about 1.1 million people, with another city in the west of 400,000, and one in the east of about 300,000.

Is Louise Harel and her government using this commission as a stalking horse to get through their own agenda of Island mergers? Once we have determined that this is not just another phoney war, you can be sure your Council will then prepare to do battle with the forces of aggregation. And with megacity mania.

April 8, 1999

MEGACITY MANIA - PART II

Whenever the chance presents itself, I ask a simple question to anyone who favours the idea of Montreal municipal mergers. The question is, “Why?” I usually get one of two answers:

- “That’s what they did in Toronto.” (Ah, that explains everything. QED.)
- “We have 28 cities on the Island of Montreal. That’s too many.”

I see. So the main justification for amalgamating cities is that there are too many of them. This is circular reasoning at its best. Or worst. The fancy name for circular reasoning is *petitio principii*, rendered into English as “begging the question”. This is a term from logic that refers to assuming as true the premise of an argument you undertake to prove. (So next time someone says ponderously “that begs the question”, please tell the speaker that “beg” is not just a more impressive word for “raise”.)

Are there too many cities on the Island? I don’t think so. What’s “too many”? Are there too many vineyards in Bordeaux? Too many banks in Canada? Too many anglophone hospitals in Montreal? (Oops. Sorry about that one.) What is so ruddy mystical about the number 1, anyway?

Speaking of numbers, I’ve written over a dozen columns on the subject of mergers since 1992, not to mention some Gazette editorials. In them, I tried to outline the many objections to forced amalgamation: it encourages urban sprawl; it creates a monopoly; it results in huge bureaucracies remote from citizens; it leads to higher costs through diseconomies of scale; it permits one powerful (and not always law-abiding) labour union; it removes bilingual status; it kills volunteerism and a sense of community. And the list goes on.

The best the amalgamationists come up with (other than the “too many cities” non-argument) is that it would rid Montreal of all those suburban parasites. Oh, yes. And it would also create a uniform tax rate. A uniformly high tax rate, I might add. Since when is the mere fact of uniformity a virtue?

Lysiane Gagnon, writing in *La Presse* last week, went on about “the suburban enclaves, the pockets of privilege that dig into the natural territory of Montreal.” Then she wrung her hands about that fact that “even with amalgamation, Montreal will still be much smaller than the megacity in Toronto.” Talk about *urbis* envy. And do you know what? The CN tower is much taller than anything we have here. So?

Are we the parasites that Lysiane Gagnon suggests we are? Not at all. Take the MUC. We Island suburban cities pay \$484 per capita (Westmount: \$1020) to finance the MUC. Montreal citizens pay only \$444 per capita. Overall, the Island suburban cities pay nearly one-half of the cost of running the MUC, even though Montreal benefits from the lion’s share of its services: 58% of its bus service, 62% of its police services, 68% of its sewage service. A whopping 84% of metro stations are found in Montreal.

Since one-third (Westmount: 40%) of Island suburban revenues go to pay for the MUC, we're already partially merged. Let's draw the line right there.

May 13, 1999

PARTS OF IT ARE EXCELLENT

Punch, the now-departed satirical revue started in 1841, printed a much-quoted cartoon that pictured a young curate sitting at the Bishop's breakfast table (this is an old cartoon, folks). The curate, on being asked by the Bishop whether he liked his hard-boiled egg and afraid to say it was bad, blurts out, "parts of it are excellent!"

While I would not be afraid to say the Bédard report was all bad; in point of fact, I must say parts of it are excellent. But much is totally indigestible.

The subtitle of Punch magazine was The London Charivari. The word charivari comes to us from French and refers to the banging of pots and pans to express disapproval of someone. (After the tin pan, allez!)

Well, all up and down the whole province last week, one could hear a dissonant medley of dissidence, as mayors assaulted their battery of pots and pans in protest. General consensus: Bédard laid an egg.

Be not too hard, though. His group's report, pretentiously titled "Pact 2000", proposes municipal reforms in three areas: taxation, structures, and labour costs. The fiscal and labour stuff was, for the most part, well-reasoned. But they made a total hash of the structural recommendations, especially with their suggestions of widespread amalgamations and the creation of a new level of government. By the way, the title of this group was the commission on local finances and taxation. You, observant reader, will no doubt notice no reference to political structures.

Some of their fiscal recommendations: cities should have the power to tax based on floor or land area (see my column of March 12, 1992) and to levy different tax rates on land and on buildings; we should return to an annual valuation roll; the unwelcome tax should be drastically pared; school taxes should be cut; cities should have 20% of the sales tax on hotels, restaurants, and entertainment – these are just a few of their excellent ideas. Unfortunately, they get a raspberry for their suggestion that the \$375 million of downloading be made permanent and their whacky premise that real estate taxes are not high enough in Quebec.

They also came up with fiscal measures to combat urban sprawl, which is by far the biggest problem facing the Greater Montreal Region. These fiscal measures, I might add, would help the city of Montreal, and, indeed, obviate the putative need for mergers.

The report favours fees for new development that would pay for indirect costs, such as off-site infrastructure (sewers, libraries, schools). It also recommends tax base sharing: as a city's tax base grows disproportionately with the rest of the region, it has to share some of its new-found wealth.

But why on earth did they come up with the nostrum of mergers? It's as if you can look on cities with years of tradition as so much playdough to be patted together into whatever fantastical forms one feels are appropriate. Oh, for a Punch to satirize such expansive and expensive pipe-dreams.

May 27, 1999

MONTREAL: MISDIRECTION GENERAL

Louis Roquet, a little more than five years ago, was the Director-General of the MUC. And a good one, I might add. He was lured away by Jean Doré to become the Director-General of the City of Montreal. Next thing you know,

Doré was turfed out as mayor. In comes Bourque, who promptly dumps Roquet, saying Montreal doesn't need a Director-General, anyway. He'll simply have all the department heads report to the politicians directly. That's a bit like the vice-presidents in a company reporting to the board of directors. In this case, the chairman. Now, just about every city in North America has a D.G., except they (correctly) call them city managers. In fact, Westmount was the first city in Canada to hire one - in 1912, I think.

Under increasing pressure - possibly from Quebec - Bourque finally decided to re-establish the position of Director-General. But where to get one? Why, back at the old hunting ground, the MUC. By that time, the MUC had promoted Gérard Divay to D.G. So Bourque does a Doré by poaching Divay from the MUC and installing him as D.G. of Montreal. Well, that, too, didn't last too long. Divay had the misfortune to take his new job seriously and in November 1998 wrote a scathing report on the state of management at City Hall. He called its organizational vision dysfunctional, archaic, and sclerotic. So Bourque dealt with the problem, right enough. He fired Divay.

Divay is not alone in his views. Even the city's auditor recently sent off rockets. The Bédard report also raises serious questions about Montreal's management, but that doesn't stop the authors from recommending annexations to Montreal. By the time you read this, Bourque will have given his formal reaction to the Bédard report. I'm sure he'll once again plump for "one island, one city". Now, even Agnès Gruda, herself a fan of amalgamation, has written in *La Presse* that annexations should not proceed until Montreal gets its house in order.

How bad are things? Well, for starters, Montreal spends 35% more per capita to provide local (that is, non-MUC) services than the rest of the Island cities. If you think that's worrisome, how about this: Montreal has about 11,000 employees. (They don't really know for sure. And a whole bunch are paid to do nothing.) Now, that's 10.9 people per 1000 citizens. The rest of the cities have 6.9. Therefore, Montreal has 60% more employees per citizen! And I'll leave you to judge whether we're talking the same quality of services.

"One island, one city" means folding the MUC and all Island cities into the City of Montreal. Montreal would see its budget expand from \$1.8 billion to \$4.1 billion. The number of employees would grow to 23,000 - all reporting, naturally, to Bourque. If the MUCTC were counted in, that's 30,000 all told.

Many studies, some even quoted by Bédard, confirm there are no economies of scale following municipal mergers. In the case of amalgamation with Montreal, there would not only be diseconomies of scale, but mismanagement of scale. God help us.

June 10, 1999

BREAD AND CIRCUSES...AND DEBT AND TRUSTEESHIP

With all this talk of amalgamation, no one has explained just how getting bigger will improve the deplorable management of the City of Montreal – and that’s whether we’re talking one island, one city, or one island, five cities. (Now that the Provincial government has discovered that francophones only make up 53.8% of the Island population, and that number will soon drop below the magic 50%, it seems Quebec is (predictably) getting cold feet about having just one mayor ruling such a polyglot realm. It would become too big an impure-woollen power base.)

Bad management seems to have dogged Montreal over the years. Montreal in this century has been run by a series of populist mayors who spent money on extravagant projects, and whose city as a consequence regularly got put into trusteeship by the Provincial government. Médéric Martin, the mayor from 1914 to 1928, started this profligate tradition. He headed such a corrupt and bankrupt administration that the government stepped in, made him a figurehead, and ran the city from 1918 to 1921.

History repeated itself when Camillien Houde became mayor in 1928. He was in power – off and on – until 1954. He, too, ruled over a corrupt administration. The government put the city under trusteeship twice during his mandate. The second time, in 1940, the city was so much in debt that it could not redeem its maturing bonds.

With Jean Drapeau’s election in 1954, the free-spending ways continued. He started to build the métro in 1961 before he got any sort of financial aid from the province or the suburbs. He got bailed out of Expo 67’s overruns by a Federal government that contributed 75% of the cost. Then there were the costly children of Expo: remember Man and His World? And the fact that Montreal just had to have (and support) a baseball team? And then, shortly before the Olympics were to take place, the provincial government had to step in and take over Drapeau’s grandiose plans and shaky management. Even though the government bailed out Montreal and picked up most of the billion-dollar tab, Montrealers still got stuck with a bill for \$200 million.

A more subtle form of trusteeship was the creation of the MUC in 1970, which was Quebec’s way of taking the police away from Montreal. This was the government’s response to violent protests, both by police who felt they were underpaid compared to Toronto cops, and, later, by police and firemen furious with the city for holding back pension funds. The police actually going on strike was the final straw.

Even if personally austere, Drapeau had an extravagant, secretive, and autocratic political style. That, and the ravaging of the city’s architectural heritage, led to the rise of Jean Doré. But spending, fuelled this time by out-of-date leftist doctrine, continued apace. Socialism replaced imperialism. Even if well-meaning, Doré’s party wanted to spend their way to prosperity. To be continued.

June 24, 1999

ONLY QUEBEC CAN HELP MONTREAL

Firms used to locate their R&D departments far away from the city in bucolic surroundings designed to stimulate creativity. Unfortunately, they were also far removed from the needs of the factory or of clients. The result was often an other-worldliness and irrelevance in much of their work. The same goes for any governmental apparatus operating in such artificial constructs as Washington, Brasilia, Canberra, and Ottawa. Quebec City is a provincial example of this disjunctive management. The best thing for both the province and the city of Montreal would be to have the capital here: there would be less disconnectedness and no inter-city jealousies. We can dream.

As I make my rounds visiting influential Westmounters, enlisting their help to ensure Westmount does not get swallowed up by Montreal, many echo the same thought: whatever happens, we must come to the aid of Montreal.

Well, it's Quebec and its ignorance of Montreal that has helped cause the mess Montreal finds itself in; in other words, the way to get the city back on its feet requires a sea change in provincial government legislation and policy – which means getting away from their obsession with the regions. Let me explain. There are two main causes of Montreal's sorry state: urban sprawl and bad city management. Quebec can help on both counts.

Quebec has actively encouraged urban sprawl in the Montreal region through the dezoning of agricultural land, by subsidising off-island housing, by over-building of highways, and by wiping out funding for public transit.

Quebec also has the power to create the conditions under which good management can flourish in Montreal. Let me count the ways:

- Modify labour laws to have a fair balance of power and to get rid of such aberrations as Montreal having to hire a minimum number of blue collars whether they're needed or not.
- Get rid of the political party system. Parties spring up almost overnight; usually their only reason to exist is to act as a clique for their leader. Councillors should vote with their conscience, not with their party.
- Stop Montreal from being the poverty magnet for the province. As the Bédard report recommended, low cost housing should be regionally distributed, not mainly concentrated in the city of Montreal.
- Abolish the enabling legislation that hinders condominium conversion. With three-quarters of Montreal voters being tenants – the highest ratio in North America – there needs to be a greater portion of owners.
- Require that citizens of Montreal be given veto power over zoning amendments and loan by-laws. In any other city, authority to borrow for new projects can be rejected by a referendum if enough citizens wish.
- Cut the power of the Executive Committee and permit decentralisation of not just public consultation, but of the delivery of services.

- Quebec must rid itself of the notion that mergers are a cure. Sweeping Montreal's problems under a bigger rug won't make them go away.

September 9, 1999

HERE I GO AGAIN

You would think that by now I would be fed up with mayoring, that cynicism and weariness would have taken their toll, and that the impulse to step off the whirligig of politics would have been irresistible. Yet to no one's surprise – least of all my own – I have announced I am going to run for mayor once again. Unlike Chief Justice Tony Lamer, I still have fire in the belly – although at times I think it's just heartburn.

Besides, what choice do I have? How could I step down at this difficult moment in Westmount's 125-year history - when it is not entirely certain that Westmount's name will still grace a map a few years from now?

Westmount's demise could come about in two ways: either we suffer sudden death by Bourque's one-island-one-city scheme or we contemplate the slow strangulation implicit in the Harel proposition. The latter method is much more likely to happen. If ever Louise Harel succeeds in installing a new level of directly-elected government in the Greater Montreal Region, it won't be long before its constituent cities become marginalized into sheer irrelevance. That's precisely what happened in Toronto. The insidious effect of Harel's plan would be the death by a thousand cuts to local services, starting with fire protection. (The counter-argument to my amalgamation-by-the-back-door thesis is that Quebec would never permit a megacity, as it would become a competing power. Even if they did get cold feet, we would still be stuck with a monster that would make the MUC look like a pussycat.)

Now, while it would be easy to fire up every living, breathing Westmouter in the face of a direct threat of annexation by Montreal, it'll be hard to get people to mount the barricades against the creation of a new government.

Sometimes I get angry. I get angry at the gall of Mayor Bourque and his obsession with extending his city's mismanagement and mediocrity to include us, all the while burling on about "Montreal needs oxygen". I get angry about the Quebec government's arrogance and their cloud-cuckoo-landish proposals for yet another level of government – a complex scaffolding of bureaucracy that would be a mockery of democracy. This *dirigiste* belief that structures solve problems must stop.

So I shall remain on the field. But, you know, all this battling has exacted its price: photos of me when I first ran in 1991 show few gray hairs. The war between ebony and ivory is progressing apace with ivory winning the crown, so to speak. I may have caused the city to stay in the black, but the city has not returned the favour.

Hairsplitting aside, if I could not have counted on such a superb administrator as Bruce St Louis and on the unshakable support and friendship of all members of Council, I doubt if I would run.

I have become very possessive towards this city: it's friendly, it's funky, and it's family. Westmount is everything a city should be. You can depend on me to fight to the last breath to ensure its continued existence

December 9, 1999

WHAT IS WELL BUILT MUST BE WELL DEFENDED

History is forever in the process of being made. Imperceptibly, daily events congeal into the permanence that is the past. Brick by brick, the edifice of history rises with no blueprints and with the sketchiest of plans. All we can do is examine the strange and wonderful structure our ancestors built and hope our children will not be too ashamed of what we put together.

Our own little city of Westmount boasts the richness and complexity that comes with a community built with care, yet we have not allowed this planning to stifle a certain quirkiness. In other words, we grew with the right mix of planning and spontaneity. We are not a gridlike Model City in the mould of the Town of Mount Royal. We are not a city that sprung up fully formed out of nothing.

Indeed, even the way we began is a little strange. On the 19th of February 1874 the village that would eventually become the City of Westmount had its first council meeting. The Honourable Eustache Prud'homme was unanimously (and certainly expeditiously) elected mayor by the other five members of council present. They were gathered in the upstairs room of a local farmhouse that was rented to them for that purpose for \$50 a year, wood and fuel supplied.

At the beginning, there were, however, great pressures to conform to a Presbyterian norm. The new council wasted no time in passing a whole raft of by-laws. By-law No. 2 "concerning Decency and Good Morals and Public Nuisances" prohibited gambling houses and houses of ill fame, cockfighting and dogfighting, profane oaths and blasphemous and obscene language, indecent placards, public bathing, fireworks, and even the throwing out of contents of privies. They also decreed "no person shall drive than at an ordinary trot...within a radius of half a mile from any church."

But by the turn of the century, the council focussed more on controlling the physical appearance of the city; less time was spent on issuing edicts concerning citizens' behaviour. Around 1910, Westmount adopted detailed construction standards (which included the banning of non-masonry construction). These standards were far superior to anything on the Island of Montreal. Zoning laws were equally strict. In 1916, We were also the first city to create an Architectural Commission. And by 1911, Westmount had invested over \$600,000 in parkland – a prodigious sum at the time for such a small municipality. By 1931, we had more park acreage per capita than any other municipality in Quebec.

But the fixation on appropriate behaviour did not totally die out. In 1912, the Victoria Rifles could not build an armoury in Westmount because booze was served in the mess. Westmounters also looked with disdain at Montreal's nightlife, characterised in 1911 by the Westmount News as "vulgar entertainments...that call for the wild excitement that is productive of a nature that is devoid of higher thinking" They also deplored the "obscene political character" of Montreal.

If one ignores the lamentable lapses in the 60s and 70s, Westmount has continued to be very careful about controlling what citizens can build. In fact, our current heritage preservation laws are the strictest in Quebec. But when I took office in 1991, our public buildings were decrepit: the older buildings suffered from neglect and - what was worse - 60s interventions, and the newer buildings were just plain cheaply built. I said that Westmount was living off its capital. Since then we have restored and expanded our library and Victoria Hall, rebuilt the lawnbowling clubhouse, built an electrical substation, and upgraded our Protective Services station. Yet to come is Westmount train station, the greenhouses, and, of course, the arena.

As Westmount grew, the rural got blended with the urban, the palatial with the unprepossessing. This city, where 14.3% of its citizens earn what Statistics Canada classes a "low income", has a demographic reality that belies its fat-cat image. I would not wish to be mayor of a city of the exclusively rich. Westmount probably has the widest diversity in incomes of any city its size in Canada. We are probably home to a few billionaires; we are certainly home to many people of quite modest means.

Westmount also has communities within communities, whether they make up the "below Dorchester" area, the Abbot/Bethune area, Victoria Village, or Priest's Farm. All very different, but all very Westmount nonetheless.

We have achieved a mini-Canada within our borders, where tolerance and neighbourliness is the norm, a comforting place where families can flourish. Where interests and values are shared. We agree on what makes a perfect city: library, parks, local shops, schools. And independence.

But this idyllic little community is threatened by the forces of amalgamation, by Bourque and his fatuous slogan of "one island one city". By megacity megalomania. By the forces of homogenization and uniformity. By the big-box approach to city management. Rather than being inspired by a city like Westmount, with its prudent management, respect for built heritage, and sense of belonging, the amalgamationists want to destroy rather than emulate. We cannot allow mediocrity to win over quality.

So as we look forward to a possible sesquicentennial, our future's a bit hazy. We have to assert a kind of municipal existentialism. We have to demonstrate that, along with tolerance and good government, Westmount is capable of baring its teeth. As Shakespeare put it "In peace there's nothing so becomes a man as modest stillness and humility. But when the blast of war blows in our ears, then...disguise fair nature with hard-favoured rage". Make no mistake about it. Bourque is launching a hostile takeover. It just remains to be seen when will be the appropriate time for Westmounters to show their mettle. Stay tuned.

We have tremendous strengths to draw on. We are, collectively, a complex product of 125 years. Westmount must live on. We owe it to all the Westmounters who have gone before us and those who, with our determination, will come after us.

February 17, 2000

THE SILENT DEBATE

In a perfect society, ideas would be discussed openly and freely, with opposing arguments getting equal exposure through a compliant media. That is, in a *perfect* society. “Utopia”, however, comes from the Greek meaning “nowhere”. In the here and now of *our* society, people such as I have to bombard the media with an incessant barrage of heavy explosives before a little shrapnel of argument gets through to the reader or viewer. If the message is at all complicated, forget it. Simple messages – and what can be simpler than “one island one city” – slip right through.

One is reduced to trying to get exposure using newspaper op-ed pages, where some sort of commerce of ideas does take place. The rest of the newspaper, and all of TV, is dedicated to “news”. “News” means the reporting on the conflict of personalities, not on the conflict of ideas.

Case in point. While I have had a number of debates with Pierre Bourque, none got reported in the mainstream media – well, at least, the content of these debates never got reported. With one exception: that’s when *La Presse* erroneously reported I called Bourque a dictator. That earned me nearly half of a page. The reporter, who was in the studio during the whole hour-and-a-half radio debate on CJAD, mistook my citing Phyllis Lambert’s calling Bourque a dictator for my calling him a dictator. While I think Ms Lambert is not far off the mark, I do not directly use such *ad hominem* arguments. But knocking your opposition rather than his arguments seems to be the only way to get debates reported. Except, I must say, in *The Suburban*, which has covered my speeches and debates quite extensively. Closer to home, though, they remain unExamined. And there is not much point in me spending much time preaching to the converted in this column, is there?

This handwringing of mine about lack of coverage has nothing to do with my ego and everything to do with my belief in open discussion. When the Bedard Report launched the debate about amalgamations nearly a year ago, Minister Harel said that it would be healthy to have a public debate on the subject. Do you, dear reader, feel there has been such a thing? I don’t.

Bourque has everything to gain by this media self-censorship. *La Presse* and *Le Devoir*, both of which have taken an editorial position in favour of Bourque’s position, rarely publish op-ed pieces against “one island one city”, and certainly have never reported in any meaningful way the *content* of any debate or speech. *The Gazette*’s coverage is generally far better.

The other night during yet another unreported debate I had with Bourque, I watched Bourque drag out the same pre-packaged PowerPoint presentation that he has been using for nearly a year, I almost understood why journalists have turned a deaf ear.

Anyway, watch out for new offensives soon to be launched by the City of Westmount and the suburban mayors against forced mergers. Coming (I hope) to a TV screen or a newspaper page near you.

September 7, 2000

THE MOMENT OF TRUCE

In the middle of a heated discussion among males, it's not uncommon for someone to form a "T" with his two open hands at right angles. This is supposed to mean, I think, "time out". This faintly irritating sign is in the same league with the "air quotes" people use when some one beckons backwards with their forefingers to indicate quotation marks - in reality looking as if they were trying to imitate a climbing rodent.

Well, Louis Bernard – he who was named by Premier Bouchard to make recommendations for reorganizing Montreal-area municipalities – has signalled a "time out" (imagine both air quotes and a hand T, please) in the battle between Pierre Bourque and the rest of the Island mayors. He has proposed what pleases him to call a compromise between Bourque's one-island-one-city fixation and our if-it-ain't-broke-don't-fix-it position.

What Bernard proposed to us on the 3rd of August was the creation of a new, Island-wide city divided into 60 boroughs, each with limited powers and each having a representative on the new city council, some of whom would serve as "mayor" of the borough. Citizens would vote for 1) local councillors, 2) "new city" councillors and 3) a "new city" mayor. Got It?

Any city that did not measure up to his magic number of 30,000 citizens would either be summarily wiped off the map (the lot of 8 small cities) or be plumped up by acquiring citizens from neighbours. Montreal itself would be divided into 9 boroughs. Bilingual cities would keep their status.

For years I have argued for splitting up Montreal into more manageable units - favouring *fission* over *fusion*. For the first time, Quebec is not only admitting Montreal is too big to be run efficiently, but is suggesting the corollary: decentralisation is the best way to deliver municipal services.

As it stands, the Bernard proposal is completely unacceptable: it would eviscerate local cities by appropriating key services for the new city: fire brigades, industrial parks, major recreational parks and festivals, arterial roads, water production and distribution, and sewer systems. While we could let some things go, our fire brigade, for example, is untouchable.

A committee of mayors and I are conjuring up a counterproposal. Even if it were accepted, the thing that could keep me awake at night is the fear that our city would suffer a death by attrition, or what Mayor Yves Ryan calls amalgamation in slow motion. Just the direct election of a central mayor would put us on that slippery slope, not to mention the erosion of our powers. That's what happened in Toronto. But do we have a choice?

And even as we are working on a counterproposal, so is Bourque – his will be made public the 19th of September. The 30th of September, Bernard will make his report. The next key date is the 19th of November when you, dear citizen, will have your say in a referendum on the future of your city. By that time the white flag will be no longer flying. Let's make sure the Westmount flag will replace it. Forever. That would suit me to a "T".

GAZETTE OPINION PIECE – 8 MARCH, 1996**THE NEW REGIONOMICS: THE ASCENDANCY OF THE URBAN**

In our unending debate on Canadian federalism or Quebec sovereignty, we are overlooking an important worldwide phenomenon: the emergence of urban regions as the nexus of power.

Sovereignists, Federalists, and, now, Partitionists are waging a 19th century battle over the nature of provincial powers, status or boundaries. As long as we are preoccupied with such arcana, our destiny is in hock while other peoples of the world concentrate their energies on developing their urban regions. The nation-state itself may eventually be superannuated, as national boundaries slowly become Maginot lines in the 21st century.

In any future constitutional tug-of-war, the urban regions of Canada should be the rope, not Federal/Provincial power-sharing. But old habits die hard. Our country and provinces were staked out in the days when gaining military advantage or protecting resources meant control of vast expanses of land. The emphasis should now shift to urban regions. And by urban regions I don't mean the artificial and anachronistic power-bases like Ottawa and Quebec City, but the three metropolitan areas that will soon produce nearly half of Canada's economic output.

Canadian cities are still in thrall to their provincial masters. It's particularly evident here in Quebec. Now, when 80% of Quebec's population was rural and cities were little more than comfortable trading posts, that made sense. But today, 80% of Quebec's population is urban - and our structures have changed very little since 1867. Quebec still suffers from what I call the tyranny of the rurality. It has inherited political structures from a period when muscle-power dominated the economic landscape. Now it's brainpower. And brainpower flourishes in large urban agglomerations. Yet laws directly affecting our metropolis are concocted in Quebec City by bureaucrats who have little knowledge of what is a modern cosmopolitan centre.

Any new constitutional deal must give formal status and powers to the urban municipalities. It's nothing short of scandalous to treat the most important demographic structures that have emerged in this century as a bunch of immature children.

Look what happened when Quebec brought in Bill 102 - the law creating the Montreal Metropolitan Transport Agency. The original proposal had the agency run by three appointees selected by Quebec. We, the local mayors, were appalled at such a patent trusteeship. We wrung a commitment from the then-minister that he would seriously consider a counter-proposal. After six-months' work we came up with a sophisticated, comprehensive plan.

The minister ignored just about all our recommendations. In fact, we now think the whole process was a sham. They seemed to have had no intention of taking us seriously.

And when Quebec talks of decentralization, it never talks of giving cities any real power or legal status - they just slough off things they find too unimportant or costly to manage. What we need to do is push down the

delivery of government services to the lowest competent level. This is called the subsidiarity principle. It works well in Germany, where cities deliver many services that "higher" levels of government deliver here.

We also need the powers to deal with urban sprawl. Cities are spreading out like ink on blotting paper. If the Greater Montreal Region were as densely populated as the City of Montreal, we could fit in it the entire population of Canada! In the 80s, they closed 31 schools on the island of Montreal. Yet 11 new ones were opened off-island. Urban sprawl is caused by fiscal imbalance as people, lured by low taxes, move to new suburbs without paying for the cost of new social infrastructure. Unchecked highway construction - paid by Quebec - also contributed to urban sprawl. So the city of Montreal, by design or by default, has become the magnet for the poor, the elderly, and the immigrant - while middle-class francophones have decamped off-island.

To his credit, M. Bouchard seems to understand at least some of these problems. For the first time, a Quebec government has named a minister whose exclusive job is to worry about the Greater Montreal Region. Will M. Ménard manage to tear Quebec away from its nostalgic obsession with the rural regions? I don't know.

Since the referendum, we have been presented with a Kama Sutra of possible constitutional positions: the revival of the idea of anglo Quebec hiving off and joining what remains of Canada, a binational Canada with two equal partners, a Montreal Island city-state, or just simply hacking off federal powers and giving them to provinces.

In Gulliver's Travels, Swift describes Laputa, a flying island inhabited by theoreticians who lorded over the mainland below. But Montreal is not Laputa: the idea of an island city state, while intellectually satisfying, flies in the face of reality. Our island is connected by 16 bridges that bring in commuters who live off-island and work here. The island of Montreal has 57% of the Region's population, yet 73% of its jobs. The urban grid is continued well beyond its perimeter. It is not a discrete, autonomous entity. But I'm all in favour of a special status for Montreal. The *region* of Montreal.

Our political structures have been handed down virtually untouched from the last century, when urban regions were unheard-of. It's these organic, unfettered entities that should serve as the basis for political division. Provinces and even countries will be less and less relevant as urban regions compete with each other. In Canada and in Quebec, they must be given the powers they need to assume their full role on the world's stage.

GAZETTE EDITORIAL – 2 JUNE, 1996

Anyone nasty enough to want to induce apoplexy in the average local politician would just have to mouth the word "amalgamation" in his or her ear. This existential sensitivity can be traced to the fact that in Quebec, as in the rest of Canada, cities have no rights or powers except those their provincial government decides to bestow upon them. Quebec can give and Quebec can assuredly take away. A city is often called a creature of the provincial government: "a creature" in the etymological sense of "a creation". Another definition of "creature" is probably more apt: "owing status to, and obsequiously subservient to, another".

Amalgamation fever in Quebec ebbs and flows. The prime mover behind the most recent upsurge of merger mania was pre-referendum talk of "decentralization". In the lexicon of the Quebec government, major decentralization had to do with the management of that happy state of affairs that will obtain in post-partem Quebec: powers will have to be passed down to the municipal level by a sovereign government burdened with all kinds of new responsibilities after separating from mother Canada. Fearful that many of Quebec's 1401 municipalities would be too small to handle all these new powers, it was felt that only a massive program of municipal mergers would do the trick.

But decentralization is only the latest in a long line of reasons to merge. Guy Chevrette, the former Minister of Municipal affairs, as late as this January had trotted out the hoary old argument in favour of mergers: "they lead to extraordinary economies of scale" he opined in touting the amalgamation of many of the 29 municipalities on the Island of Montreal.

But wait. Who comes along to defend the right-to-life of our cities? None other than Jacques Parizeau. He said last month, "there is no economy of scale in amalgamations", saying further: "it's just for the convenience of the government". He is right. For example, a 1992 Price-Waterhouse study on the possible merger of eleven municipalities in Ottawa-Carlton concludes "bigger is certainly not more efficient". Another study by Brock University even talks about "diseconomies of scale".

Indeed, if coalescing cities led to cost savings, the city of Montreal - itself the product of many mergers over the years - would be our leanest-run city.

Certainly, amalgamations on the Island of Montreal won't address the problems facing the Greater Montreal Region. It won't curb urban sprawl caused by fiscal imbalance, over-zealous highway building, and fears of personal security. And it will do nothing to attack the economic gangrene that's set in while Quebec agonizes over its destiny.

The Greater Montreal Region is an organism that has been feeding on itself. The growth of the outlying areas is fuelled by sucking out jobs, wealth, and people from the core. This self-disembowelling began in the 60s. Montreal Island mergers, and the insecurity they would bring, would only exacerbate this phenomenon and be a sad waste of political energy.

The parochial and insular nature of small cities, according to some, is a barrier to urban regional development. But this certainly does not apply to

Island cities, who have shared in regional costs for decades. In fact, all cities on the Island of Montreal are already partially merged: one-third of their budgets on average go to the MUC to pay for common services such as police and mass transit. There is also a plethora of intermunicipal agreements, mutual aid arrangements, and sharing of services such as libraries and water distribution. Those services for which sharing makes sense are already shared.

Recently, M. Trudel decided to back off from Montreal Island mergers - he is simply going to ask cities making up urban agglomerations throughout Quebec to give him their ideas for mergers. There will be no forced mergers. M. Trudel has come to the correct conclusion that the problem of mini-municipalities - if it is a problem - is found in rural Quebec. In fact, 67% of all Quebec towns and cities have a population of less than 2,000 - yet they are kept on a sort of artificial life-support, as 19-44% of their revenues are government transfers.

Unless hooked on substantial government aid, a city should be autonomous, and be capable of deciding its own future within constitutionally-guaranteed limits. And we should avoid the homogenization by amalgamation that has blanché a lot of other North American urban regions. Many newcomers are actually attracted to the well-run and charming patchwork of communities that comprise the Island of Montreal and whose number and variety so disturbs the neatness-freak Quebec bureaucrats.

GAZETTE OPINION PIECE – 7 SEPTEMBER, 1996**SHOULD THE MUC'S ROLE BE EXPANDED?**

Here we go again. Quebec has just announced it wants to bestow upon the Greater Montreal Region yet another structure. This time it's the Metropolitan Development Commission. Our region is definitely taking on the layered look as government structure is piled upon government structure. In fact, the public commissions, councils, counties, boards, agencies, and corporations are as numerous as the 111 municipalities they are supposed to serve!

That is *not* to say that this new commission is not needed. Far from it. But we need to prune drastically our existing structures. The only sector of society to benefit from this welter of organizations is the burgeoning ranks of bureaucrats who run them.

So why not just expand the Montreal Urban Community and have done with it? Why not let the MUC loose from the confines of the Island of Montreal in order to take over the entire region - including Laval and the north and south shores, thereby getting rid of the thicket of sub-regional structures? It's a seductive idea. But before I address it, some background first.

The MUC was originally imposed on the 27 Island suburbs in order to bail out Montreal after their notorious police strike - and its generous settlement -in 1969. Even today, the Island suburbs pay far more into the MUC than they get out in the form of services. Montreal is the beneficiary. But most suburban cities accept the need to subsidize Montreal, although we do wish our generosity were acknowledged.

The most costly service provided by the MUC is still the police. Next is mass transit. The MUC Transit Corporation is a stand-alone body, with its own chairman and public meetings, but is connected to the MUC through a financial umbilical cord, since the MUC pays all its operating subsidies. The third major service provided by the MUC is wastewater treatment.

Two weeks ago at a meeting of the MUC Council, a Montreal opposition-party member put the cat among the pigeons by tabling a motion suggesting the MUC become the forum for debate on matters outside its jurisdiction; that is, on regional issues. Mrs Danyluk, the chairman of the MUC's executive committee, rose to defend that expansionary point of view. The motion was roundly defeated. The fact that she, a non-elected official appointed by the elected Council, would have a differing view from that of the Council led the media to talk melodramatically of the MUC's "existential crisis". It's no such thing. But it does mean we have to, once and for all, decide on the future of the MUC within the region. And it's hard to debate the future of an institution inside that very institution.

The issue, plainly and simply put, is do we wish to create another level of government? For if the MUC did pronounce on regional issues, it would slowly become a *de facto* level of government - but without the accountability. Should we then endow the MUC with the usual trappings of government - universal suffrage and direct taxation? But we already have

three levels of government in Canada. Do we really wish to create another? In Toronto, their equivalent of the MUC - Metro Toronto - was "opened up" to the electorate in 1988. This has proved to be so ineffective that the Golden Report on Toronto's regional government came out in favour of scrapping Metro, recommending indirect election for their proposed regional body, with more powers going to local municipalities. Amen.

Cities must be the basic building blocks of any regional edifice. People understand and relate to their city. Through their *city* people should determine what kind of intermunicipal or regional service they want. And Pierre Bourque speaks for the City of Montreal in regional matters, and other Island mayors speak through the Conference of Suburban Mayors. Do we really need a third voice?

There is also a bit of a myth out there that Island mayors don't agree with Montreal, so Quebec must intervene to sort things out. Well, it's been my experience mayors have come to agreement with Montreal on just about every major regional issue, be it the airport, Montreal International, solid waste, police, and the Metropolitan Transportation Agency. And *within* the MUC, Montreal/suburban dissention is rare.

The Conference of Suburban Mayors views the MUC as an intermunicipal service organization for the cities on the Island of Montreal, not as a level of government. It also agrees that some form of light, indirectly-elected structure could ensure regional planning and co-ordination, and result in the elimination of most of the gallimaufry of other structures that clutter up the regional scene. It would not provide services. And guess what? Montreal also agrees with this idea. And you don't have to look far to see a blueprint of what that solution could look like: it's the basis of the 1993 Pichette report on the Montreal Region.

So rather than engaging in an ontological discussion on the future of the MUC, and instead of putting our region in thrall by such mistakes as the Metropolitan Transportation Agency, and rather than a new Development Commission, why doesn't Quebec just simply implement the thrust of the recommendations found in the Pichette report?

GAZETTE EDITORIAL - NOVEMBER 17, 1996

Still a bit dazed from the *son et lumière* of the Socioeconomic Summit - which provided more *son* than *lumière* - we were treated recently with a kind of local son-of-Summit. Serge Ménard, the Minister responsible for the Montreal Region, managed to get some 700 people to a forum to discuss the future of the metropolis. Significantly, only 15% of participants were elected officials.

Something deep in the Quebec collective psyche seems to well up once in a while, calling for this kind of group decision-making. It's based on the notion that, if you get a disparate bunch of people under one roof with a problem to solve, they'll eventually come up with a solution. Not perhaps the best solution, but one that most can live with. It's a bit like an intellectual barn-raising or quilting bee.

A key characteristic of this Summitry *à la québécoise* is the mixing together of elected people and non-elected. Throw in union leaders, academics, businesspeople, and social activists - all are supposed to agree spontaneously through the miracle of *concertation*.

The fact that this forum, after the hoopla and hype surrounding the Socioeconomic Summit, came off as a local side-show playing a week after the Big Top had folded says more about the priorities of the governing party and their apparatchiks than they may realize. In scanning the provincial horizon for consensus, Quebec is looking into the wrong end of the telescope. They should focus on the Montreal region in search of their economic bootstrap, not on the province as a whole.

This is because the Greater Montreal Region is too big to be just the metropolis of Quebec. It has to be one of the metropolises of the world. In other words, a province of 7 million people can't support alone a metropolis of 3.3 million people. It's disproportionate. Besides, the economic health of all of Quebec is predicated on a robust Montreal.

Quebec's niggardly and jaundiced attitude to the Montreal region has impoverished the whole province. Their insistence in treating the 16 regions across Quebec as equals and carving up the Montreal region into 5 pieces is hobbling any progress Montreal might make as a player on the international scene. We are already saddled with the competitive disadvantage of a murky political and constitutional future.

So M. Ménard is taking arms against a sea of troubles, many of Quebec's manufacture. At the Forum he showed us a far more determined, articulate, and non-vacillating minister than we have had the pleasure of seeing to date. It's as if M. Ménard knows that this forum and its aftermath might prove to be his last chance for a hurrah. It remains to be seen whether his cabinet colleagues can help him deliver the goods.

Yet, instead of challenging this welter of brainpower to come up with solutions for the manifold problems besetting the Montreal region - such as urban sprawl, unfair fiscal policies, overpaid functionaries - the goal of the day-and-a-half forum was to determine what kind of a regional structure should be created.

Quebec's knee-jerk reaction to any problem is to create a government structure to deal with it, blithely layering yet another structure on the strata of existing bodies, all of which remain undisturbed. Monuments of past brainwaves are kept functioning because of the lack of political will to kill off entrenched bureaucracies.

Government structures have grown like Topsy over the last few decades. In the Greater Montreal region, we have 16 counties, 16 transportation boards, three transit commissions, one transport agency, one transport round table, five development councils, 5 tourist corporations, 20 economic development corporations. Now we will be lumbered with yet another structure; paradoxically, the only structure we probably really need. But not with direct election, please!

The Pichette Report, the fruit of a couple of years of examining the problems of the region, suggested a light, indirectly elected, regional structure. But it also recommended the elimination of a lot of existing structures.

Suffering from structuritis, Quebec has trouble grasping the nettle of real problems, such as the unbalance of power in municipal labour relations. Indeed, public-sector unions are actually invited to these summits and forums. The unions are only too happy to get recognition, to have greatness thrust upon them. Can the involvement of public-sector unions really help solve the problems that undermine the economic health of the Montreal Region? When municipal employees make 27.3% more than the rest of the public sector, does anyone think the unions will all of a sudden give up such featherbedding? Or agree to eliminate the fiscal straitjacket in which Montreal finds itself because it has to keep 4060 blue-collar workers whether needed or not?

So, none of these kinds of problems was addressed. And we'll have ourselves another structure. But it is the first substantive step towards breaking Quebec's fixation on its rural regions and getting the Montreal area into its rightful place in the sun. We have to thank M. Ménard for that.

GAZETTE EDITORIAL – 4 MAY, 1997

Those who would wish to make a coherent pattern out of the jumble of government proposals cluttering up the municipal scene these days will be sorely challenged. There are at least five different and conflicting policies being proposed.

Minister Chevrette pushes **regionalization**, Minister Menard believes in **metropolization**, Minister Trudel wants **decentralization**, Mayor Bourque plumps for **equalization** (payments, that is), and all four sing the praises of **amalgamation**.

■ Regionalization puts the emphasis on Quebec's 16 regions. Chevrette wants to give them more and more powers - in effect, turning them into 16 provinces within a kind of *de facto* sovereign state. Naturally, this policy will also create a whole new series of structures: one hundred "local development centres" and "local employment centres" reporting to the 16 administrative regions.

■ Swimming upstream against the regionalization trend is Minister Menard, who is trying to be strengthen the Montreal metropolis. The two concepts - regionalization and metropolization - cannot co-exist, as the former treats the 16 regions as being all equal, and the latter regards the Greater Montreal Region as unique, indivisible, and the true economic guts of Quebec.

Quebec, already suffering from a surfeit of structures, will see the imposition of Minister Menard's new commission that will be layered over existing structures, some of which will compete with Chevrette's brand-new collection of structures. These two ministers together will have achieved the bureaucratic equivalent of two parallel universes. Kafka meets Alice Through the Looking Glass.

■ Last week, Minister Trudel announced his decentralization plan - or rather, his plan to discuss the devolution of new responsibilities to municipalities. A lot of this is a smokescreen. It will keep the cities at each other's throats, arguing to who will have to pick up more of the bills that go along with decentralization. While this is going on, Trudel is sticking cities with \$500 million-worth of downloaded costs.

■ Meanwhile, Mayor Bourque, seeing in this decentralization a great opportunity for a new "fiscal pact" - read equalization payments - has come out in support of Trudel's plans. This time, rather than Quebec sending payments to the central city, it'll be the suburbs.

■ Bourque and Chevrette have also come out publicly for Montreal Island amalgamations. Trudel refuses to discount the possibility. And Menard thinks Island fire departments should be amalgamated - after which, there's really not too much left of independent cities. It's amalgamation by the back door.

Adding a bit of fuel to the amalgamation fire is the group making the rounds with their nostrum for our country's ills: the "unity" resolution that they insist federalist municipalities must adopt. These resolutions are clearly partitionist, but that has not stopped a number of cities, under concerted

pressure, from adopting them. Cities must weigh the very real threat of amalgamation against the very remote possibility that passing such resolutions will make one jot of difference in any upcoming constitutional wrangling.

Indeed, Quebec would love to see anglophone cities merged with Montreal. A city that says it will stay with Canada come what may, and then gets wiped off the municipal map for its pains is hardly going to help the federalist cause. If Harris can forcibly fuse six Toronto cities into one, merging a city like Westmount with Montreal could, strictly legally, be a piece of cake. But they would have to run a blockade of its mayor, who would raise an international stink.

None of these measures - regionalization, metropolization, decentralization, equalization, or amalgamation - will address the problem of urban sprawl, which is the problem (other than the threat of separation) that besets the Montreal region. Regionalization harks back to a bucolic past, ignoring the worldwide reality that it's large urban agglomerations that count, even more than nation-states - certainly more than provinces who would become nation-states.

Metropolization makes sense, but not the PQ's version that lumbers our region with a structure without decision-making powers. Likewise, decentralization, without real power, just means more bureaucracy.

Equalization payments to Montreal, paid by other cities, reward Montreal boondoggles of the past. And amalgamations will encourage urban sprawl, as citizens would abandon a mega-city in favour of small, well-run cities off-Island.

It would seem that all this jiggering around in the Quebec municipal world has a lot more to do with politics than any real attempt to bring our municipalities into the modern world. And it involves the creation of even more structures. Government-imposed local structures are always unnatural, unwanted and unremovable.

GAZETTE EDITORIAL - 12 OCTOBER, 1997

In trying to follow the developments in the story of the \$500 million recurring bill to Quebec municipalities, one is confronted with more twists and turns than the sinuous streets descending to Quebec's lower town. Unfortunately, this tortuous tale masks the simplicity of just what the Quebec government is trying to do. Their goal is to balance their own budget on the backs of municipalities. They get the credit. The municipalities get the blame. They don't really give a fig how it's done: they just want to get it done.

The hypocrisy behind this act of fiscal piracy becomes clear when one discovers that, on a \$40 billion budget, Quebec is only cutting some \$250 million; yet on total municipal budgets of \$8 billion, Quebec demands a contribution of \$500 million. A year. And this is on top of some \$1.3 billion per year extracted from the property tax field since 1992, appropriated (or, more accurately, expropriated) by Quebec.

If it was Minister Trudel's aim to set the whole municipal world fighting among themselves, he succeeded. Rural vs. urban. City vs. village. Suburb vs. centre city: each succeeding tag team went into the ring, slugging it out as to how the bill would be divided up among them. It was not an edifying sight. Many commentators have been yammering on about how stupid the municipalities were in not sticking together. But division was inevitable. Once Trudel bought off the six centre cities by promising them a cap of 2.7% of their budgets, he effectively put them on the sidelines, cheering for him.

This is why Mayor Bourque has been so silent about this downloading. He did not want to bite the hand that promised to feed him. Or, at least, the hand that promised not take away too much from him. The fact that his suburban partners on the Island of Montreal were being gored did not raise one jot of sympathy. (Besides, he said the other day, they should all be merged into his city in order to bail it out.)

The sidelining of the six centre cities of Quebec left the two municipal unions to battle it out: the UMRCQ, a rurally-based union representing 20% of Quebec's population, and the UMQ, which represents the (supposedly) more urban cities that make up 80% of the population. The UMQ immediately shot itself in the foot by forcing its members to decide as to how the amount should be divvied up, creating winners and losers within its own ranks. It passed a formal resolution to the effect that the bill must be uniformly (not equitably) distributed - a formula that would cost the average suburban homeowner on Montreal Island hundreds of dollars a year.

Laval and Longueuil originally trumpeted this uniform treatment as eminently fair. That is, until they, too, demanded the coveted "centre city" status and therefore be eligible for preferred treatment.

Then the fight deteriorated into low comedy. Trudel triumphantly declared ten days ago he had a deal as to how the \$500 million will be shared. Well, a deal with the UMRCQ. Well, a deal with the president of the UMRCQ. One small problem. A day later, that union flatly rejected the deal. Wiping pie off his face, the Minister had to start all over again.

Then last Thursday Premier Bouchard stepped in with a "final offer" that sported a 25% discount off the original price tag of \$500 million per year. A discount for nearly everyone except - guess what? - the Island of Montreal.

What did the Montreal Island suburban Mayors do during all this? They got out before the burlesque began. They quit the UMQ when it adopted that anti-Island resolution. They were refused a seat at the negotiating table, which wound up with no representative from the entire Island of Montreal. But five members of the ten member team come from the UMRCQ. Once again, the rural tail was wagging the urban dog. Finally, the Conference of Suburban Mayors was offered a seat, but by that time the table would have been more appropriate furniture for the Mad Hatter's tea party. The Conference declined, having hardened its position and not wanting to have to endorse the results of any negotiation.

The Conference is even more confident it took the right course in going it alone, especially after some 5,000 irate citizens came to the Verdun Auditorium to send a message to Quebec they wanted no part in this irresponsible, improvised, inequitable tax grab.

The Quebec government recently launched a campaign against tax dodgers. They should look in the mirror.

GAZETTE EDITORIAL – 5 APRIL, 1998

THE M.U.C.: A THREE-LETTER ENIGMA

Two weeks ago, deep in the concrete catacombs of UQAM, quite a number of academics, media types, and politicians gathered for a symposium on the Montreal Urban Community. The MUC provides police, mass transit, and wastewater treatment services to the cities on the Island of Montreal, who act as its "shareholders".

The MUC is a mystery to most people, according to a survey released at this symposium. Among some participants, there was much wringing of hands and rending of garments on learning that the average citizen doesn't really know or care about the MUC. For example, only 22.5% of residents know that Vera Danyluk heads up the MUC. Nearly as many thought that Jacques Duchesneau ran it. And 75% of people thought it was the MUC that provides fire services. 60% thought the MUC operated libraries!

Is this so terrible? Well, if one regards the MUC as an intermunicipal service provider and a mechanism for subsidising the city of Montreal, this lack of interest is explainable. After all, citizens still look to their own city in order to get things done, and to feel part of a community. And this is how it should be. On the other hand, for those who see the MUC as a level of government, this apathy is seemingly a cause for worry.

Since its inception, the MUC has suffered from an identity crisis.

The analogy of a shotgun wedding is often used to describe the beginnings of the MUC in 1970: two unwilling partners (Montreal and the Island suburbs) were forced into a *mariage de raison*. Well, the MUC is more akin to an orphan conceived by the Provincial government, left at Montreal's doorstep, with the suburbs dragged in as surrogate parents. This odd commune was forced to involve itself in the care and feeding of a rapidly growing child who was unloved and ignored both by the public and by its true parents. But Montreal quickly saw how its own household expenses could be fobbed off on its partners using this new creature as excuse.

So Quebec "gave" us this burden, not to create a level of government, not to serve as a forum for regional debate, not even principally to create a service provider, but indeed to bail out the City of Montreal. This function survives to this day: the Island suburbs contribute 45% of the cost of operating the MUC, but use less than 33% of its services. Montreal benefits to the tune of \$150 million a year. And, in spite of this help, the city of Montreal is still a fiscal basket case.

The MUC never was and never should be a level of government; that is, an organization with direct election and taxation. With three levels of government in Canada, we have enough, thank you very much. The MUC should not even disguise itself as a level of government. The citizens of the Island of Montreal always sensed this, exhibiting a sagacity that escaped the legislators in Quebec. So in spite of artifices to "open up" the MUC such as its five public commissions supplementing its 80-member Council - both sparsely attended by the public - the MUC remains largely ignored.

Those who want to endow the MUC with political clout and a higher profile, wish - probably unwittingly - to achieve indirectly what all Montreal

mayors have always wanted to do directly: create only one city on the Island. It would be amalgamation by stages. That's what happened in Toronto. When their version of the MUC - Metro Toronto - got direct election of its council in 1988, it became the most hated government around. It also paved the way to the merger of its six constituent cities into one huge city, swallowing itself up in the process. Bye-bye Metro Toronto. Hello, megacity.

What is the answer? The 1993 Pichette Report reflected the Island suburban mayors' vision of the MUC and the region. It recommended the MUC stay an intermunicipal service agency, leaving politics to a new Council that would cover the real metropolitan territory, rather than just the Island. Let's not look though the wrong end of the telescope: let's focus on the larger picture, then make any changes, if necessary, to the MUC.

But, ultimately, structures don't solve problems. They are tools, not ends in themselves. Quebec should deal with the financial precariousness of the city of Montreal and help the metropolitan region control urban sprawl. Turning the MUC into a level of government or improving its brand-name recognition will achieve neither.

GAZETTE EDITORIAL – 25 OCTOBER, 1998

MUNICIPAL MERGERS: MUNICIPAL MONOPOLIES

Merging. Canadian banks want to do it. Quebec hospitals, too. Over in Ontario, after such municipal couplings as Ottawa/Carleton, Chatham/Kent, and Hamilton/Wentworth, Premier Harris now brings into the world Toronto: the megacity. Meanwhile, back home in Montreal, mayoral hopefuls Bourque and Doré plump for municipal mergers on the Island of Montreal. Everybody's doing a brand-new dance now: come on baby, let's talk amalgamation.

This is one example of 60s revivalism we can do without. For it was then that a Montrealer, H. Carl Goldenberg, in his guise as a municipal guru, set in motion the 1967 merger of thirteen Toronto municipalities into six. The Montreal region was spared such forced homogenization - with the exception of Laval, which today spends 37% of its budget in financing its debt. Montreal Island itself got partial amalgamation - a commune, if you like - through the creation of the MUC.

Now, bank mergers are voluntary. In fact, the government is dithering whether to stop them. Quebec hospital mergers are also voluntary, whether you're talking about making a CHUM in French or a MUHC in English. These two medical sollicitudes [*editor: sic!*] are self-generated.

But municipal mergers are forced because people simply don't want them. Citizens don't want their town subsumed into a soulless bureaucratic construct.

Why are provincial governments so allergic to allowing competition among cities? Harris, not known for his left-wing leanings nor love of big government, purposely stamps out municipal competition and knowingly creates the most massive municipal bureaucracy Canada has ever seen. Why are monopolies to be avoided in the private sector, yet governments favour them at the municipal level? Shouldn't the consumer have a choice of city as well as a choice of house?

This small-is-ugly fad is very Canadian. No such movement is afoot in the U.S., where metropolitan Boston (over 100 cities) or Atlanta (over 50 cities) are doing very well, thank you very much.

The question one must ask annexationists is: why? What is gained? What regional problem is solved?

Apart from chronic political instability owing to Quebec's flirtation with separation, the most insidious and pernicious problem facing our region is urban sprawl. Will Island amalgamations reduce urban sprawl? Since the main cause of urban sprawl is unequal fiscal loads, extending Montreal's legendary mismanagement to cover the whole Island will just further urban sprawl, as even more people will flee the Island for lower taxes, better-run cities, and a heightened sense of community.

A short digression. The reason why our North and South shore neighbours - who envelop the Island of Montreal like a bun surrounding a burger - can boast lower taxes is simply because they live off the avails of the Island. They, of course, maintain they are not parasites: their commuters increase the economic base of Montreal. This is true. But they miss the point: they are the people who, had they not fled the Island in the first place, would be paying the higher property taxes on the Island that are needed to maintain an urban infrastructure. They would also be paying for things such as the MUC, which, *inter alia*, serves as a method for Island suburban cities to subsidise the city of Montreal.

So we should continue to have freedom of choice at the municipal level. What governments should do is ensure a level fiscal playing field among cities; for example, tax levels that include all the costs of urban sprawl. The lure of the exurbs is fine as long as their citizens pay the true cost of their decision to move there, including the building of new highways, schools, and hospitals.

The usual argument trotted out in favour of amalgamations is the hoary old notion of “economies of scale”. Few researchers have come across any long-term economies of scale following municipal mergers anywhere in North America. The opposite is usually true. Yes, the number of elected officials drops, but salaries double. Politicians discover the need for a bevy of executive assistants. Likewise, the number of city managers drops, but soon you have assistant managers and executive assistants by the score. All salaries are brought up to those prevailing in the largest city, through the mechanism of the highest common denominator.

So, if you want to keep yourself awake at night, imagine the MUC and the city of Montreal, all folded into one megalithic whole. The Island would sink under the bureaucratic weight of this uncontrollable, unaccountable leviathan. Government monsters are easy to create, yet impossible to destroy.

GAZETTE EDITORIAL - 21 MARCH, 1999

In our society, it is a received wisdom that - as a class - politicians are really not very nice people. Elected officials are seen as venal, slippery, pompous, and sometimes even a bit thick. At best, they come across as ineffectual and glib. Politicians arrive dead last in every poll that rates various professions for perceived honesty or public respect. If we held doctors, executives, or teachers in equivalently low esteem, there would be a prodigious outpouring of studies, Royal Commissions, and op-ed pieces examining such a dangerous crisis in confidence.

Yet society bears its contempt of politicians with resignation, even mild amusement. They may be rogues, but they are our rogues. Keep in mind, these are the people we collectively pick to run our federal, provincial, and city governments, wielding billions in budgets and supposedly operating complex circuits of power that infiltrate every level of society. These are our leaders who can shape our national psyche. Theirs should be the most important jobs in our country. So what is going on?

- First of all, why would anyone with a fully-functioning brain want to get into politics? To suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous citizens, the newsman's commentary, the law's delay, the insolence of officials? Politicians have no union or professional organization to protect their interests or to threaten removal of services. And no golden handshakes - more like a boot up the backside.
- Given the disdain with which society holds its elected officials, it is not surprising that they are paid pretty poorly, at least on an hourly basis. Is this owing to a kind of implied *noblesse oblige*? Perhaps, but it wasn't always that way. In today's dollars, the President of the United States was paid \$1 million a year in 1893 and nearly as much in 1943.
- While stingy as paymasters, electors are supremely difficult to please. They want politicians to make them feel all warm inside by being told they can have and eat their cake, and some are mightily surprised when no miracles are subsequently delivered. Electors want leaders, but don't particularly want to hear what true leaders will tell them. People are always clamouring for a politician with convictions, as long as those convictions coincide with their own.
- Indeed, most politicians start off as idealists. Many end up as cynics. This degenerative process can take years, as candour slowly deliquesces into guardedness. Speeches begin to ring hollow. And as long as the role of the press is seen as a game of tripping up the politician, namby-pamby political statements are seen as the only defence. Unless one happens to be in the Parliamentary cockpit. There, public debate and "professional" wrestling have a lot in common. The audience and media know the fight is faked. This verbal huffing and puffing - usually fuelled by sheer partisanship - further degrades the politician in the public's eye.

What to do? Well, political parties have to shoulder most of the blame for tarnishing what should be one of the most noble callings in our society. To start off with, the covert operations of political parties make freemasonry look transparent. Party solidarity muzzles elected officials and turns them into purveyors of pap and the party-line.

With deal-making, party hacks, back-room boys, and bag-men, the party machine just helps to reinforce the shady image of politics. Porkbarrelling, mutual backscratching, patronage plums - all these activities run at cross-purposes to what every politician should strive for: accountability, transparency, probity. Even party platforms are temporary structures: the only permanent plank in a party's platform is to get re-elected.

It's political parties that decide whom they will serve up to the public as candidates. The election ballot resembles a shop counter with a frustratingly narrow range of preselected goods.

Polls tell us that municipal politicians are more highly regarded (or held in less contempt) than their provincial or federal counterparts. It is no coincidence that many mayors in Canada are free of the impedimenta of political parties and can be themselves. Even in those cities saddled with the pettiness and sclerosis of party politics, their mayors are usually more respected than their parties.

So. Politician heal thyself. Start by shaking off the negative effects of political parties: conserve at all costs your independence, idealism, and honesty. You'll gain the respect of the public and they in turn will be well served. It's a consummation devoutly to be wished.

GAZETTE OPINION PIECE – 24 MAY, 1999

MEGACITY MANIA:

ELIMINATING OUR CITIES, NOT OUR PROBLEMS

Oh, how soon we forget. “Small is Beautiful”, for example. In that influential 1973 book, subtitled “a study of economics as if people mattered”, E. F. Schumacher says that the *largest* city should have no more than 500,000 inhabitants. This book should be required reading for those who wish to disinter the 60s remedy of wide-scale municipal amalgamations as a way to deal with the problems of the Montreal Region. While no one should be surprised that the mayor of Montreal wants to enlarge his fiefdom, megacity mania has taken hold in other quarters as well.

Take the Bédard report, for example. In it, one finds innovative tax recommendations that would create some degree of fiscal equity among the various municipal players. Unfortunately, its authors also decided to recommend forced amalgamations, along with the creation a brand-new level of government with direct election and taxation powers.

The Bédard report treats the Montreal Region’s municipal landscape as if it were a *tabula rasa*, starting from which it is pleased to confect a series of complex structures, as if building so many sandcastles. Anything that got in the way of their *idée fixe* of “a major reinforcement of the supramunicipal level” was unceremoniously swept away, including cities that have been lovingly created and nurtured, many for over a century. This is an urban heritage just as precious as Mount Royal Park or Old Montreal. Before we look on our suburban cities as so much bric-à-brac to be cleared away in today’s version of urban renewal, let’s be sure such wholesale destruction is justified.

This indiscriminate application of urbicide, combined with a big-box approach to municipal management should be specially contra-indicated at the very moment when our fissiparous society is in desperate need of a sense of community. Communities may continue to exist after amalgamation, but only in the way a limb is felt after amputation.

This report simply *assumes* there are too many cities on the Island of Montreal. It refers to the “fragmentation” caused by the number of cities as if it were self-evident phenomenon. In a perfect example of circular reasoning, the justification for amalgamating cities is that there are too many of them.

Yet, on the Island of Montreal, the existence of the MUC obviates the need for mergers. Services that should be merged, are merged. Police. Mass transit. Wastewater treatment. One-third of the total budgets of the suburban cities goes to pay for the MUC. So we are one-third merged. The services that are left are best delivered locally.

The usual rationale trotted out for mergers is the hoary old “economies of scale”. If amalgamations and bigness led to economies of scale, why is the City of Montreal so badly run? Don’t take my word for

it. Montreal's recently-fired Director-General said it. And the Bédard report more than once refers to the inefficiency and management problems of the City of Montreal. By the way, Montreal spends 35% more per capita to provide local services than what is spent by the Island suburban cities. And Montreal has 60% more employees per capita.

What kind of a society would reward Montreal's penchant for prodigality and mismanagement by allowing it to get even bigger, strip-mining the suburbs in the process? "One island, one city" means nothing less than an amalgam of the MUC, Island suburbs, and Montreal – and that's assuming the MUCTC is not folded into this bureaucratic leviathan. The city's budget would increase from \$1.8 billion to \$4.1 billion. The number of employees would grow from 11,000 to 23,000, with only one powerful blue-collar union. Aware of the catastrophic bigness implicit in "one island, one city", the Bédard Report arbitrarily recommends 3 or 5 cities. A bad idea diluted is still a bad idea.

This same report, citing a number of studies, says there are no, repeat, no economies of scale following municipal mergers. There are diseconomies of scale. This is because the labour costs and staffing levels of the larger city become the norm for any new megacity. It's the principle of the highest common denominator. Even Laval, often cited as the exemplar of a merged city, spends 36% of its budget for financing its debts. Laval has some of the highest tax levels in the region, even though it, unlike Island suburbs, does not have to subsidise the City of Montreal through being part of the MUC.

Yes, we Island cities, rather than being parasites, actually *subsidise* Montreal. We pay \$484 per capita (Westmount: \$1020) to finance the MUC. Montreal citizens pay only \$444 per capita. Overall, the Island suburban cities pay nearly one-half of the cost of running the MUC, even though Montreal benefits from the lion's share of its services: 58% of its bus service, 62% of its police services, 68% of its sewage service. 84% of metro stations are found in Montreal. We are not complaining, though. We would just like our contribution to be acknowledged.

So why merge? To reduce the cost of local politicians? The opposite, in fact, happens. Montreal spends 1.4% of its budget for the care and feeding of its Council, Commissions, and Executive Committee. Westmount, for example, spends 0.5% of its budget for its politicians and their expenses.

We are told we must amalgamate to face the competition from other urban regions. Yet this small-is-ugly fad is a very Canadian movement. The Boston region has 101 cities. Atlanta: 92. Minneapolis St-Paul: 189. The city of San Francisco is only 18% of its urban region. These constellations of small cities certainly don't stop their regions from competing.

Most citizens don't want their town subsumed into a soulless bureaucratic construct. Why, then, are Canadian governments so allergic to allowing competition among cities? Premier Harris, not known for his left-wing leanings nor his love of big government, purposely stamps out municipal competition and knowingly creates the most massive municipal bureaucracy Canada has ever seen. Why are monopolies to be avoided in

the private sector, yet governments favour them at the municipal level? Shouldn't the consumer have a choice of city as well as a choice of house?

The most insidious and pernicious problem facing our region is urban sprawl. Island amalgamations will *increase* urban sprawl, as Montreal's legendary management style will be the norm for the whole Island. Even more people will flee the Island for lower taxes, better-run cities, and a heightened sense of community.

So we should continue to have freedom of choice at the municipal level. What governments should do is ensure a level fiscal playing field among cities; for example, tax levels that include all the costs of urban sprawl. The lure of the exurbs is fine as long as their citizens pay the true cost of their decision to move there, including the building of new highways, schools, and hospitals.

In our attempt to build the Greater Montreal region, we have to avoid at all costs what Schumacher called the "idolatry of giantism". We need to control urban sprawl. We need to help Montreal improve its management and ensure it is compensated for those unique costs that come with being a centre city. We don't need to resort to uricide in the process.

GAZETTE EDITORIAL – NOVEMBER 14, 1999

Some politicians would have us believe that municipal amalgamations are a worldwide phenomenon, an ineluctable tide that is wiping small cities right off the map. Welcome, they say, to a brave new world of mega-cities. While, admittedly, urban *regions* around the globe are becoming the centres of economic power, more often than not these regions are made up of constellations of small cities. Most countries have learned that small cities are the best way to deliver local services and limit bureaucratic flab.

The only country that seems to be in the throes of amalgamation fever these days is Canada. (Only in Canada, you say? Pity. For Canada.) In Europe, the 60s fad for municipal mergers has now died out. Curiously, France and Italy were spared this post-war pillaging of cities. In the U.S. there have been no real mergers since 1945. In fact, there are now serious secessionist movements in New York and Los Angeles. Meanwhile, Boston is quite happy with its 101 cities, Atlanta with 102, Seattle with 88, and Cleveland with 146. The list goes on.

Why Canada? Well, unlike their U.S. counterparts, Canadian cities have absolutely no constitutional right to exist. Provincial governments can override the democratically expressed will and merge cities on a whim. Why do they do it? Well, Canadian provinces have discovered a neat way to download costs to the municipal level. It goes like this: 1) pretend an amalgamation will save money 2) skim off the fictitious savings by dumping new responsibilities on the newly-amalgamated city, and, 3) by the time it becomes clear that the mega-city costs more, no one is in a position to do the accounting. Besides, the new team running the mega-city obviously has no interest in declaring it was a mistake.

In many countries, ignoring an expressed desire to remain an independent city would be considered a denial of democracy. Stripping people of municipal citizenship should result in an international howl, but it doesn't. If supranational bodies can pronounce on such things as the sign issue here in Quebec, who is going to decry an anti-democratic action such as ignoring the will of 96% of the people in Mont Tremblant who don't want to lose their town? If this is not abuse of power, what is?

Trying to elicit convincing arguments from pro-amalgamationists is not easy. Once one gets beyond the "it-doesn't-make-sense-to-have-all-these-cities" line, which implies there is some natural law of aggregation, one drifts into the realm of meaningless cant: the need for a "critical mass" to become a "world class" city. The creation of a Montreal mega-city is, according to Mayor Bourque's brochure, "an inescapable necessity". We are not told why. As for Mayor Bourque himself, we have to be content with statements like "Montreal needs oxygen" and other such opaque metaphors.

Most experts in the municipal field now agree there are no economies of scale, only diseconomies of scale. Even Mayor Bourque's own study assumes the rather paltry savings subsequent to amalgamation would be conditional on the provincial government changing the labour

code to prevent suburban employee salaries rising up to those of Montreal. Fat chance. The only sellable argument to the public seems to be the reduction in elected officials. Bourque's report calculates the "one island one city" proposal would save \$7 or 8 million by getting rid of suburban councillors and mayors. That's 0.25% of total costs. Well, gee, Montreal could save exactly the same amount *right now* by cutting by one-half their own councillors, along with overhead and support staff.

The advertising profession came into being based on one arresting idea: repeat something often enough and people will take it as truth. With Mayor Bourque whistle-stopping around the farther reaches of the island, repeating that vacuous mantra "one island one city", the danger is that people will come to believe that it is a real solution, rather than a quack Drapeauesque nostrum. It is encouraging that a majority of Bourque's own citizens are chary of the idea: it might be they don't want to sweep Montreal's management problems under a bigger rug. Or maybe (and you read it here first) many Montrealers desire the continued existence of Island suburbs because some day they, too, would like to live in one of them.

Meanwhile, the rest of the world seems to know something we Canadians don't: amalgamation of cities will not lead to "world class" status. It *will* lead to "world class" taxes, spending, and bureaucracy.

GAZETTE EDITORIAL – 2 APRIL, 2000**MUNICIPAL MERGERS: AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS GONE**

Most people when asked about municipal affairs will stifle a yawn. They usually know which city they live in and when the garbage is collected but, beyond that, their municipal interest quotient drops rapidly. Certainly, the average citizen - what the Brits used to call the man on the Clapham omnibus - is understandably confused by the complexity of matters municipal.

So when someone comes along and resurrects a simple idea such as “one island one city” it has at least the advantage of being instantly comprehensible. And when these same proselytizers of salvation through amalgamation tell you, “that’s what Toronto did”, well, can there be any argument? That’s got to be the way to go. QED. You are led to believe that we can all be witness to a miracle, the transubstantiation of a clutch of small cities into a modern metropolis. All it takes is vision – or at least, Vision Montreal. We are told that the gospel of municipal mergers is sweeping the world. The unbelievers will be left behind with their fragmented metropolitan regions, condemned forever to obscurity, never to have known “world-class” status.

If one examines the febrile claims of the amalgamationists in the cold light of facts, one discovers that the only place in the world where municipal mergers are taking place is Ontario. (That is, with the exception of an outbreak in Halifax - which 66% of residents deem a failure.) So Harris is paddling the merger canoe alone. Now Pierre Bourque wants to squeeze in behind him. Elsewhere, no one is seriously looking at mergers as a solution for anything. It’s an outdated concept of the 60s, when kids experimented with LSD while their parents experimented with big government.

The merger mania that gripped parts of Europe is now dead. And the U.S.? Well, in the land where people trust in God, not Government, there has been no municipal merger for 100 years! Bourque tells us we must merge in order to compete with, say, Boston and Atlanta. He will not, however, tell you that Boston is made up of 282 cities. Or that Atlanta has 102.

The motto of the United States is *e pluribus unum*. This could well apply to their approach to municipal governance: many municipalities, one urban region. The Yanks don’t seem to share the compulsive neatness of Ontario’s politicians. Americans would no more think of legislating the size of cities any more than legislating the size of families. Then there is the little matter of democracy: any U.S. amalgamation would have to be approved by referendum.

So in spite of the worldwide trend away from mergers, in spite of all the academic literature that points to the increased costs subsequent to mergers, Montreal continues to preach its outdated nostrum. Is the aggrandizement of Montreal some sort of manifest destiny? Should

Montreal's mismanagement, high costs, and contempt for democracy be rewarded by allowing it to gobble up its neighbours?

Mr Bourque recently groused about the money Island cities are spending in order to defend themselves. Does Montreal expect the independent Island cities to lay down their coats of arms, strike their municipal flags, and hand over their colours without a fight? And make no mistake: we are not really talking mergers here but straight annexation. A hostile takeover. The product of any suburban merger with Montreal is a bigger and fatter Montreal, not a brand-new amalgam of its constituent cities like the Toronto example. And even the Toronto megacity, according to an expert in the field, will wind up costing more to operate than the smaller cities it replaced.

So why merge? The only argument that has even a whiff of logic is that mergers would reduce fiscal inequalities. But Island cities already subsidise Montreal through the MUC. It's the off-island cities that are spared, and that's where one-half the region's population lives. One of the many reasons we should support Mme Harel's plan to create the Montreal Metropolitan Community encompassing all of Greater Montreal is that it would put paid to accusations of unfair fiscal loads. It would also deal with the real problem facing our region: urban sprawl.

The burden of proof has to be borne by those who would decimate many cities that have flourished for over a century. Evangelical appeals to believe in "one island one city" camouflage the lack of underlying arguments justifying such forced annexation. It's an idea whose time has gone.

GAZETTE OPINION PIECE – 14 OCTOBER, 2000

Nothing is more dangerous than a politician who feels he or she must do something. These days, they usually reach for the catch-all phrase “the status quo is not an option”; a meaningless cliché if ever there was one. When it comes to the municipal situation in Quebec, there are certainly problems regionally, but things are generally well-run locally – with the obvious exception of the City of Montreal, which does indeed call for a total makeover.

After applying themselves to the Herculean task of “doing something” to the health and educational systems, and between picking fights with Ottawa and stirring up the language pot, our provincial politicians, not content to lay down their tools and rest, now find the time to direct their considerable energies to mucking up the municipal system.

And it’s not as if Quebec were so well run that it had lessons to give to the municipal level. Indeed, by what right or logic does one order of government meddle with another, tell it what to do, and wipe out cities with the stroke of a pen?

Quebec, in its urge to do something, should have stopped at the creation of the Montreal Metropolitan Community - the one body we do truly need to co-ordinate regional transport and economic development in the Greater Montreal Region. That, and the excellent idea of making the city of Montreal more manageable and accountable by dividing it up into 9 autonomous municipalities.

But the government’s representative, Louis Bernard, went much further in his report released this week. To be fair, he was manfully trying to squeeze out an honorable compromise between two irreconcilable positions: between Pierre Bourque’s one-Island-one-city obsession and the suburbs’ if-it-ain’t-broke-don’t-fix-it position.

M. Bernard recommends the creation of a new Island-wide city, to be called – to no one’s surprise – the City of Montreal. This city would be divided up into 27 districts (which is a better translation of *arrondissements* than boroughs). Of these, 18 districts would respect the existing boundaries of the larger suburban cities. While these districts would – for now – retain most of the current responsibilities of our cities, they would be handcuffed financially. They could in no manner be thought of as autonomous municipalities.

This is because the new city would control two-thirds of total Island spending (and taxing). But that’s not all. Through a system of grants to the districts, it would also control most of the remainder. These grants would be doled out by the number of dwellings in each district, regardless of the actual cost of the delivery of the service. The district would be left with a few crumbs of independent revenue, just like a branch plant with all decisions taken at head office. Local councillors and the lucky person “fulfilling the role of district mayor”, as Bernard so delicately puts it, would become ciphers, their hands tied by such an extraordinary and arbitrary financing method.

How could anyone running a district be accountable to the citizens with so little control of the budget? Our well-run, independent cities would become empty husks. The end result? One big city. Sooner than you think. Goodbye to even a pretence of local government.

Curiously, M. Bernard (and Quebec) both hold up Laval as some kind of model of perfection to follow. Laval? That's the place where 36% of the city budget goes for financing its debts. As one South Shore mayor put it, "the main employer in Laval is the city itself".

One of the most troubling aspects of this report is that it totally lacks an analysis of the current situation or of the effects of its sweeping recommendations. By way of example: in an offhand comment, M. Bernard says his solution would put an end to "the never-ending conflict between Montreal and the suburbs". Until M. Bourque disinterred the idea of eradicating the suburbs, there were very few such conflicts. Things generally got resolved amicably. One wonders to what conflicts Bernard was referring. If the only example that comes to mind is the debate over the Cavendish extension, we've done very well over the years.

And by spreading the party system practised by Montreal right across the Island – a thing M. Bernard devoutly wishes – one can only imagine the "never-ending" and "sterile" quarrels that will go on. Just go to a Montreal city council meeting. And this is what we want for the whole Island?

One of the advantages of smaller cities is, often, the absence of political parties. In these cities, the mayor has to be a consensus-builder, not a slave to the party line, or, contrariwise, the leader of a tailor-made political party created overnight around his personality.

But all this should not be a battle between politicians or between mayors. This is a battle for the citizen's right to determine how he or she will be governed. The citizens of currently independent cities should not be duped into thinking that the only thing that will change is the word "city". The prudent management, the specialised services, the low taxes cannot be maintained in a simple district of a large city. Just ask any Montrealer.

We are left with one question. Why? Most admit, including Bernard, that there will be no savings. Most admit the problem is with Montreal. Yet the result of what is being proposed is the existing City of Montreal writ large. When all else fails, those who push for "municipal reform", invoke the need for fiscal equity. Well, the suburbs are willing to help Montreal financially - over and above what they currently contribute to Montreal through the MUC - if that is what is required for fiscal equity. You don't have to change a thing for one city to write a cheque to another.

When will Quebec understand that the role of the government is to create conditions propitious to human development, to encourage, to cajole, to fine-tune – but not to resort to a scorched-earth policy against a municipal landscape grown complex and rich with time. Just for the sake of change.

GAZETTE EDITORIAL – 11 FEBRUARY, 2001

People who braved the cold to participate in the massive anti-merger rally held last December 10th must be scratching their heads these days. The air then was thick with diatribes against the injustice of Bill 170, with declarations of war against its architects. As speaker after speaker split the ears of the crowd, the citizens in turn pledged their unconditional support for the mayors in carrying on with their battle against a forced merger of all the Montreal Island cities.

Exactly two months later, some of these same leaders have shucked off their battledress. They're in a party mood; or, more precisely, they want a party of the political variety. With the spectre of Pierre Bourque ruling over a much larger demesne, a kind of sink-the-Bismarck collective mania has taken hold. Some suburban mayors are forming a party. DemocraCité, a group set up to stop the megacity, wants to form another. Even the venerable Montreal Citizens' Movement is trying desperately to de-Doré itself, to become a party of born-again decentralists, and generally to tart itself up for suburban consumption. "Anybody but Bourque" seems to be the only objective that unites these disparate forces.

This desire to create a party to topple Bourque is understandable. Certainly, if this misguided project of a Montreal megacity ever saw the light of day, the election of Bourque as its mayor would cause great harm. But it would be a reparable harm. The natural common sense of voters would eventually see to that. The creation of the megacity itself is, however, an irreversible disaster. *Urbs longa, vita brevis*. A city is forever, life (especially political life) is short.

The Halifax megacity, created in 1996, has proved to be a failure. The extent of the damage in creating mega-Toronto in 1998 is just surfacing, with its budgetary shortfall of \$305 million and taxes that could go up as much as 77%. Ottawa is next in line to immolate itself.

In a leap of faith and logic of Olympian proportions, Bourque says all this can't happen here. Let's get this straight. 1) We have to take the merger medicine because Toronto took it. 2) It made Toronto sick. 3) The same medicine will make us well. Hmm. Let's try it another way. 1) The mess in Toronto was created by provincial downloading and spiralling salaries. 2) Quebec has been repeatedly downloading since 1992 and refuses to free Montreal from its union hammerlock. 3) Downloading and salary increases won't happen in the future. Hmm.

Then there are more than a few mayors who feel that they should co-operate with – and now even advise – the Transition Committee. This non-elected task force, appointed by and reporting to Quebec, is charged with the job of imposing mergers.

Now, Quebec successfully kept the Island mayors quiet for three whole months last year by holding out the empty promise of an honourable compromise – through their representative Louis Bernard. The Bernard manoeuvre worked so well that Quebec now is repeating the same

brilliant diversionary tactic, this time using the Transition Committee. The central idea is to lull mayors into thinking that the law can be substantially modified and that Quebec will suddenly see the virtues of a truly decentralised system. In reality, though, while the Transition Committee will remove the pacifier once in a while to let a few whines escape, that won't distract them from their task of creating the monster preordained by Bill 170.

Unfortunately, Bourque is not alone in warmly welcoming the Transition Committee and their antidemocratic mission. We have Gerald Tremblay, who, in his ill-disguised declaration of candidacy last month, gushed, "we must recognize and seize the exceptional opportunity this reform is offering us". And, in a swipe against those mayors who are fulfilling promises made to citizens and who therefore are fighting Bill 170 in court, he lectures us "we must respect this law in the same way we respect all other laws". Somebody should inform him that iniquitous laws should be contested. That's what the judicial system is for.

But all those December 10 protesters, and, indeed, the two-thirds of all Montreal Island dwellers who are against the megacity, should take heart. Things are not as bad as they seem. There are now 20 cities on the Island of Montreal that are continuing to fight the good fight against Bill 170. Instead of being in the streets or in a backroom somewhere, the battleground is now the courtroom. A place where cool logic prevails. It will be a change.

GAZETTE EDITORIAL – 21 MAY, 2001

Transition Committee. Those two words sound innocuous enough – even mildly reassuring. One thinks of a group of folks sitting around together, smoothing the way from one state of affairs to another. The reality is that the Montreal Transition Committee is engaged in foisting a huge bureaucratic construct upon a suspecting public who is largely against the idea. Ah, but these unelected megacity-makers know what's best for us, especially for those citizens who so touchingly want to cling to the idea of human-scale cities. So the Transition Committee serves double duty as a wrecking crew to rid the municipal landscape of these bothersome little cities, many of which have thrived for a century or more.

The identities of Transition Committee members are known, yet they go about their task behind closed doors, busily executing the orders of their boss (Minister Harel), following a legal blueprint (Bill 170). From time to time, a bulletin emerges to the outside world that things are going swimmingly. But a recently-leaked document shows all is not well in the megacity-creation business. This document predicts a \$304 million yearly deficit in five years' time, even after a \$50 million injection from Quebec.

How does the committee intend to deal with such a massive shortfall? Why, simple: just ask - politely - the unions to eliminate guaranteed minimum staffing levels and then (poof!) get rid of 1696 people. Sure, and maybe the unions will buy the Jacques-Cartier Bridge into the bargain. Let's face it, if there is so much overstaffing, why wait for the megacity? Do it now. And if these 1696 people are actually doing something today, what this means is a massive reduction in services for the privilege of living in this brave new megamunicipal world.

Memo to the Transition Committee: no municipal merger ever saved money. Don't even try. Take Toronto, for example: there, the megacity faced a \$305 million deficit this year. They would have had to raise taxes 19%, had the provincial government not stepped in with a one-time bailout of \$125 million. The experience of Toronto proves that the real cost of mergers only shows up a few years after, when salaries rise to the highest common denominator. Not only are Torontonians facing a series of tax hikes and user fees, but service levels have dropped. Just one of the pinchpenny new user fees: groups picnicking in the park will now have to pay a \$50 fee. (They'd better bring a lawnmower, because in a cost-saving measure, the grass in Toronto parks is now only cut four times a season, down from eight.)

It is for these reasons that the only place in the world where municipal mergers are currently taking place is in Quebec. Ontario has stopped all further mergers; in the U.S., there's been no real merger for 102 years; and in Europe, the Charter of Local Self-Government requires prior consultation before any municipal mergers are attempted. The United Nations will be looking at a similar charter. Forced mergers are not only *passé*, but are now considered clearly antidemocratic.

Oblivious to their anachronistic mission, the Transition Committee beavers away. They recently hired the megacity's Director-General – to

no one's surprise, he currently runs the City of Montreal. One hopes, for his sake, he fares better than Gerard Divay, their ex- Director General, who had the courage to say that Montreal's management is hopelessly sclerotic: Divay got fired for his pains. The city auditor said the same thing last week. This is the management mess that the Transition Committee wants to spread all over the Island? If so, they are suffering from what the C.D. Howe Institute called, in a scathing indictment of forced mergers, "the religious-like idealization of professional bureaucracies".

In short, the Transition Committee is in the process of creating a bigger, fatter City of Montreal. Yet they persist in saying they want to give the *arrondissements* some power. Well, they can't. Bill 170 requires that financing and staffing will be controlled by the new City of Montreal. *Arrondissements* have no legal status, with no power to tax, borrow, hire or fire. They are empty shells. Oh, but they are bilingual empty shells.

The Committee is supposed to recommend changes to Bill 170. Well, the mountain has laboured and brought forth a mouse: the amendments, though some clever fiscal sophistry, even manage to remove the 5% annual cap on future tax bills. And the Transition Committee now has the power to hire all no-unionised management staff.

But it's really not just a question of money and management. The first casualty of forced mergers is democracy: citizens become resigned and cynical about the whole process. This is not helped by the secret workings of the Transition Committee. In fact, their taskmistress, Minister Harel, had originally declared she would force them to hold monthly public meetings. Four months into their mandate, members of the Transition Committee have yet to venture forth into the sunlight. They continue to toil and moil, transmuting our well-run cities into a bureaucrats' dream and a taxpayers' nightmare.