Proposal For Change to the Minister of Tourism

Ed's note: we didn't feel the need to add anything to this because it says it all.

The promotion of Tourism Prince Edward Island style has been a matter of concern and study for our groups for quite some time. We realize that the tourist industry and its future is very important to the Government, otherwise you would not have commissioned the present study by ABT.

The purpose of the Brief is to raise important questions connected with the promotion of tourism. It is our belief that tourism needs to be guided and controlled so that it fits into our Island way of life which should be firmly based on farming and fishing and the spin-off production which meets basic human needs. Tourism is seem by us as an extra, hence our concern about its rapid growth.

We are not suggesting that Islanders hoard the beauties of nature. It would be wrong to keep away people who want to share P.E.I.'s beauty in ways which are positive, not luxurious, not unreal or escapist, not disrespectful of the needs of people who live here all year round. Tourism does have good points. We believe in the importance of leisure but at the same time we are challenged to develop in ourselves and others an attitude of caring, sparing, and sharing.

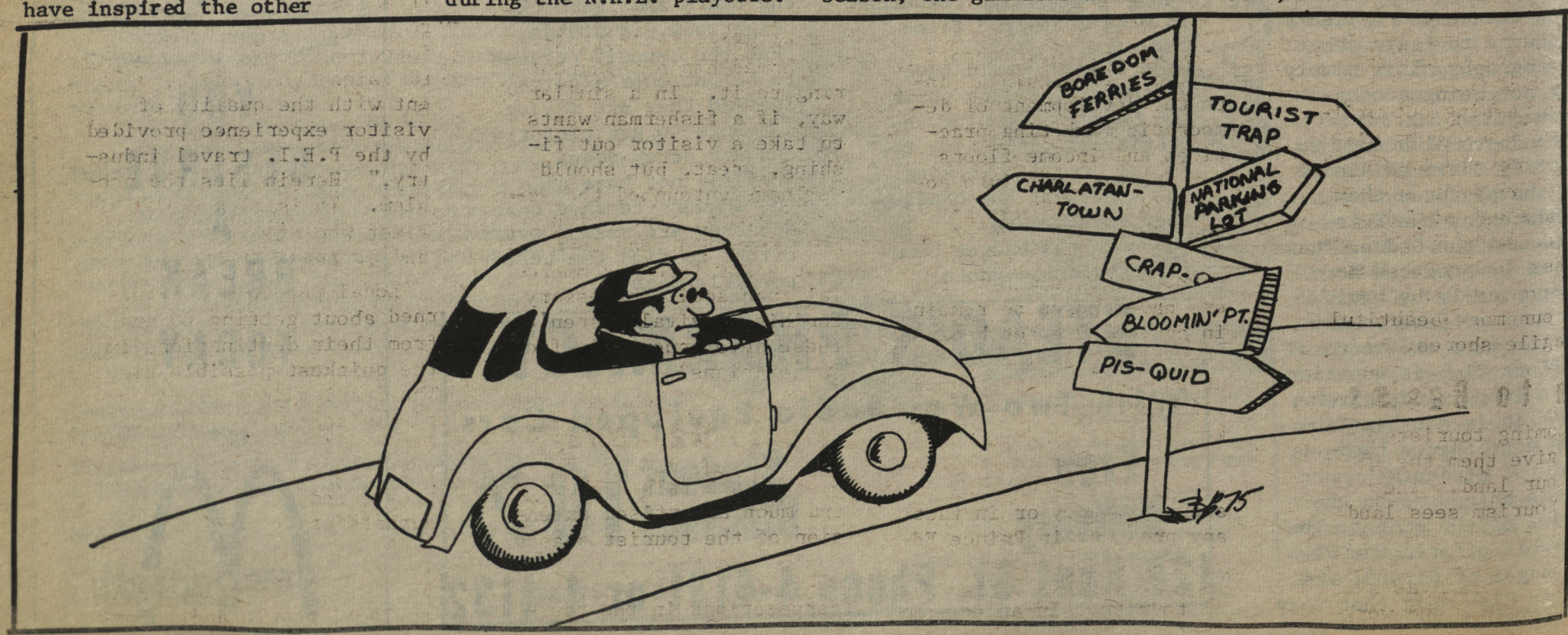
Dep't of Tourism

Looking back over the work of the past year, the Premier deserves congratulations on his initiatives with land use, e.g., the Federal Court case and efforts in land use which have inspired the other premiers. It is our hope that all of this leads to positive action for the good of P.E.I. However, we wonder just what has happened to the Royal Commission on Land Use? When can we expect the long overdue land use legislation which is so desperately needed on this Island?

At this point we are compelled to express our concern about the information on tourism which reaches the public from time to time. Our concern is that we may be pushed into a model of tourist development which is not in the best interests of the Island. Indications are that the Department of Tourism intends to continue its promotion of tourism, adding frills and expanding both the season and tourist facilities. We believe that the Island is first and foremost a place for Islanders to return to. Tourism is not meant to be commercial and we must avoid the deception that people are tourists when they are coming home for a visit. We also believe that it is unwise to promote tourism in these precarious times of petrol-chemical shortages and inflation, and unhealthy to put so much money and energy into an industry which generates unproductive work.

Several messages, e.g., the Labour Day Statement of the Canadian Bishops and indeed some of the Premier's own speeches seem to us to be in conflict with the kind of tourist promotion which is, in our eyes, extravagant and uncharacteristic of Islanders. We offer the following examples. There is the high cost to Islanders of advertising P.E.I. during the N.H.L. playoffs. Many Islanders found it difficult to watch such propaganda and saw no good reason for it. It is over-promotion and one of many examples of questionable methods. There is the Tourist Information Centre at Poole's Corner which is again unnecessary and extravagant; there is the recent joint plan of the four Atlantic Provinces and the Federal Government to join together to spend even more money on tourist promotion and commit more Island money to advertising; there is the appeal to the rich through promotion of special packages including airline flights (this is how international tourism which benefits a few people begins). Although we have no quarrel with the service which Air Canada is giving to the Island, we are familiar with its tourist promotion policies in other places, e.g., the Caribbean, Bermuda and Mexico. There is evidence that the airline has similar intentions to promote tourism in the Atlantic Provinces. This is verified by articles in Enroute and other types of propaganda. Other signs of priority for rapid expansion of tourism are the continued suggestions that Island facilities be overstrained for the benefit of tourists, e.g., the suggestion that children of tourists attend Island schools; the recent $16,000 study of the Department of Tourism, Parks and Conservation indicating a yearly increase of 8 to 10 percent in use of ferries concentrated in a span of two to three months during the summer season; the gimmicks and novelties which are continually being devised to please tourists; the false tourist expectations which are due to unreal advertising, tending to make the Island a kind of fantasy land; the use of travel agents and their language which in fact promote only the "fast buck" and which talk about "selling the basic charm of the people."

False advertising attracted several tourists to the Island in 1975. Some of them were unable to get adequate accomodations. This has let to frustrations for the tourist and worse still, to the recent comments by the Minister of Tourism that he is seeking DREE funds "to encourage creation of accomodations in the areas where they are needed." Is the government unable to see that many Islanders lack adequate accomodations and that their needs have priority?

Life Styles

Tourism as it is now promoted is imposed on our people. It is seen as over-promoting the things which Islanders consider to be of least importance. Discussion with Islanders reveals that we don't want to change our lifestyle for the tourists. The tourist industry must accept us as we are. Our attitude towards the tourist is "You're welcome, not for your money. You are a person." Islanders need to be encouraged to maintain our identity, way of life and spirit of hospitality as a people. But when the Island is advertised in unreal terms and people are enticed to come, we are forced to re-