The Guardian

Covers Prince Edward Island Like The Dew

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A Fine Theory!

The new theory of political irresponsibility propounded by Postmaster General Nicholson drew shouts of derision from Opposition benches in the House of Commons on Tuesday. It would be surprising indeed if it didn't. Mr. Nicholson made two or three attempts to qualify his statement, but we must assume that The Canadian Press quoted him accurately in claiming that an out-of-office politician who makes a promise in an election campaign can't be held to account for it if he gets elected and joins the cabinet.

This, of course, would relieve the whole Pearson Cabinet from responsibility for its election pledges, since every man jack of them was out of office when the pledges were given. Only the government of the day—Mr. Diefenbaker and his colleagues—were bound by what they said; and since they went down to defeat it would seem that there is nobody at all now who can be held responsible for a single one of the promises the campaign produced!

Prime Minister Mackenzie King used to be credited with saying that election platforms were only planks to get into power on, but he always denied having made such a statement. As he was a very cagey gentleman we are inclined to believe that whatever his thoughts were on the subject, he would be unlikely to give expression to them in this manner.

Nor do we think that Mr. Nicholson's colleagues will be enthusiastic about publicly indorsing the views to which he gave utterance on Tuesday—even in the modified form in which he sought later to present them.

Politicians who don't live up to their election promises must expect, when their party is in power, to be reminded constantly of their dereliction by the electorate. A simple course for them to take, if they are really sincere, would be to refuse to enter a government—or resign from it as the case may be—if they can't get the support required to put their pledge into effect. Only in that way would they be keeping faith with their constituents.

A still simpler course would be for them to refrain from making windy promises in the first place; but perhaps that is asking too much.

In any case, they can't expect to have it both ways.

A Personal Issue

President Johnson's family ownership of radio and television properties is looming as a controversial issue in the U.S. election campaign. It has been described in the New York Times as a "basic conflict of interest," and at this distance the the conflict looks, to say the least, to be an unpromising one from the Democratic party standpoint.

The issue revolves about the fact that the television license is under the regulatory authority of the U.S. federal government and the Federal Communications Commission. The rapid increase of profit and capital of the Johnson license resulted in part from the natural growth of television, but also, it appears, from a series of decisions made by the above mentioned commission.

One result of this has been called by Edward W. Barrett, in the Columbia Journalism Review, "a monopoly" for the Johnson station. As Senator, Mr Johnson was a member of the Senate Commerce Committee which dealth with budget and law affecting the commission. As President he appoints its chairman and if he is re-elected will have appointed two members of the commission in his first 18 months in office. It will be his reponsibility also to review its budget.

When he entered the White House Mr. Johnson did not divest himself and his family of his interest: he merely transferred it for a limited period to a trust. The Johnsons will continue to receive its profits and ultimately will regain ownership. Thus they continue their profit or loss relationship to a committee controlled by the White House and Congress.

Further discusion has to await further facts on the nature of FCC decisions affecting the Johnson TV station and comparisons with the treatment of other license holders. Unless documented charges are made and confirmed it is presumed there is nothing improper except the "conflict of interest." But that itself is improper.

So, it has been argued, are similar personal or family connections between 18 members of Congres and radio - TV stations. Messrs. Nixon, Goldwater, and Johnson made varying degrees of information available on their personal fortunes; Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy did not. But neither Eisenhower nor Kennedy were involved in the kind of predicament that Mr. Johnson now finds himself.

Probably it is not as bad as his opponents will paint it, but it could give him a lot of trouble on the hustings.

Malta's Independence

"A faithful British sentinel guarding the narrow and vital sea corridor through the central Mediterranean"—thus was Malta described by Winston Churchill in the 1940's when the island withstood thousands of air raids by Italian and German bombers. The situation has changed since then.

Britain has lost its naval supremacy and the United States 6th fleet, with its atom bomb carriers, is the strongest force in that busy area between Sicily and Tunisia. No longer do British fleets of warships moor in Grand harbor beneath the battlements of Valletta, the Maltese capital. A few elderly cruisers, mine sweepers and escort vessels are the reminders of earlier armadas.

There are other changes for Malta, too. In September it will declare its independence from the British crown whose protection it sought and received 162 years ago. Napoleon was the Maltese menace in those days, and his garrisons were kicked out, bag and baggage, by the rebellious islanders and the supporting navy of famed Admiral Horatio Nelson.

Now Malta will be on its own, politically; but Britain will continue to supervise Maltese defenses and in the next decade will contribute $140 million to its "faithful sentinel." Welcome indeed will this assistance be, for the colony has probably the worst trade balance in the world. Its imports in a year amount to $81 million and its exports to $13 million. British loans and subsidies and visitors' spending meet the deficit.

Independence is a very fine thing, even when it has to be propped up in this manner. But there are dangers involved as well. Malta is not likely to become the hotbed of that Cyprus turned out to be, but it will take good government to keep it on a steady course.

EDITORIAL NOTES

The Middle East was a headache in Shakespeare's day too. An exchange recalls that in "Othello" the Venetian court also feared that the Turks would invade Cyprus, then ruled by Venice.

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"What about those seat belts?" asks a new brochure issued by the Canadian Highway Safety Council, to appear soon in the glove compartments of all new cars in Canada. Now that new cars are equipped with seat belts at the factory, CHSC designed the brochure to urge owners to make full use of this vital item of safety equipment. "When a seat belt is worn," the brochure advises, "it can take the sting out of accident chaos. It can save a life. If it is NOT worn, it can do nothing." The brochure ends with the admonition, "Make seat belts a habit."

I'VE JUST GOTTA GET THAT ONE!
AN' THAT ONE—
AN' THAT—
AN'—
WHERE'S MY STANDING?
FEDERAL SPENDING
PENSIONS
MUNICIPAL SPENDING
HEALTH
AND WELFARE
PROVINCIAL SPENDING
BOOM
BOOM
BOOM