

A Current Affair

The shocking truth about electricity

ISLANDERS ARE AN AMUSING BUNCH-- and that's coming from the pen of an Islander, born-and-bred, so this isn't some alien aspersion on the provincial character. Since before its entry into Canada, P.E.I. has always had a healthy sense of its own importance. The Island once considered itself too prosperously self-sufficient to be bothered with Canada, and since joining Confederation, the never-altogether-humbled P.E.I. has jealously asserted its uniqueness and importance as a full provincial partner in this country. A largely tourism-dependent, agrarian Island with a population below that of most major Canadian cities, P.E.I. remains a proud and independent province of Canada--if not always a very realistic one regarding its relative place in the scheme of things.

This fierce pride is apparent in the recent controversy over the supply of electrical power to P.E.I. The fiendish plot runs as follows: New Brunswick (NB) Power plans to acquire Maritime Electric, the private electric utility that serves the Island. To elaborate, secret talks between P.E.I. and New Brunswick

resulted in present efforts by P.E.I. Energy (a provincial agency) to acquire ownership of Charlottetown-based Maritime Electric. The stated goal: slashing P.E.I.'s ridiculously high power rates (the highest of any Canadian province).

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NB Power already supplies 85-95 per cent of P.E.I.'s electricity via underwater cable connection; moreover, P.E.I.'s power needs would require only 140 megawatts of New Brunswick's present 300 megawatt power surplus. While NB Power stands ready and willing to supply P.E.I.'s power needs, Maritime Electric maintains an oil-fired plant at

Charlottetown and gas turbines at Borden, since the NB Power line can be interrupted at any time. Regardless, the new NB Power proposition is far from unattractive.

The fly in the electrical ointment is the assertion by some that the buyout will reduce P.E.I. to little more than a suburb of Moncton. The critics most assuredly have a point or two. While rates may eventually fall, P.E.I. Energy has agreed that, if successful in its takeover bid, it will resell its shares in Maritime Electric to NB Power at a price far below their list value. The difference will be paid for by maintaining

current electric rates in P.E.I. for about two and a half years, with the extra revenue slated to cover P.E.I. Energy's unpaid share of the acquisition price. If this deal fails, Maritime Electric could follow through on its reported plans to lower rates by 7.4 per cent as of July 1. So, NB Power's takeover could actually lead to higher power rates in the short term.

Furthermore, Maritime Electric's P.E.I. plants and facilities, which account for 240 jobs, could be jeopardized by an NB Power regime.

Economic brass tacks aside, a touch of the old Island Pride is what makes this deal a bit harder to swallow. Many people, like P.E.I. Opposition Leader Pat Mella, fear the loss of provincial autonomy with the management of P.E.I.'s electricity in the hands of a Crown utility owned and regulated by another province.

Mella's fear for P.E.I.'s independence is understandable, especially in light of the forthcoming Fixed Link to New Brunswick. P.E.I. does indeed face the prospect of becoming a New Brunswick suburb, the poverty peninsula. What's amusing is how it takes something as blatant as this, a proposed out-of-province utilities takeover, to clue folks into the possibility that increased ties with the mainland might leave P.E.I. in a less than commanding position. We haven't the resources or the population to be an equal--let alone dominant--partner in a closer economic relationship. It just takes a shock to the Island ego to put this idea in some Islanders' heads. P.E.I. may feel perfectly secure in its watery, splendid isolation for now, but the power controversy may be our first taste of what it could be like as a small fish in the big Canadian pond.

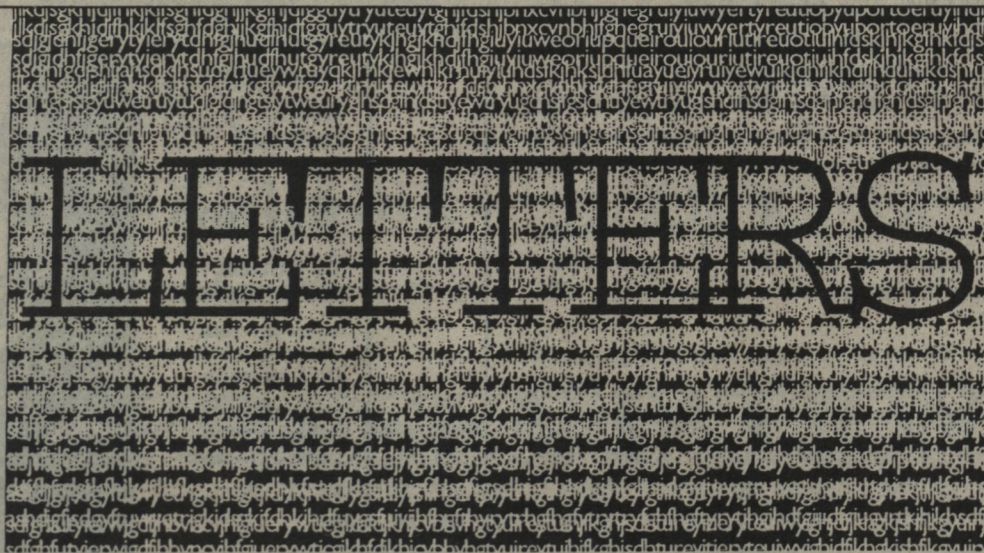
Sean McQuaid
Electrifying Editor

Fuming mad

I am not just writing this article because I am pregnant and second-hand smoke is even more dangerous to my unborn child than it is to me, but because I feel that as a non-smoker there should be some place I can sit in this library building to have a pop, a bag of chips, or even just sit, without having to breathe in someone else's smoke! I am not complaining about "the Pit" being a total smoking environment, and I am not even complaining about the fact that each time I enter "the Pit" to buy a treat I come out smelling like a cigarette! Smokers have rights to smoking areas, especially in the cold winter, but I think non-smokers (like myself) should have some rights, too!

All I'm asking for is that the breezeway be a smoke-free area. Is it really fair that anyone should have to stand outside for a few minutes of relaxation or for a quick snack? Is it really fair that smokers not only get to enjoy the luxuries of "the Pit" (food, drink, tables and chairs), but also get the luxuries of the breezeway-- hard, wooden benches and a peanut and smartie machine?!!

I am sure there must be other people who agree with me. If so, let's all try to get "the breezeway" smoke-free. Surely you smokers would not mind confining your area to "the Pit" only, would you? That's not a really big request, is it? Let's make a deal here... if you all smoke only in "the Pit", I will not complain about having to enter there to purchase food



and exit smelling like a cigarette. Maybe if I knew for sure that "the breezeway" was smoke-free, I would just buy my treats elsewhere. All I know is that the library is the central point of this university, and my unborn child and I would like a warm and smoke-free seat now and then during the day. Everyone else comes here, why shouldn't we and others who feel like I do? I know, I won't be pregnant forever, thank the Lord, but I will always want a smoke-free area to sit and relax in every now and then. It would be nice to know that there is a meeting and greeting place in the centre of the university for me and others like me. Waddayasay?

I'd sign my name, but anyone who reads this just needs to look around. You'll know it's me!

The Ghost of X-Press Past

Dear Sean,
We think that you are absolutely right about Eric Lindros and the Flyers. We think that he is just a disgrace to hockey because he is just looking for the money, and he hasn't even proven himself yet. The Flyers made a terrible mistake trading the good half of their team just for one player. He should have gone to the Quebec Nordiques because they needed him more than the Philadelphia Flyers. As we said before all he is looking for is the money.

We like the comparison about the "Chiquita" Bananas, and your style of writing.
Your friends,
Jason Campbell and Dennis Gregory

Dundas Consolidated School

Editor's Note: If you're confused by the above letter, you have our fine postal service to thank for it. This letter, delivered to our office last week, WAS actually relevant-- when it was written back in the Fall of 1992, anyway. It referred to a then-recent editorial denouncing the star pretensions of Eric Lindros in the wake of his training camp time on the Island. Thanks for the kind words, guys, and our apologies for the delay-- Canada Post works in mysterious ways.

Column bites

Having just read your column "trials and tribulations of a twentysomething," I felt compelled to comment on it. How could you allow something so unoriginally bland to be published in your paper?

My God, it's as if S. Livingstone treats the book *Generation X* as his own personal Jesus and feels uncomfortable writing anything unless Douglas Coupland has already written it better. Cleverly (or at least attempting to be clever) for nothing in this meandering is clever) dropping catch phrases he saw on *MuchMusic* does not a generational chronicler make. Some tips for Livingstone:

1. MAKE A FRIEND OF ORIGINALITY. Don't fear it, seek it out. You may actually like it and your writing style will definitely improve.

continued on next page