

November 15, 2004

## If we want to 'save Canada' let's make politicians subject to the rule of law

I hope -- I really, really hope -- that the revelations of federal corruption spilling out daily at the Gomery inquiry into Adscam lead to jail sentences if they prove true.

Including for politicians.

Adscam wasn't just standard penny-ante contract padding. And it wasn't "waste," as so many brain-dead Canadians seem to think.

It was a systematic, \$100-million-dollar looting of the federal treasury which was plainly orchestrated (at least in large part) from the highest political office in the land, the Prime Minister's Office.

If this happened in the United States, the whole country would be in an uproar. But not here. The man on the street, or in the next office, says, "Yeah, they wasted a pile of money, but, hey, what can you do?"

The sponsorship program funneled \$250 million over eight years to federal propaganda projects in Quebec. Of that, according to the Auditor-General, about \$100 million was billed by, and paid to, Liberal-friendly advertising agencies for no reason at all.

In short, the \$100 million was stolen. But who ended up with it? The Quebec sleaze-balls who sent in the phony invoices, or the politicians who approved them?

To find out what happened, Justice John Gomery is conducting a public inquiry, and has heard some amazing stories.

For instance, the sticky notes.

The politician most heavily implicated in the scandal (so far) is former Public Works minister Alfonso Gagliano of east-end Montreal. He and his political chief of staff, Jean-Marc Bard, kept track of who got what payola, mainly by attaching sticky notes to otherwise incomplete file documents.

The stated (but unwritten) policy of the sponsorship program was to keep no incriminating records, and to involve as few civil servants as possible.

Three weeks ago, Justice Gomery heard that on the day that Gagliano was removed as minister of Public Works in 2002, three of his staff spent the evening sorting through hundreds of documents in two filing cabinets removing and destroying all the sticky notes.

The judge was incredulous. "This would be unknown in the private sector," he said. It smacks of criminal destruction of evidence.

But it doesn't seem so to politicians of the sponsorship mentality. To them, it's not the purpose of politicians to serve the interests of the government. It's the purpose of the government to serve the interests of the politicians--the standard backward assumption of every one-party banana republic in the world.

Thus the breathless but phony urgency of the whole sponsorship scam.

Last week, for example, Guite was explaining (between bouts of stonewalling and backtracking) why he approved a 1996 contract to supply \$325,000 worth of nation-saving golf balls and Christmas decorations.

In the process, Lafleur Communications got its standard 15% commission for doing nothing except placing an untendered federal order with the owner's son.

There was no time, they needed the items right away, Guite explained. "Golf balls?" asked commission lawyer Neil Finkelstein. "Christmas ornaments? In March?"

Guite's memory then failed him. No sticky note, I suppose.

We're just in the beginning of this huge mess, and haven't heard yet from Chretien and his cabinet accomplices.

But Canadians should start preparing now for the strong possibility that the men who ruled our country for ten years may face criminal charges, and may go to prison.

If they ever do, it will do more to save Canada than anything I can think of.

- Link Byfield

*Link Byfield is chairman of the Edmonton-based Citizens Centre for Freedom and Democracy.*

*"Just Between Us" is a feature service of the Citizens Centre for Freedom and Democracy. The purpose of the Citizens Centre is to enhance freedom and democracy by enabling ordinary citizens to become active and effective on important issues outside the normal processes of party politics.*