

Now is the time to stand up and be counted...

July 2002 Column, Country Life in B.C.

Wendy R. Holm, P.Ag.

Intelligence without empathy and compassion makes for thin gruel indeed. Remove ethics from the pot and you've got some pretty nasty stuff.

The move by David Asper — 30-something overseer of the family's newspaper empire — to swoop boldly in from Winnipeg and topple respected Ottawa Citizen editor Russell Mills for writing an editorial calling for Chrétien's resignation is ringing alarm bells across Canada.

For years, competition analysts have voiced concern that ownership of Canada's national, regional and local papers by two families — Southam and Thompson — could, as Mills puts it, reduce the quality and independence of the information and commentary Canadians require to be good citizens of a democracy. The recent phenomenon of convergence —two entities, CanWest Global and Bell Globemedia, now control not only the empires of Southam and Thompson but also the local and national television and cable network holdings of Global and CTV — dramatically escalates public concern.

The firing of Ottawa Citizen editor Russell Mills is one example of why such concerns are valid. The shutdown of public discussion on the water/trade issue is another.

Last July 19, the Globe and Mail's lead editorial quoted "Chrétien spokesman" Duncan Fulton as saying "We are opposed to the bulk export of Canadian water. It's something that we negotiated under the North American trade agreement... to be excluded... The treaty exempts bulk water..." In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. There was NO EXEMPTION negotiated for water under the NAFTA, which is precisely why we have a problem.

Opposite this was an editorial by would-be-water-exporter William Annett pooh-poohing water exports as not economically feasible (it will never happen). I promptly submitted my credentials and an op-ed correcting the statements of Fulton and Annett. After 15 days of "ya-da, ya-da, ya-da" from Globe and Mail's editorial desk, I was told, "sorry, the story is stale now, we can't use it..."

Is it any wonder some farmers still express alarm when told that yes, water is indeed included in the NAFTA?

Farmers are no strangers to the power capital takes on when it concentrates. Look at Canada's food processing and retailing industry (now one). Look at Parmalat and Saputo's rapid take-over of Canada's dairy processing sector. Look at spuds and hogs on the Prairies. Margin capture by concentrated agribusiness interests has been threatening the economics of farming for over a decade. The capture of farm water rights is simply the next horizon. By US farmers, for irrigation. By the oil patch. By a competing industry that just happens to have American investors.

Enough is enough. Water is a tailor-made issue to turn the tide. Whether you love NAFTA or hate NAFTA, water must be removed from NAFTA. Think of it: Canada's farmers riding in on a white horse to rescue our water from the NAFTA, win the hearts and loyalty of Canadian consumers and create a unified voice for Canada's farmers in the process. Pretty slick. And pretty do-able...

The fruit growers already passed the water resolution at their 2002 BCFGA AGM. It's also making its way through the committee system of the BC cattlemen. I have been asked to present the resolution to the Dairy Farmers of Canada Policy Conference in Ottawa in January.

If you haven't already done so, take this resolution to your commodity group, farmers institute, and/or

women's institute, get it passed and get it back to me ASAP. Call me if you want me to come and speak to your meeting.

Tell your grandchildren how you helped to save Canada's water. Not how you sat back and felt powerless to stop its capture. Canada is, after all, a democracy. With farmers across Canada speaking in one voice, saving Canada's water is eminently do-able. Now is the time to stand up and be counted.

For further information, go to <www.farmertofarmer.ca> and click on OUR FIRST OUTCOME: WATER or contact me at 604.947.2893, fax: 604.947.2321 or holm@farmertofarmer.ca)

CBC TV's COUNTRY CANADA PROFILES CUBA FARMER TOURS

Watch the season opener of CBC-TV's Country Canada for a special on the Canada-Cuba Farmer to Farmer Project. Host Reg Sherren traveled to Cuba with us in March to produce this feature. Once it airs, we anticipate next season's tours will quickly sell out. So don't miss out! Reserve now for January 6th, January 27th, February 17th or March 10th 2003 departures. Farmers/farm families only, please. www.farmertofarmer.ca, 604.947.2893, <holm@farmertofarmer.ca>

THE SOLUTION IS CRYSTAL CLEAR FARMERS' RESOLUTION TO EXEMPT WATER FROM NAFTA & FTA

WHEREAS Canadian food security depends on water,
AND WHEREAS the NAFTA compromises Canada's control over this vital resource,
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the members of the _____ (*name of your farm organization*) stand together with farmers and farm organizations from across Canada in calling on the Government of Canada to immediately:

1. secure an explicit exemption for water under the goods, services and investment provisions of the NAFTA and the FTA;
2. place a moratorium on any new water export initiatives until such an exemption is in place; and
3. secure an explicit exclusion for water and water related services under the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS), the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) and all subsequent agreements related to international trade.

Once passed by your membership, return this resolution to Wendy R. Holm, P.Ag., RR #1, L-25, Bowen Island, BC. V0N 1G0. Please include the name and address of a contact person for your group and a short profile of your membership (number of farmers, etc.). ALL RESOLUTIONS MUST BE RECEIVED BEFORE FEBRUARY 10, 2003. <www.farmertofarmer.ca>, holm@farmertofarmer.ca, 604.947.2893