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EDITORIALS

Making sense of a Canadian atrocity

Twenty-five years — almost to the day — after Air India Flight 182 was blown out of the sky near Ireland, Canada can finally claim to have a full analysis of the tragedy that followed the country's worst terrorist attack.

Yesterday, former Supreme Court justice John Major delivered his report into the attack, and the bungled investigation that followed. It is a damning indictment of the performance of the police and the government which does not mince words in portraying officials as slow, disorganized and curiously detached from the enormity of the attack, which killed all 329 passengers, most of them Canadians. The government was simply not prepared to deal with terrorism, he said, and the two major investigating forces — the RCMP and CSIS — became bogged down in turf wars, bureaucratic battles and alarming displays of investigative ineptitude.

It has long been argued that Canadians' seeming indifference to the bombing derived from the fact most of the dead were of Indian background, a

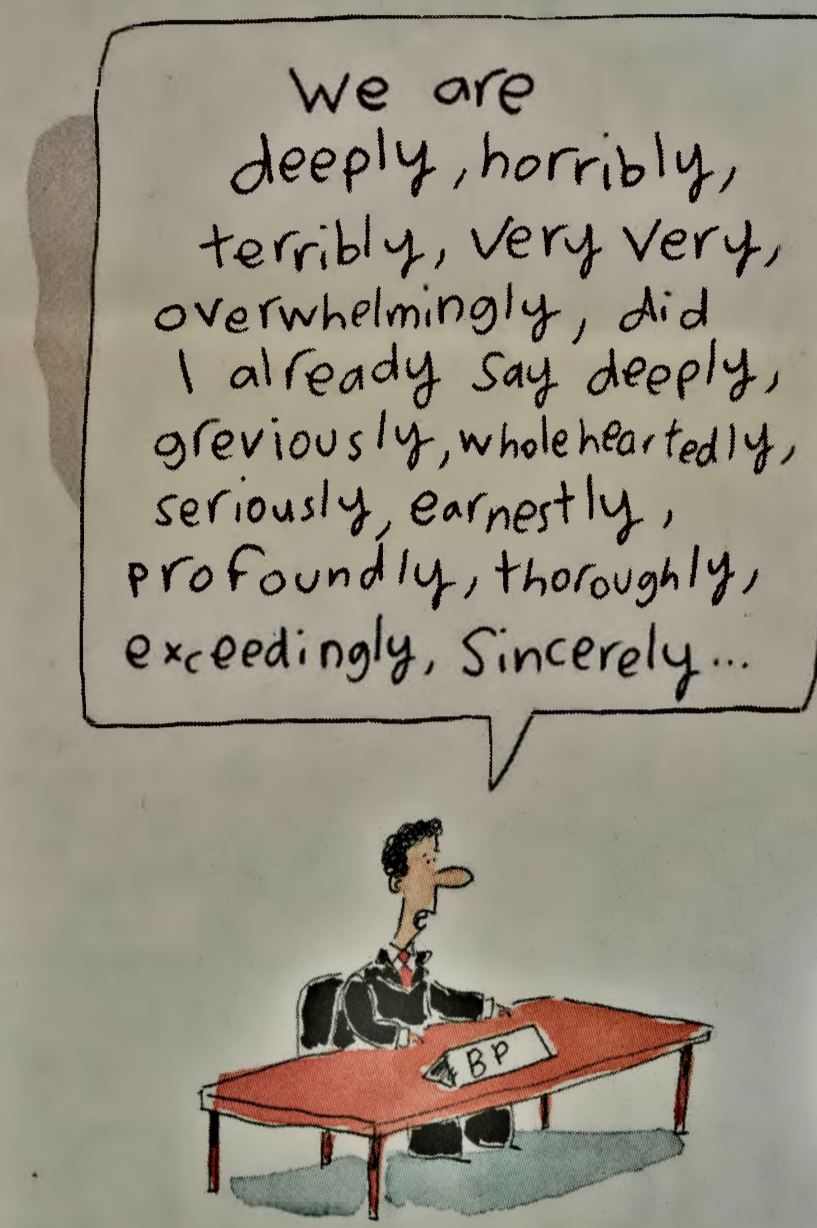
in the same search for answers. Between them, he noted, there was ample intelligence to signal that Flight 182 was at high risk of being bombed by Sikh terrorists. Yet taken together, their performance at gathering, analysing and communicating information was "wholly deficient."

"The level of error, incompetence, and inattention which took place before the flight was sadly mirrored in many ways for many years, in how authorities, governments and institutions dealt with the aftermath of the murder of so many innocents," Mr. Major said. To remedy the inability of the police to co-operate with one another, he recommended the strengthening of Canada's national security advisor, urging that the post be given new powers to sort out turf wars between the agencies, and that the advisor have direct access to the prime minister.

While that advice may be welcome, it is a sad reflection on the state of Canada's two premier policing agencies that they have to be watched over by the equivalent of a class monitor to keep them from pulling one another's hair. The findings add to numerous other incidents involving the RCMP which have brought what was once a proud national force into a state of disrepute. Mr. Major indicated the force may have spread itself too widely, and suggested it is time it dropped its contractual policing duties in a number of provinces.

Although the Conservative government has made efforts to remedy some of the force's deficiencies, it is clear that much more remains to be done. Tinkering with procedures and operations is not enough; it should be clear by now that the RCMP needs a full housecleaning to rid it of the people and attitudes that are eroding it from within. There should, in particular, be much greater civilian oversight and control, and an elimination of the culture of secrecy and cover-up which plagues the organization.

Canada can be grateful to Mr. Major for at last bringing a degree of closure to a tragedy that has nagged at the national consciousness for a quarter of a century. Now Ottawa must seize the opportunity to institute the reforms needed to deal with similar threats in the future — and to provide a police force capable of dealing with the terrorists who would commit them.



The Air India report makes it clear the RCMP needs a good housecleaning

suspicion Mr. Major addressed directly. "I stress this is a Canadian atrocity," he said. "For too long the greatest loss of Canadian lives at the hands of terrorists has somehow been relegated outside the Canadian consciousness."

Prime Minister Stephen Harper met with relatives of some of the victims, calling the report a "damning indictment" and pledging to respond to Mr. Major's call for compensation and an apology to the victims' families.

Though it has been apparent for years that the police response to the tragedy was riddled with errors, the extent of the blundering as detailed in Mr. Major's report is no less startling. While victims' families clamoured for information and some form of justice against the killers, CSIS and the RCMP lost themselves in bureaucratic battles, treating one another more as rivals than as co-operative forces engaged

Just call it 'right-wing'



SCOTT STINSON

Sun News TV remains but a twinkle in the eye of Pierre Karl Peladeau, at least from a regulatory perspective, but its mere mention seems to send the news-consuming public in this country into fits of indignation. Unless it causes them to squeal with delight.

Consider these comments, attached to an online *Maclean's* story about Quebecor's plans for the all-news channel: "Lovely, a right wing conservative channel designed to brainwash the small minded intolerant lemmings of the nation and whip them into the same hysteria that Fox does in the U.S." And, "Ever watch someone reading the *Sun*? They breathe through their mouths and move their lips at the same time."

Then there are those of a different bent: "I for one am so fed up with our current left wing socialist media I welcome this refreshing concept. No more CBC for me." Or, "I can hardly wait for this new channel to begin broadcasting. I am so fed up with the leftist tripe served up by the CBC that I can't take it any longer."

If the idea of Sun News TV was to spark debate, then it appears to have already accomplished its goal.

The bombast that has greeted the planned arrival of the network — which needs a lot of regulatory help if it is to sit beside CBC News Network as a "must-air" channel on cable and satellite ser-

vices — has seen Sun News's frontman, new Quebecor executive Kory Teneycke, appearing before the media to explain the network's mission to Canadians.

Given that Mr. Teneycke was recently the director of communications for the Prime Minister's Office, it is odd that the messaging is so mixed.

Mr. Teneycke appeared on CBC's *Power & Politics* on Wednesday, and he sounded at pains to suggest that it is unfair to brand the new network as "right-wing" when it has not aired anything yet. He said simply that the mandate was that they would "try not to be boring" and "spark a bigger debate."

He didn't accuse the CBC of being leftist so much as he accused it of being, well, crappy. "The biggest problem with much of what is on this show

Sun News would combat "smug, condescending and irrelevant journalism" and would aim to take on "political correctness." He might as well have waved a banner saying "No Lefty Hippies or Limousine Liberals Welcome."

When the CBC's Don Newman said he didn't like the sound of a network modelled on Fox News because it would be divisive and one-sided, Mr. Teneycke pointed out that critics such as Mr. Newman had unfairly "already decided" what Sun News would be and taken a position against it.

But then he also accused Mr. Newman of "only having an issue with it because it's conservative," and said "you're going to be much happier if there's only a left-wing channel." (At this last dig Mr. Newman appeared genuinely hurt. "Why would you say that?" he asked, then started recounting all the coverage he has given conservatives over his long career. To his credit, he did not call Mr. Teneycke a whippersnapper.)

I can understand Mr. Teneycke's defensiveness over being branded a right-wing hack before having broadcast a second of news. It doesn't help when Mr. Solomon asserts that the CBC employs "journalists" and says of Sun News: "It's not real journalism, Kory, you're a propagandist." Who's being "fair and balanced" now, hmmm?

I've no issue with a new network with a different slant, and I don't buy Mr. Newman's argument that the arrival of a Fox News-style channel in Canada would suddenly bring with it the political "gridlock" that plagues the United States.

But if Mr. Teneycke is going to go on the public broadcaster and rip it as boring and left-wing, he shouldn't be surprised if observers conclude he intends his network to be the opposite; that is, right-wing. Or at least leaning in that direction.

It's a logical place on the spectrum for a new channel to occupy, after all, so why not just say that's what it is?

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Why won't Teneycke admit where his new network will fall on the political spectrum?

is its playfighting," he said, "by people who shouldn't be on TV." It shouldn't be news with just one perspective, he said.

When host Evan Solomon argued that other views are provided on his show, including paid appearances by Mr. Teneycke himself until he decamped for Quebecor, Mr. Teneycke responded, "It's not a question of whether other views are represented on this show — they are — it's just that they are represented in a boring way."

But these assertions that the network only aims to be lively are at odds with Mr. Teneycke's statements at a Toronto news conference this week that

Let's hope it's only the beginning

Nothing less than a forensic audit of each and every MP will do



LORNE GUNTER

Forgive me if I am unimpressed with the kind of audit MPs have finally consented to permit Auditor-General Sheila Fraser to conduct on their spending.

And forgive me, too, for thinking their consent was nothing more than a hurried compromise designed to give them cover as they head home for the summer. Could have been a long, hot Parliamentary recess if

members had had to face the wrath of constituents over their continued refusal to permit Ms. Fraser to examine their spending.

While it sounds as if Ms. Fraser will only be invited to do a superficial examination of MPs' office, travel and expense accounts, I'm pretty sure she won't be pulling any punches. She has said if she uncovers any mis-spending during her initial "statistical sample," she will turn over her findings to police. She may even be prompted to conduct a forensic audit — a much deeper receipt-by-receipt investigation — of all of Parliament Hill, if she uncovers widespread problems or fraud.

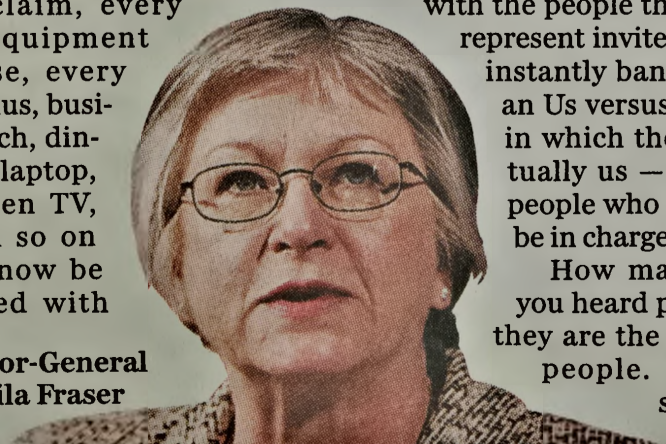
It could even be argued that the kind of audit she plans of randomly selected MPs and Parliamentary services is similar to the kind of audit she does of all ordinary government departments and agencies. Her audit of Parliament will be neither more severe nor more lenient.

When she and her staff examine the Agriculture department or Justice department or Industry Canada, they don't always do item-by-item

audits. They sometimes pick a few functions within each department that represent that department's activities and examine those functions closely as representative indicators of the entire department's efficiency.

But as good or bad as the audit MPs have consented to may be, too much water has passed under this bridge for MPs to get off that lightly now. Their arrogance about their own self-importance and dishonesty about Ms. Fraser's lack of legal authority to examine their books means that nothing less than a forensic audit of each and every MP will be good enough. Every travel claim, every office equipment purchase, every staff bonus, business lunch, dinner out, laptop, big-screen TV, gift and so on should now be examined with

Auditor-General
Sheila Fraser



the same thoroughness a Canada Revenue Agency auditor would use when going through the tax returns of an MP's constituents.

What's good enough for ordinary electors should also be required of MPs, too.

I don't for a minute think most MPs are crooks or fraudsters out to rob taxpayers. They are not padding their payrolls or claiming reimbursement for lunch meetings they never held or buying laptops at public expense for use by their kids in university.

But the fact they would all so readily and steadfastly link arms to deny access to their ledgers to the people who elected them invites suspicion. And the fact they demonstrated more solidarity with one another than with the people they are meant to represent invites mistrust. They instantly banded together in an Us versus Them scenario in which the Them was actually us — the voters, the people who are supposed to be in charge in a democracy.

How many times have you heard politicians claim they are the servants of the people. The expenses scandal demon-

strated what poppycock that is. They are our servants until we get uppity enough to demand an accounting of their spending of our money. Then we serfs have no right to question them. They invoke Parliamentary privilege to keep secret their use of \$533-million annually. They insist their internal accountability mechanisms are doing a good enough job, even as it is revealed that at least one MP — Toronto Liberal Judy Sgro — has potentially been violating internal rules for the past four years by giving the title to her Ottawa condo to her adult children, then renting the condo back, without internal auditors catching it.

Kevin Gaudet, the federal director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, said his organization was disappointed that Ms. Fraser was only going to be invited to do a cursory initial audit and that she would not name the names of any violators she caught. But he hoped once she had her foot in the door she would expand her investigation.

I hope that too, because nothing less than a full-scale probe of MP spending will now be enough to restore faith.

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