

# VIEWS & OPINIONS



## Two Minute Insight ...

BY PAUL MARTIN



It is like the duck swimming on a pond – quiet on top but paddling crazy underneath.

That is a loose description of the global economy these days as offered by Peter Hall of Canada's Export Development Corporation. He provides a different angle on the doom and gloom we're hearing these days in places like Europe when governments are crumbling under massive debt.

While Hall acknowledges that government austerity – the flip side of the stimulus programs they enacted a couple years ago to prevent a recession – is resulting in the public sector withdrawing from the market. And that has a depressing effect.

But, he argues what we're not seeing – the duck's feet under the surface – is a better-than-expected improvement in private sector performance. As he puts it, the US government's spending cuts will take a point or two off the nation's GDP. But private sector growth is keeping it in positive territory...and without the government restraint, the American economy would be expanding by a respectable 4 or 5 per cent right now.

Have you ever looked at your RRSP account or your investment portfolio and wondered: how are the rich people handling their finances in the wake of the Great Recession?

The answer to that question was explored at a conference in Toronto a few days ago as some of the top financial managers reviewed how their high net worth clients have been acting since the economic meltdown of 2008. What they've discovered is that these investors are more inclined towards fixed income vehicles – things like bonds and have only recently started returning to stocks.

Also, they are getting more involved in their financial affairs and relying less on advisors. They're doing more research and have begun to take a global view rather than focusing only on Canada as a place to put money to work.

And one other major finding – philanthropy throughout North America has declined since the Great Recession. Donors are also demanding more of the charities they support in terms of transparency and measures of the 'impact' their contributions are making to improving the lives of recipients.

### Letter to the Editor

## Where was Ian White?

It is quite funny to listen to CWB CEO Ian White comment that he sees farmers as the CWB's natural shareholders. In most companies shareholders have a right to vote on major direction changes, sell outs, or takeovers. No vote was given to the "natural shareholders" when Minister Ritz confiscated farmers' assets though Bill C-18. If the CEO really felt this way why has he never stated that farmers should have a vote on the direction of the CWB?

Where was he when the CWB had their farmer meetings this past summer when the changes to the CWB were being discussed?

The CEO states that Cargill has not even raised the idea of acquiring a privatized wheat board. My question is why would they even talk to White about this?

He is not running the CWB - Minister Ritz is.

Presently there are five people appointed to the CWB board of directors, by Minister Ritz. This arrangement is a mockery of good governance and only portrays a puppet attitude of doing what the Minister directs.

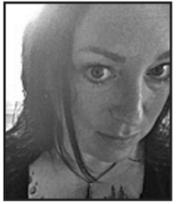
This is a far cry from when a ten member farmer elected board gave direction to the CEO. That was a democratic indication of what farmers wanted. White is more of a communications consultant for the Minister, whose only remaining substantive task is to shut the lights out as he leaves the building and the CWB fails. His \$800,000 per year job is probably short term at best.

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## Muzzled media bad for democracy

BY SHERI MONK

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Perhaps I'm just old-fashioned, but I believe that no means no, honesty is always the best policy, and a democratic government should behave democratically. That's not too much to ask these days, is it?

A free press is one of the cornerstones of a healthy democracy. So much so that in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, it's listed as the second fundamental freedom: "Freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication."

And yet, it has become disturbingly clear that the Harper regime believes the media should be seen and not heard, and that shoot, shovel and shut-up is their communications policy of choice.

Yes, I realize I'm in Alberta now. I know that as a province, we tend to dress to the right, but this issue runs much deeper than where one province roosts on the political spectrum. Uncomfortable as it may be, it's time we peel off our partisanship and have a naked dialogue about transparency – with the lights left on.

For the last few years, I have experienced more and more difficulty and resistance accessing information from the federal government. Almost immediately after being elected, the media's access to Mr. Harper was openly restricted, but his preferences have now perverted every level of communications within the federal realm. At first, I thought it was just me. And then I began to hear rumblings from other journalists, right across the country. Accessing even the most mundane information became tedious, and time-consuming. In the past, communications staff facilitated information-gathering by answering media requests with an expert or source who could best explain a topic of news relevance. The journalist would then interview the source, and that information was relayed to the public through the media.

And then things changed. There were fewer interviews, and more email answers, often with useless and shallow content. Media requests were screened, and questions had to be pre-submitted. And the whole process began to take an unbelievably long time – often too long to make deadline, leaving many stories dead in the water.

Yet, in an age of fiscal conservatism, budget cuts and economic prudence, ever more taxpayer dollars are being spent on communications staff. The emperor isn't only wearing no clothes, he's building an elaborate closet to hide them in too.

Perhaps the federal agency I have dealt with the most over the past number of years is the CFIA, and it's no secret that I am not one of their biggest fans. And recently, I needed permission from their communications staff to speak with a research scientist.

When I expressed my frustration with the sluggishness of the system, I learned that media requests are dealt with an absurdity Kim Jong-il would envy. Questions must be pre-submitted, so that the expert can pre-answer the pre-screened questions. And then, both the questions and the answers are then screened, edited and eventually approved by between five and 11 people.

That's not communicating – it's scripting and the answers given are propaganda, not information. In such a system, there is only the illusion of a free press and the public will inevitably wear the resulting shackles. Only in totalitarianism does the end justify the means. In a democracy, it is the means that will ultimately determine the end.

Some Conservatives will defend this administration's draconian assault on freedom of the press as a necessary response to the "liberal, left-wing media". First off, that's simply not true – Canada's media offerings are diverse, much like its people. And even if this administration were so afflicted by its own persecution complex, such a response to the media would be akin shutting down Parliament to avoid criticism from the Official Opposition to avoid backlash from public. (Remember when we all learned what prouogue meant?)

We have a duty to honour the values of democracy that Canada has always cherished, and the media checks and balances the government's power and control in the interest of the people. Make no mistake – any government that seeks dominion over the media doesn't only desire control of the information – it seeks to control the people.

Yes, I'm thrilled the long gun registry is gone. Yes, economically, this administration steered Canada through one of the worst global recessions in history. But the definition of freedom does not change when the sitting government does. Allowing any government the chance to take advantage of its position to erode our democracy is wrong – allowing your own party or candidate to do the same thing is worse. No still means no, and rape is still rape – even if they did buy us supper first.

*Sheri writes for an agricultural publication in Alberta, and also freelances as an investigative journalist and opinion editorialist.*



The GULL LAKE

# ADVANCE

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