

Former Prime Minister Joe Clark speaks in Sidney

By David Olsen

Inspired by the words of a First Nations Chief, “Let us lift each other up,” the Right Honourable Joe Clark challenged a Sidney audience to break the habit of “looking at the world from our own point of view, interests and prejudices”.

Canada’s 16th prime minister spoke to a capacity audience at Mary Winspear Centre, on January 19, participating in Elizabeth May’s eminent speakers program with the subject “How we Lead – Canada in a Century of Change” - the subject of his new book.

Clark focused on Canada’s role in the world; how the country had a significant and positive role in world affairs in the decades following World War 2, and how it could and should do so again.

Clarke’s address mirrored his deep concern, “that the present Canadian government has aggressively narrowed Canada’s official international policy to concentrate on trade and military initiatives; and rejecting conciliation, most notably in the tinder-

box of the Middle East”.

While relaxed and often humorous he left his audience in no doubt that time is running out if Canada is to regain its rightful status in the world. He also praised the work of NGO’s, such as Oxfam, MSF and Greenpeace. He recalled that Canada was a key architect of the United Nations, the Commonwealth and NATO and that we need to identify new alliances including Ghana – one of Africa’s most successful democracies, the Nordic States and Indonesia, which has the world’s largest Muslim community.

Clark said he sees such engagements as a key response to what he described as “the threatening time” in which we live, citing Ukraine, Boko Haram, Paris, and Ebola. “Even wars,” he said, “once had rules” which allowed the UN, MSF, Red Cross/ Crescent etc. to alleviate suffering in conflict zones. But now, “attacking the innocents”, is all too common.

In a rousing call to action Clark declared, “we are here tonight as citizens of the world to make a difference.” We will



Rt. Hon Joe Clark

never again have the World’s 7th largest GDP (the ticket to the G7) he cautioned. Our **soft** assets, not military or resource power, will define our future international reputation. Our quality of fairness, our capacity to find common ground – these will help to inch steadily towards a more just and peaceful world and we need to “lead from beside” convincing others to want the same outcomes as ourselves.

Recalling that 2015 is the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta, Clark deplored the

serious decline in the ability of Parliament to hold the government accountable – and had harsh words for the current use of omnibus bills which prevent parliamentary discussion.

Clark came across as progressive and thoughtful – a far cry from today’s “Conservatives”. Recalling his experience as prime minister in a minority government he said he believes now that it was a mistake not to reach out to the other parties and, even if not forming a coalition – which he said, can work - to have been more inclusive.

But, he said, he was locked into the old way of doing things, trying to govern as if it was a majority – which it wasn’t.

Asked about Canadian military action in the Middle East – “the most dangerous place in the world” -- Clark observed that “we have taken sides – and there are already too many sides”. “We need to do what we used to do -- help find the common ground”.

His final message was “be involved and ask what could we be – to what can we aspire”?

Are rail passengers ALSO getting fracked by BIG OIL?

Photostory by Diane Walsh

Amtrak is doing its best in the face of challenges presented by a fracking boom in North Dakota and beyond.

In Wisconsin, there have been previous reports of freight train crews coming to the end of their shift and simply abandoning a train on the rail line when done with their shift – no one scheduled to take over from them.



An Amtrak train is parked, with no crew to man it..

A parked train! All rather frustrating to Amtrak. The effect of this kind of brazen blockage is that Amtrak’s passenger train (honourably trying its best to keep to schedule) is simply unable to pass, left hostage to the theatrics of industry giants.

One wouldn’t think that freight-train shortage-of-staff would be Amtrak’s problem but there have been instances of Amtrak actually having to call someone and plead to get a parked freight train moved so its passengers can get by.

Further reports, only very recently, are that more freight staff have since been hired.

On Saturday, November 1, 2014, just before midnight, there was another rather odd incident. Ten to 15 minutes out of Spokane going east, en route to Idaho, Amtrak’s Empire Builder was delayed behind a freight train which had collided with an unoccupied SUV. The freight train was going about 60 miles an hour, needless to say demolishing the vehicle right in its track. It is unclear why the vehicle was on the track and what the circumstances were around the incident.

The Amtrak passenger train, the Empire Builder, was behind the freight train and therefore was halted for three hours while emergency services, the Sheriff and 20 BNSF staff swarmed the area. Cleaning up a big mess of debris enabled both the freight train and the Empire Builder to then continue.

Incidents off this nature are apparently not that uncommon.

Even more troubling however is the impact of three times more freight trains running on the tracks in the last two years on Amtrak’s ability to gauge how long any particular journey is going to take. Amtrak is beholden to freight priority traffic.

The boom in North Dakota is creating enormous freight traffic. Doubtless Warren Buffet who owns BNSF is delighted; mounds of money are pouring in – with a cool \$1000/a car to move oil and up to 100 oil cars per train.

Capitalism steals the day as wheat farmers are second priority. It’s \$200/ a car to move wheat. So at the moment it seems

Some Williston, North Dakota, landlords who see dollar signs bouncing everywhere have reportedly racked up rents and are housing fracking boom-business workers whilst uprooting long term residents in favour of those who can pay exorbitant rents.

Still 300+ men to one woman, isn’t much fun for barmaids!

The damage that can be measured is the boom’s impact on Amtrak schedules. Amtrak trains have for years and years been able to say that they’ve had a 90% record of being on-time. But now through no fault of their own, they are late more often than not, as a direct result of the freight cars moving oil tripling in the last two years.

Thousands of black stealth oil cars are



Writer Diane Walsh

dominating the railway line. Amtrak merely gets to “use the railway line” and be at the behest of industry’s priority needs. And there is nothing customers of Amtrak can do about it. The oil boom may actually be said to be culpable in the unintended consequence of virtually ending on-time-commitment passenger rail travel. Amtrak has to tell its passengers it has to play it by ear. Literally.

How slick is the oil boom after all?

Maybe Warren Buffet should be made to be stuck behind a freight train and told “too bad sir, sit and wait.”

Writer Diane Walsh posted this commentary to her blog www.indydianewalsh.com November 4, 2014.



Passenger trains are being delayed by heavy freight trains.

it’s tough times for the wheat farmer.

The bottom line means that “choice”: oil brings in more money.

Amtrak passengers are delayed by the increased freight traffic, be it CSX, BNSF or whatever; industry freight has the right of way. Amtrak is paid a fee for any delay; which is part of the contract.

No incentive on the part of Warren Buffet to support alternate routes for moving the oil because the numbers “are working” in the current situation.

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