

On the fossilized East Coast, it's time to get out of our own way

Just when I think the message might finally permeate our thick, Maritime skulls (genetically adapted, I'm guessing, to survive generations of pitching headlong into log-jammed, spring freshets), a small-town burgermeister from New Brunswick proves me painfully wrong again.

Meet Bill Bishop, mayor of Rothesay, a stately little community of roughly 12,000 souls, nestled amid the irises and bull-rushes of the Kennebecasis River Valley. Hizzoner has a problem with travelling food trucks, the sort one sees out and about when the weather miraculously complements the warming moods of this defiantly climate-change-resistant corner of Canada.

Specifically, Bishop doesn't like the cut of their jibs, no sree Bob! The reason is as plain as the crooked proboscis on the face of every hard-working stiff lucky enough to live in the nation's least economically promising province.

Simply, he tells the CBC in July, "The word 'change' in Rothesay is not a welcome word." You see, he explains, "You have to know Rothesay. It is not your regular community. We people here have been here for decades and they have very firm beliefs and needs and wants. . . (A food truck) is not the sort of enterprise that we welcome in Rothesay."

To be perfectly clear, the object of his scorn is the Funky Monkey Sandwich Shop, owned and operated by one Dan Landry who hails from that far-off principality Quispamsis, another cartographic afterthought that lies (get this) just 11 minutes up the road as the crow flies. For his part, Landry is dumbstruck to find himself at the centre of such a tempest. Well, almost.

He tells the CBC that people all over Rothesay love his freshly grilled sandwiches and homemade treats. "We've had a great summer so far," he says. "The community is, very much so, coming out and supporting us."

Apparently, he's right. Following a storm of social media derision, much of it from Rothesay residents, the mayor issued a half-hearted apology scant hours after his initial commentary, while still managing to bluster about "ensuring that mobile food establishments fit appropriately within municipal regulations."

Given that there are no "municipal regulations" governing food trucks in that



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town, Bishop's so-called mea culpa is almost as mystifying as his original complaint.

In fact, there's no need for the Bishop of Rothesay to backtrack. As a matter of principle, he simply doesn't like "change". And there's nothing wrong with that except, of course, there's everything wrong with that.

Lamentably, in this region, His Worship is not alone.

The Atlantic region's putative cosmopolitan centre, Halifax, only took 50 years to settle its food truck debate. What isn't yet settled is the disposition of a new convention space that, though it passed planning board requirements and received the imprimatur of municipal council, has run afoul of a defiant little band of 'traditionalists' at the Heritage Trust of Nova Scotia.

It claims that the Nova Centre's developers received preferential treatment during phases of the approval process. They've asked the Province to conduct a judicial review. The builders, meanwhile, are taking Heritage Trust to court on a complaint that amounts to charges of mischief. And so, in Halifax, like just about everywhere else in this region, plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

When, I wonder, will we finally get out of our own way, and stop erecting roadblocks where none are needed? Every economically successful jurisdiction in the world understands that there needn't exist a philosophical divide between productive change and cherished tradition. One need not become a cudgel to beat the other into submission.

But here we are in the Maritimes, the birthplace of Confederation, 147 years after that momentous change, bickering about the status quo, even though we know, in our quieter moments, the status quo simply won't do.

Our competing towns, our fractious special interests, won't be eating our respective lunches. International bankers and bond holders who clutch our debts and finance our complacency and parochialism will. They don't care about food truck wars and giant holes in the ground where sparkling, new magnets for commercial investment should rise.

They'll just bang us on the ear until our thick, Maritime skulls ring with the message of our own stupidity.

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