



RON LIBERT, RIGHT, SPOKESMAN FOR ALBERTA'S MERV LEITCH
... takes a question on oil pricing, as federal spokesman Lucien Blair looks on

Press 'unsuited' for oil marathon

By Duncan Thorne

OTTAWA — First rule for covering federal-provincial oil-pricing talks: bring more than one suit or change of clothes.

Most out-of-town reporters who went to Montreal for the talks expected a one-day session, so they arrived with one change of clothing.

The two government sides, knowing better, came prepared.

As reporters attended one uninformative briefing session after another through the six days in Montreal, and then Ottawa, they became increasingly identifiable by their clothes.

Meanwhile, they studied the habits of the official spokesmen, the main link to the negotiators.

Lucien Blair, representing federal Energy Minister Marc Lalonde, and Ron Leipert for Alberta's Merv Leitch, shared the ability of getting mileage out of one word, "possibly." To untold numbers of questions, they gave the same answer.

What little information they gave was often unreliable. Scheduled meetings didn't take place, unscheduled ones did.

It was Premier Peter Lougheed who broke reporters' tedium, when he arrived Sunday but chose a different hotel.

Reporters first tried staking out the main lobby of the hotel where negotiations were taking place, unaware that Mr. Lougheed was elsewhere.

Finally The Journal and a Broadcast News reporter managed to follow Mr. Leitch to a meeting with the premier.

The two reporters, on seeing Mr. Leitch leave his hotel, leaped into a cab. Mr. Leitch got into the one behind.

"Follow the cab behind us," the reporters instructed. Somehow it worked.



Premier Lougheed's press secretary Ron Liepert took the brunt of reporters' questions yesterday after the oil-pricing talks entered their fifth day.

Press relations drained at talks

By DERIK HODGSON

MONTREAL — That old music hall tub-thumper about east being east and west being west has taken on a delicious new meaning in this sensuous metropolis of the east where Ottawa and Alberta are haggling over a nation's economy.

The twain did meet of course — they met at an Expos ball game — they met for beer and croissants and they met in a \$200 a throw hotel suite to attempt to settle the great Canadian Catharsis of oil prices.

In the midst of all the hush-hush oil pricing talks a curious relationship had developed between Montreal Media Mafia and Ron Liepert, the press secretary to Peter Lougheed who is here to chaperone the Alberta delegations.

To say it was a love-hate affair would be wrong. It's more like hate-hate.

The Montreal news gatherers are a curious bunch and a few seem to think the best way to conduct an interview is by standing on the interviewee's belt buckle.

Liepert — the press secretary — seems to operate on the assumption that the best interview is no interview.

Which all goes to make an interesting — if volatile combination.

Liepert is already being called Ron Ziegler, a not-too flattering comparison to the press flack who patrolled the Nixonian White House.

... particularly curt exchange

between Liepert and reporters a Franco-phone wire service man rolled his eyes heavenward and said:

"You want a news story? I'll give you one. I'm gonna rip Liepert's lips off his face with my bare hands."

Now, that's a thought-provoking idea for a news story.

Liepert has an uncanny ability to move dangerously close to provoking physical violence.

Take, for instance, how he handles a television request to ask the ministers if they would mind having their pictures taken.

"No," said Liepert.

"Why not?" queried perplexed television person.

"Because I don't choose to," snarled Liepert.

Good reasoning Ron.

As the love-in continued, there was some thought that Liepert was wasting a valuable talent by working for Lougheed in Edmonton.

"Hell. He's wasted with Lougheed," said an admiring radio reporter, "with his arrogance he should go right to the top and join Trudeau's staff."

So, as you can see, in this city of Joy de Vivre there is still room for Canadians from all parts of this grand land to work together, play together and learn to hate one another without regard to race, religion or province of origin.

Old foes becoming fast friends? Lalonde and Leitch:

Here's the latest on the oil talks between Ottawa and Alberta, held at some time over the last two days, somewhere in the tower of the Quatre Saisons hotel in Montreal.

As of noon yesterday, the ministers may or may not have been meeting, in the suite of one or the other, with or without their officials, in the presence or absence of their all-important computers and calculators.

A further press briefing may or may not have been scheduled for later in the day. In any event, the Alberta delegation was booked to fly out last night, today and tomorrow, on three different air lines.

The Montreal meetings may or may not have continued today, and possibly into the weekend, depending on whether federal Energy Minister Marc Lalonde had any kind of breakthrough to report to cabinet, and any kind of go-ahead from there.

By now they must be getting to be old friends. The Montreal meeting was, or is, the second series of oil talks held here this month, marking the fifth encounter between them in the last year.

"We're not talking about a situation where you give me 50 cents and I give you 50 cents," Ron Liepert was saying in a Quatre Saisons corridor yesterday. He is Peter Lougheed's press secretary, and just the man to keep the filthy media hordes at arm's length.

If his premier could have heard him, he would have been proud of the way Liepert straight-armed a request that the ministers at least be made aware of the cameramen's need for a "photo opportunity." He wouldn't pass on the request, Liepert said, "because I don't choose to." This guy makes Ron Ziegler, he of Watergate fame, look like a blabbermouth.

Lougheed joins pricing talks

MONTREAL (CP) — Alberta Premier Peter Lougheed arrived here late Sunday, a development that suggested negotiations with the federal government on the price of domestic oil have reached a crucial stage.

Ron Liepert, a spokesman for the Alberta delegation, said Lougheed came to consult his energy minister, Merv Leitch, as the negotiations were set to continue for the sixth consecutive day.

Asked whether Lougheed's arrival signalled an agreement is near, Liepert said only, "You can judge for yourself."

He said Lougheed is prepared to stay in Montreal as long as he considers necessary.