

Betrayal of Faith and Trust

A Review of *Just Business* by Don MacAlpine

Bill Broderick

Most of us go through life doing our best to live in a manner that does not impact negatively on those around us. We generally obey the laws and rules which our not-so-glorious leaders impose on us, we're pleasant to people we meet, and we try to do what we believe is right in the various life situations that we run into.

And then there are our not-so-glorious leaders, the politicians, the lawyers, the so-called professional people and CEO-types, and those who get themselves appointed to various juicy-plumb sinecures in governments, agencies and commissions within the public service (federal, provincial, whatever).

Or if not appointed to something, they nevertheless exercise considerable influence, political and otherwise, because of their wealth, prestige, position in the business world, and the financial contributions they have made to those in power.

Normally, getting a job in any branch of the public service, even one that requires no more skill than pushing a broom, requires at least a high-school diploma. Anything entailing a modicum of responsibility requires some level of university.

But if you are a politician and fortunate enough to be elected to government, it almost doesn't matter what you know or even if you know anything. The main thing here is who you know. If you have the inside-track to someone important within a party, or if you're a regular donor to a political party, you may be appointed to something without even the shadow of a selection process. The nice thing about either situation is, if you manage to stay elected for a certain minimum number of years, you are assured of a nice juicy pension down the line when you retire. And if you are a public appointee, you are assured of a nice golden hand-shake when your ineptitude finally catches up to you and you are forced or eased out of your appointment. I seem to recall that there have been a number of these lately both at the federal and

provincial level.

Don MacAlpine, the author of *Just Business*, saw a little bit of the favouritism that government ministers, deputy ministers and other such poobahs are wont to bestow on people they like while he was employed as a forester with the Ontario Department of Natural Resources in Nipigon. In this case the persons and companies were in the lumber and wood pulp industry. Being a conscientious public servant, and knowing that such favouritism was contrary to public policy, unfair, and also illegal, he protested to his superiors. When they didn't seem to be listening to him he eventually went public. That got him fired, but he grieved the disciplinary action through his union and eventually won his job back.

This incident and others that he experienced convinced him that much goes on in government, business, and the legal profession, that is unethical, immoral and even illegal. For the most part, we Canadians know a little about the patronage, the favouritism, the under-the-table dealings, the conflicts of interest, and seem to take them pretty well for granted. It's almost as though we accept dishonesty in business and government as normal or have become so cynical that we expect nothing better from the people we elect or appoint to public service. Even though many Canadians can't find jobs, make ends meet, our schools are crying for money, and our First Nations people are living in poverty, drinking polluted water and suffering neglect due to violated treaties, broken promises, and access of white businesses to resources on First Nations reserves, the politicians, the big corporations, and political appointees always seem to have plenty of money for the things they want. Think G20 summits, super-jails and F35 fighter-jets in excess of \$100 million each – not to mention tasers, sound cannons and other toys for the police in order to keep the sheep in line, and you'll see what I mean.

Dishonesty and unethical dealing is not confined to government, of course. MacAlpine mentions how his parents were cheated out of a little bit of money when they finally sold their farm. It was standard practice for farmers to be able to sell and reap the benefits of any crops they had planted prior to an offer being made. Such a clause was requested to be put into any sales agreement. However, when the real-estate salesperson showed up at the farm one day with an offer, he found the elder MacAlpine in the barn dealing with milking and the noises of machinery, animals and other distractions. He did not point out that the offer said nothing about crops but only urged Mr. MacAlpine to accept and sign the offer. When the MacAlpines later read the offer in detail, they found that it did not give them the right to keep the money from selling their crops and they tried to cancel the deal. The purchasers sued for breach of contract. The court could only go by what was contained in the written agreement and would not allow any other consideration or evidence. The lawyers for both the plaintiff and the defendants drove to court in the same car, ostensibly to save expenses. Actually, as it turned out, the real-estate agent and the two lawyers were all members of the same church.

MacAlpine had a fairly religious upbringing. His parents were hard-working Christians, honest, thrifty and fair-dealing and they passed on their values to Don and his brothers. But he was to learn from many of his life-experiences that many people who professed to be religious (and therefore ethical) people, did not scruple when it came to taking advantage of others or of a situation, particularly if it meant making money. After all, smart business dealing is “just business.”

Time and again, MacAlpine makes reference to how justice and fair-dealing degenerated in Nazi Germany when a small group of men managed to run away with the democratic process. Once in power, that small group set about eliminating all possible opposition to their rule and to make Germany a one-party State. To be against Hitler and National Socialism was to be against the State. Germans who applauded when the rights of Jews were trampled, soon learned that when the rights of some are trampled, the rights of all become vulnerable, their own included.

Although we don't live in a police state – at least not yet – the G20 weekend in Toronto in June 2010 is a reminder that we are getting very close to it. On that weekend over 1100 people were arrested and detained in a makeshift detention centre, in some cases for over 24 hours. Most were never charged with any kind of crime; of those who were, the majority were acquitted. And in a small number of cases people were physically injured by the police. One person had his arm broken. Another, an amputee, had his artificial leg torn off. Others suffered beatings. One of these was told, “These are your rights”, as officers continued to punch him. Later this same victim was paraded naked before a female officer. And in an attempt to avoid any responsibility for their actions, many police personnel unlawfully removed numbers and nametags from their uniforms to hide their identities.

Just Business was written long before the G20 fiasco. But we can ask if it is an indication that the peace and security of ordinary citizens is being eroded in Canada? We can hope not. But what are we doing to ensure that it isn't? MacAlpine is concerned that Canadians don't seem to understand that they must expect – and demand – better from their politicians than they have received so far in the way of ethics, truth, justice, and accountability. The book is lengthy – 877 pages. In the main, it's well-written even if it has more than the usual number of typos, spelling and grammatical errors. In spite of length, I found it an intensely interesting read.

[A “free” electronic version of the book is available at: <http://JustBusinessTheBook.com>. MacAlpine hopes that, in time, those who can will pay for their electronic version. But it is critical, he says, that people start to read about and understand the forces that threaten our democracy and human rights. MacAlpine can be contacted at author@justbusinessthebook.com.]

Bill Broderick retired from the federal public service in 1990 after a career spanning about 30 years. He came to both *Humanism* and *Skepticism* in 2002 and joined the *Ontario Skeptics* in Toronto and the *HAC*. He was elected to the Board of Directors of *HAC* in 2004, and was editor of *Canadian Humanist News* from 2005 to 2008. His hobbies include writing, astronomy and nature.