

POINTS OF VIEW

Police chief must show his leadership skills

"There is no secret recipe to managing a crisis; the ingredients include equal doses of competence and credibility." — Chantal Hebert



TERRY COOKE

It almost goes without saying that it's been a bad year for the Hamilton Police Service. Unfortunately, most of the wounds have been self-inflicted. The Corey Rogers' debacle is just the latest in a cascade of tragic and embarrassing incidents that threaten to leave a permanent stain on the fabric of the organization.

I've heard from a number of police officers who say that the Hamilton Police Service has never before faced such a potent combination of internal dissent and external criticism. But that assessment forgets important history, because our police department has indeed faced similar adversity in the not-too-distant past. I know this for sure because I was there as a witness to events.

I was appointed chair of the Police Board in 1992 during a time that was eerily reminiscent of present circum-

stances, with two notable exceptions: our five-member board was comprised entirely of newcomers without experience in police governance; and Chief Bob Middaugh had only been on the job a year and was the first chief hired from outside the local department in Hamilton history.

The external recruitment of Middaugh was precipitated by extraordinary divisiveness that existed within the ranks of Hamilton's senior officers. The organization was still reeling from an internal scandal dating back to the 1980s involving vice squad cops drinking confiscated booze in the

basement of central police station. Before the dust settled, criminal and civil legal actions had occurred, one of which eventually made its way to the Supreme Court of Canada. In the aftermath, a couple of officers were charged criminally, some others disciplined and careers were ruined. The resulting internecine warfare between rival factions within the department continued for years.

During the course of a single year from 1992-93, a new police board, together with Chief Middaugh and Deputy Chief of Operations Ken Robertson, faced multiple crises, culminating with an inquest into events leading up to the suicide of Jonathon Yeo following his murder of Nina de Villiers. The Yeo inquest results were a damning indictment of both the performance and policies of the Hamilton Police Service.

Chief Middaugh responded to this adversity with single-minded resolve and courage. He accepted full responsibility even for things that had preceded his watch. The chief was relen-

tly straight with the families of victims and then with the community. As an outsider who challenged the Hamilton Police Service to confront its own shortcomings, Middaugh was not particularly well-liked within the department. But the respect he commanded allowed Middaugh to initiate the process of rebuilding trust within our community.

Chief Brian Mullan needs to show that he can hold our police service to the exacting standards established by Middaugh and Robertson. Nobody doubts Mullan's intelligence or his integrity. The question being asked by his officers and the community is whether or not he has the strength of leadership to demand full accountability.

The police handling of the senseless murders of Paul Haggerty and Lucas Deane and the botched surrender of Corey Rogers is now the subject of an independent investigation by Niagara Regional Police. It will also likely be the subject of a coroner's inquest. But an arm's-length investigation can

never be a substitute for honesty and accuracy with the families of victims and the community.

The chief and the board must immediately explain why misleading and incomplete statements were made on behalf of the department by Deputy Chief Ken Leendertse following the arrest. Three simple questions need to be asked and answered. Who in the police leadership knew what? When did they know it? What did they do about it?

The problem today for the Hamilton Police Service is not a scarcity of resources or talent. They have both in abundance. What some members of the department seem to lack is the ability to tell the truth when it's hard.

Mullan and the board have to fix that problem if they are to begin the painful process of restoring confidence in our most important public institution.

Terry Cooke is a former Hamilton-Wentworth regional chair. He is currently president of Cooke Capital Corporation.

Film gets its strength from Ugandans

Hollywood has been starting to show Africa's bloody truth

BY THOMAS FROESE

KAMPALA, UGANDA ♦ Piling up its international awards, *The Last King of Scotland* has come full circle, finally released in Uganda as a rare film experience, if not an unusual life-experience, where story and reality meld so much that it's hard to know where one begins and the other ends.

The film's success shows that Idi Amin Dada — that ever-strange despot who once told world leaders that, in their struggle for independence from England, "The Scots came to me because they know I'm the only leader in the world who speaks the truth" — is still Uganda's best-known figure.

He was a charming and comical and demonic figure who gave himself various weird titles such as Lord of All the Beasts of the Earth and Fishes of the Sea while 300,000 Ugandans died or "disappeared" during his bloody reign of terror in the 1970s.

Chronicling Amin's relationship with the fictitious character Nicholas Garrigan — a young Scottish doctor who goes to Uganda for adventure and discovers much more — the film is a fascinating character study, of two men really, with a theme that's universal.

But what really gives *The Last King of Scotland* its strength are the Ugandans, and Uganda itself, where it was shot. Uganda, after all, is a movie backwater. Nobody comes here. There's simply no film infrastructure, in part because of the mess Amin left.



Idi Amin Dada, left, seen in this Jan. 25, 1978 photo, was then president of Uganda. Forest Whitaker, right, portrayed Amin in the film *The Last King of Scotland*.



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Hundreds of indigenous African movies are shot annually in Nigeria, Africa's so-called "Nollywood." Then when they do come, Hollywood producers run to Kenya (*The Constant Gardener*), or South Africa (*Hotel Rwanda*). That's where *Last King of Scotland* financiers initially wanted to shoot, for the tax breaks. Even *Blood Diamond*, set in Sierra Leone, was shot in Mozambique.

Instead, director Kevin MacDonal went to Uganda's president, Yoweri Museveni. He wound up with not only permission to film, but full use of Uganda's parliament and army. An unusual chemistry between country and filmmakers was born.

Cast and crew were reportedly overcome with emotion when seeing the stark reality of Ugandan life. And Forest Whitaker, who stayed in Uganda

for months to interview Amin's family, was able to harness this energy in his Oscar-winning performance.

For western viewers, this movie has perhaps made the world smaller. It's accomplished what MacDonal said he loves to do: "bring audiences to new places they don't know." And it won an Oscar. Not bad for a film shot in a country that has just two small Cineplex theatres.

For Ugandan viewers, though, there's been much more. Some have said they loathe the movie's more-rounded portrayal of Amin, the beast who was feared even long after he left. Susan Watt, a McMaster University social worker working in Uganda in the mid-1990s, told me that even then, 15 years after Amin's exile, if Ugandans mentioned him it was only "in hushed tones with raw emotion."

But also, here in Uganda, there's been more magic. In fact, the world now seems so small one can't help but laugh at the absurdity of it: a film shot literally around the corner from my theatre seat, put together on the other side of the Atlantic, then sent back — albeit a little late — to where I now watch.

Look, on screen, that British journalist is really Dr. Dick Stockley. I recently took my little boy to his Kampala clinic. There's Mulago Hospital, where my wife has meetings. Hey, there's Amin in the Sheraton's pool. I've swam there. And there's Rosie, our British friend who's sitting a row away, while also on screen as a hostage at Entebbe airport.

The whole thing seems nothing short of Twilight Zone material, an experience that, for me, came shortly

after the film's premiere in Uganda. That gala brought Whitaker and MacDonal to join President Museveni and his wife, who, by the way, covered her eyes during sex scenes in an obvious discomfort that's shared by other Ugandans in this traditional culture.

Whatever one thinks of Amin, this movie shows producers are looking at Africa in a bigger way. True, Hollywood's string of African realism in recent years hasn't shown a pleasant image of life on this continent. But the bloody truth still seems better than those swarthy old movies made for whites, about whites living among two-dimensional Africans who often play little more than fresh lion-feed. *Thomas Froese is a Canadian journalist who writes for Uganda's national daily The New Vision. E-mail 140765@sympatico.ca*

Canadian feminists take on the Tory agenda

BY BERNADETTE WAGNER

Last Sept. 2, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government announced a cut of \$5 million to the budget for Status of Women Canada (SWC), the agency responsible for followup on the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women.

This attack on women's equality should not have been a surprise to feminists across the country, given the backlash already at play across the nation. The corporate media has promoted a fictional narrative of feminism as passé in a "post-feminist" world since at least the 1980s.

Popular culture — much of it imported from the U.S. — regularly vilifies women who challenge the status quo. So strong is this anti-woman sentiment, that even men who call themselves progressive often dismiss feminists as too angry, too radical or too "out there." But women have not backed out from the latest assault. In fact, their outrage has been loud, their organizing extensive and their mobilization for the expected 2007 federal election has begun.

The Cuts

National women's organizations were quick to denounce the 40-per-

cent cut to the SWC's budget, suggesting its funding should be considerably increased so its function as a watchdog for women's equality could be enhanced, as recommended by the Expert Panel on Accountability Mechanisms for Gender Equality just before the last election. Women's groups also pointed out the prime minister's betrayal of a pledge — signed during the 2006 election campaign — if elected, to "take concrete and immediate measures, as recommended by the United Nations, to ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitments to women in Canada."

Instead, Harper's government adhered to its socially conservative agenda, removed the word "equality" from the SWC mandate and removed funding from groups who engage in advocacy and lobbying at any governmental level — local, provincial or national. Doing so effectively opens the door for groups like the right-wing organization REAL Women and businesses like the Royal Bank of Canada to apply for funding.

The third prong in Harper's approach included eliminating the independent research component of SWC and closing 11 of its 15 offices across the country, effectively cutting its staffing in half. Minister Bev Oda,

seen by many as a pawn in the anti-woman agenda of the Conservatives, defended the decision, saying, "We don't need to separate the men from the women in this country... This government as a whole is responsible to develop policies and programs that address the needs of both men and women." This is a complete denial of the reality that women in this country experience.

Other than in four major centres in the country, Canadian women will no longer be able to access SWC program officers — many of whom have years of experience working with women's equality issues — for assistance with developing proposals and implementing projects. The Edmonton office now, geographically speaking, serves half the country.

The Response

As those of us who lived through the '80s in Canada can attest, there is nothing quite like an attack to spur a speedy response. And now, even those of us who cut our teeth on the axe that Brian Mulroney's Conservative regime wielded are more prepared than ever to stand our ground during this assault.

Within 24 hours of the first announcement regarding cuts to SWC,

nine national women's organizations had denounced them. The next week saw several organizations, large and small, issue similar statements.

On Oct. 2, a Declaration of Women's Groups was read to the media during the meeting of federal, Quebec, provincial and territorial Status of Women ministers' in Saint John, N.B. By Oct. 11, a website, StatusReport.ca, was online to "combat inaccuracies and indifference toward Status of Women Canada" and to "rally support for Status of Women Canada and related issues."

By the middle of November, another website, TheWomenAreAngry.org was up, encouraging women to express their anger and promoting campaign buttons, postcards and stickers.

In early December, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers Sisters' campaign — the F-email Fightback — was underway, urging women and their friends and families to e-mail the prime minister to express strong disagreement with the change in direction to Canada's "long-standing commitment to the promotion of women's equality and human rights."

Women have been organizing on the ground, too, with demonstrations in major centres. In Moncton, more than 300 marched, demanding equality

now. In Hamilton, women carried placards complaining of "unjust cuts." In Regina, university students organized a noon-hour "Funeral for the Future" that brought out 150 demonstrators on a cold day. In Northwest Territories, the Yellowknife Women's Society hosted a good, old-fashioned bra-burning event in front of the federal building.

But the big event, in Ottawa on the commemoration of Human Rights Day, where hundreds of women gathered in song and solidarity to protest the actions of the Harper government, was virtually blacked out by the mainstream media.

Just two national media outlets were on hand.

It will be an uphill battle — as it always is for feminist women — to be heard in the mainstream media and to overcome the Harper agenda. But it is this kind of organizing that will be crucial to defeating the Conservative government at the polls.

In fact, it will be the women's vote that ensures Harper's defeat. *Bernadette Wagner is a feminist poet, publisher and community activist. She lives in Regina. An expanded version of this article appears in the March/April issue of Canadian Dimension magazine (canadiandimension.com).*