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Dealing with Government XXVII ~ Patrick Brown

Branding Government

Those of us who have only just become accustomed to the pseudo-bilingual style of the federal government, as manifested in Elections Canada, Transport Canada, etc. will be surprised to find that Mr Harper's group has decided to call themselves 'Canada's New Government' ('Le Nouveau Gouvernement du Canada'). This is a 'brand new' piece of promotional branding.

Clearly, the alternative 'Canada's Minority Government' was unacceptable. Never mind that 'Canada's New Government' in due course may also become 'Canada's Old Government' or even 'Canada's Previous Government'; 'new' is always better than 'old', isn't it? (Quiet in the back row, please.) In the iconic words of the Barenaked Ladies, 'Everything old is new again'.

This new style started to manifest itself in press releases as early as April this year, and has been slowly spreading like a cancer through the utterances and publications of the new gang in Ottawa.

And, what's more, the new title has several different tag lines, depending on where you find it: 'Working for you' implies that the 'old' government was working for someone else, or maybe not working at all; 'Getting things done' (what things?); 'For all of us' (who is us?); 'Les resultats parlent' (the results speak?); 'On tient parole' (keeping our word?). The french versions follow an old Canadian political tradition of conveying a different message than the english, but are equally empty of meaning.

A New Tradition?

The traditional 'Government of Canada / Gouvernement du Canada' was straightforward, non-partisan and non-political. Its apparent replacement, 'Canada's New Government,' is clearly an attempt to make a political statement using public money.

It's also clear that this new slogan is intended for everyone's use. But, like all government publications, it's now copyrighted under the *Copyright Act*, so you need permission to use it.

Copyright clearance is granted, or not granted, upon application, involving completion of a three-page form which requires the applicant to disclose who he is, what government material he wishes to reproduce or publish and how, how many

copies, where they will be distributed, and the purpose (commercial, non-commercial, educational, free distribution, advertising, promotional, or other), and if it is to be sold, what will be the price.

The Crown Copyright and Licensing section promises to review each request within 48-hours of receipt, get someone to make a decision within ten days, and reply within 48-hours of the decision—the total could be two weeks. In the meantime, you can use whatever terms you please, but not the government's.

Olympic Copyrights

'Canada's New Government' is, however, not as thorough as the people who are putting on the Olympic winter games in Vancouver and Whistler in 2010. (There! I've already violated their copyright.)

Turns out that VANOC, the Vancouver Olympic Committee, has claimed copyright over 'Olympic,' 'Winter Games,' 'Vancouver 2010,' 'Whistler 2010,' 'Vancouver Whistler 2010' and a long list of terms that people might associate with the games, even '2010' (not to mention '2006,' '2004,' '2002,' '2000,' '1998,' and '1994'). In fact, a visit to VANOC's website reveals 36 pages of terms, signs, and symbols (including 'VANOC') which one must not use without permission from them. This is authorized under the 1976 federal *Olympic Act*, and is intended to defend against 'ambush marketing,' which means using these terms without paying for the privilege.

As early as 2004, they attacked Vancouver's Olympia Restaurant, which existed long before the games were a gleam in Gordon Campbell's eye. Now we find that a local volunteer promotional committee in White Rock, calling itself, quite accurately, the 2010 Olympic Task Force, has had to change its name to the White Rock Legacies and Games Committee. You'd think that VANOC would welcome the publicity.

Anyway, we mustn't use the words for that sports extravaganza that is expected to occur in the year following 2009. (Of course, if you are the premier you can use the words for commercial, non-commercial, educational, or even political purposes, since you, or rather the taxpayers, have paid, and will continue paying, for the privilege.)

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Authorizing Adjectives

Back to 'Canada's New Whatever-it-is'.... Following the above example, the current group in Ottawa might do well to copyright all the terms by which anyone might refer to them, in order to ensure control over their use. This would include both egregious puffery and gratuitously insulting language.

No bill has yet been introduced to change the name of the government. But this might take the form of a special version of

copyright legislation (the *Government Description Authorization Act?*) to set out, in lengthy regulations, exactly what terms may be used, with a comprehensive list of controlled adjectives—endless possibilities for aficionados of the newly politically correct.

This new *Act*, of course, would make 'ambush journalism', like this, illegal. After all, you can't complain about something if you can't name it, can you? ☞