

# Paris still sizzles

**P**ARIS — Ah, la belle France. I know it's hardly hot news, but France really is the centre of the artistic, intellectual and gastronomic universe. If I learned that a meteor was about to hit Earth, as happened recently, I'd go at once to Paris to await the event in a delightful little bistro with a glass of 80-year-old Armagnac in one hand and a cigarette in the other.

I was wafted over to Paris on a typically excellent Air France flight on which champagne quickly removed any cares about air travel. The crew chief actually gave me the name of his favorite restaurant in Paris, a deeply moving gesture. For Parisians, a good eating spot is a precious secret you don't even share with your mistress.

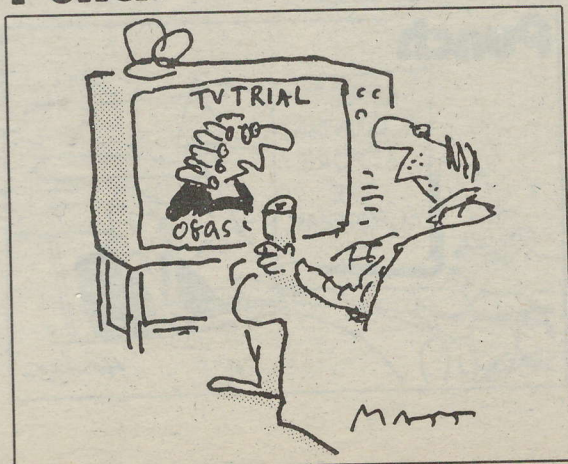
Paris, as usual, is humming. My only depressing moment was when I visited the Canadian Embassy. It is plastered with No Smoking signs. Such goody-two-shoeism in a city where people smoke like chimneys, sluice down cholesterol and drink like fish was an unwelcome reminder of puritanical old Toronto.

All, however, is not perfect. Frenchmen are watching the onrush of 1992 with mounting unease. Three years from now, Europe will enter a loose political and economic federation some believe will be the first major step to the formation of a United States of Europe. Doing so makes enormous sense, but economic federation means free movement of goods and people. This, the French fear, may threaten their glorious way of life.

Until now, the republic has managed to immunize itself from the scourge of imports. Frenchmen love to export all over the world, but they absolutely hate to import anything. There are legions of surly bureaucrats here whose sole mission in life is to find new ways to block imports.

Once 1992 hits, the French will have to drop many of their non-tariff trade barriers and bear the agony of importation from other European countries. They will, of course, derive some relief from the fact a united Europe will erect an almost impassable tariff wall against non-European products. This, by the way, is a prospect that has the Japanese, Asians and Americans deeply

**Punch**



"If you think he's guilty, ring this number now."

**ERIC  
MARGOLIS**



concerned. Canadian products will run into the same barrier. Without the Free Trade deal with the U.S., Canada would have been left out in the cold once 1992 arrived.

For the average Frenchman, 1992 poses a threat on a far more personal level. People here blanch with horror at the thought that German or Dutch cheeses, or Spanish olive oil might find their way into food stores — and even drive French food off the market because of their lower prices. Cheap wine will flood in from Spain, Portugal and who knows where else. The republic is in grave gastronomic danger.

Just as bad, the French fear that all of their precious foodstuffs, like exquisite little string beans or goat cheeses will be snapped up by hungry, rapacious Germans. Such worries may seem frivolous to North Americans who go to the supermarket and buy frozen, petrified plastic foods once a week, but for the French, to whom gastronomy rates with l'amour, the danger is great.

France needs a sort of Star Wars system or at least a new Maginot Line to protect its gastronomic heritage. Frenchmen may have to pick up their knives and forks and go forth to do battle.

As if this were not terrible enough, other Europeans will soon start pouring in to buy up French real estate. Apartments in Paris, always scarce, are selling like hot crepes. Prices are soaring and the French blame their fellow Europeans. Add to this threat the influx of more European tourists into already jam-packed Paris. In spite of living in good part off tourism, the French are fed up with looking at scruffy visitors in sweatsuits and sneakers.

On top of all this, Paris has lately been afflicted by a series of architectural monstrosities that have upset everyone. First, there are the awful glass pyramids in the middle of the Louvre courtyard. Then, in front of the museum, are two massive antenna-radar type eyesores whose function or purpose remains a deep mystery. The new Paris Opera, designed by a Canadian architect, is truly ghastly. It looks like a cross between an animal shelter and a bus terminal.

Parisians are furious, but they have no one to blame but their cultural czar, Jack Lang. And, of course, there's the gruesome Beaubourg Gallery, a vast heap of huge pipes, ribbing and tubes that badly needs to be nuked.

All of this notwithstanding, Paris remains magnificent and glorious. The French, who are chronic grumblers, don't know how well off they really are. And what do they think about Canada? Oh, a charming rustic place filled with trees, canoes and wigwams, Frenchmen told me, where there's nothing to eat or drink. Well, that's the French for you. Maybe the Canadian-designed opera house is Brian Mulroney's revenge.