

## 'Winegate' nothing to smile about

It is not true, as Lorrie Goldstein reported on Thursday, that I am smiling as a result of the unfolding LCBO scandal. I am actually grimacing.

Watching politicians trying hurriedly to cover up this sordid episode makes me queasy. Back in August, when I first charged the LCBO with selling tainted wines and spirits, asking why such products were exempt from the law of the land, I was roasted and toasted by the Establishment. Even the *Sun's* own "wine expert," a now strangely silent Bob Pennington, accused me of moral turpitude and lauded the LCBO.

How dare I! Consumer Minister Monte Kwinter, as the eagle-eyed Goldstein recounted, fired off nasty letters to me. He was upset because of my suggestions there was something very, very fishy going on between the LCBO, the beer stores, the regulators and the politicians.

So I wrote back to Kwinter and asked him: Why are there no ingredients listed on the labels of wines, spirits and beer? What was he doing about dangerous sulphites and other allergy-causing ingredients in liquor? Back came a letter from Kwinter about the political angle. Not a mention of the public's health or right to know what it was ingesting.

While our Canadian liquor scandal was developing, a U.S. federal judge in Washington ordered that full ingredient listing go on all beer, wine and spirits sold in the USA. For years, the liquor industry had delayed product labelling by making vast contributions to politicians — but no more. At the same time, the U.S. Food & Drug Administration issued a warning that sulphites in wine and those sprayed onto vegetables could cause serious illness and, as in one recent case, even death.

poisoning of the Canadian public.

How many liquor drinkers will suffer long-term liver damage or develop cancer from having drunk tainted products from the LCBO? What other horrors, as I suggested last August, will be found in LCBO products — particularly those from East Europe, Italy and Ontario? We are, I suspect, seeing only the tip of the iceberg.

How many Canadians are being poisoned by sulphites? How many by fish glue used to clarify some wines? Or by the preservatives used in beer? Or the chemical colors in cordials? How many injured Canadians will now — as they should — try to sue the LCBO for personal injury?

Now, Kwinter wants to hold secret hearings. Another cover-up of an already criminal cover-up.

Canada's "Winegate" should show us, if we need any more proof, that the cozy, unregulated cartel called the liquor industry must be privatized. It must be subjected to non-political regulation, it must be made to follow the laws of the land that all other manufacturers obey. We must get the politicians out of industry — and their hands out of the public's pockets.

Don't expect politicians to police themselves, or to kill the LCBO goose that lays their \$1.58 billion annual golden egg. We need an independent judicial investigation, honest regulation and the healthy injection of free enterprise into the liquor industry.

Federal and provincial regulators who failed to protect the public, who allowed this disaster, should be replaced. Let's see immediate full ingredient labeling for all beer, wine and spirits.

Canadian consumers and taxpayers deserve no less.



ERIC MARGOLIS

And I am grimacing over the incredible inaction of our federal regulators, the health protection branch and consumer affairs. These "watchdogs," huge bureaucracies with ever-expanding budgets, make life for Canadian manufacturers a nightmare of relentless nitpicking and obtuse regulations.

While these agencies were harassing manufacturers over the size of print type on cereal boxes or label copy for bath oil, hundreds of thousands of Canadians were being poisoned. Talk about fiddling while Rome burned.

For five years LCBO officials hid the fact they were selling products that could produce cancer in humans. When poisonous diethylene glycol, small amounts of which can destroy the liver, was found, bottles were secretly removed. As Goldstein said, we should call the cops!

What would happen to the executives of a supermarket chain that knowingly sold cancer-causing, poisonous products for many years? Obviously they would be jailed. But not our politicians who ran the LCBO. It seems not to matter that there has been a massive