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Railgate Commentary by BC Mary

More Tracks, More Connections, Less News

Why haven't we heard more news from the BC Rail corruption trial? It's the most important trial in British Columbia's history. I can't think of a single factor that unites north, north-central, and southern BC more than BC Rail. It was Canada's third largest railway, running from North Vancouver up to Prince George, Mackenzie, Dease Lake—wherever people with lumber, grain, cattle needed a railway. Then suddenly, BC Rail was sold, despite Liberal election promises not to do so.

Next came the first-ever police raid on a parliamentary precinct, and then the charging of two former ministerial assistants, Dave Basi and Bobby Virk, with fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in connection with the \$1-billion privatization of BC Rail and, originally, with claims of money laundering and drug trafficking—hence the raids.

Meanwhile, I created a blog, 'The Legislature Raids'. Why? Because nobody knew why a police raid was necessary. No such raid on a peoples' parliament had ever happened in Canadian history. 'I know nothing more than you know,' said the premier, a week or so after the raid, when he got back to Victoria from that Hawaiian Christmas. Prime Minister Paul Martin said the same thing. Neither of our leaders said, 'Rest assured, I'll do everything I can, to find out what's going on.' They shrugged and walked away.

That's when I began watching, day by day, the things which got left out of BC's news.

In particular, I watched for Jasmohan Singh Bains. Why him? Because he was one of the eight people arrested soon after the December 28, 2003 raid. And because Bains had been overheard on the phone to his cousin working in the Ministry of Finance. His cousin is Dave Basi. The same Dave Basi now facing trial over fraud and bribery with regard to BC Rail deal.

However, initially it was a drug trafficking investigation which took police into the Legislature. That's how police overheard remarks about BC Rail—while listening to the wiretaps between Dave Basi and Jas Bains. And RCMP Staff Sgt John Ward had told us on December 29, 2003, that organized crime had reached critical mass in the previous two years. Jas Bains certainly looked like the key to the larger

puzzle—if you could see him, that is.

Neal Hall (*Vancouver Sun*) mentioned that Bains would go on trial in 2008. That's all. I watched and waited, but found no further mention of Jas Bains. Nothing. Then, at the Basi-Virk-Basi pre-trial hearings in Vancouver Supreme Court, somebody heard lawyers mention that Bains had been sentenced to 9 years; realizing that this was big news, he informed my blog.

I have to admit that I couldn't believe it. I held the comment back for two days, rather than publish an error about such a significant event. I worked hard digging up the facts. And it was true: Bains had gone to trial in June 2008, been found guilty, and sentenced to 9 years ... and no news media had mentioned it. Big Media missed it by a mile. Please, someone tell me what that means.

So my December 11, blog headline was Jasmohan Bains sentenced to nine years (for drug trafficking). I knew that Google wouldn't miss it, and neither could anyone searching. I kept mentioning the puzzling absence of news about Bains' sentencing. But another 2 months passed quietly.

Then one day, while complimenting Ian Mulgrew on a column he had just written, I said I wished that he had been assigned to the BC Rail Case—then maybe we'd have heard about the Bains trial and ... bingo!

On February 16, Ian's column titled 'Drug dealer linked to Legislature Raid imprisoned' appeared in *Vancouver Sun*. I hope Ian Mulgrew wins a Jack Webster Award for that story.

But on the other hand, doesn't it make you wonder about Big Media? Where were they for eight silent months since Jas Bains' trial at Victoria Courthouse, just a few blocks down the street from *Times Colonist* offices!

I must ask this question, too: how different is denying or avoiding the news—as compared to delaying or avoiding the disclosure of documents—now ongoing in the BC Rail case?

The BC Rail corruption trial is the most important trial in British Columbia's history. It affects us all. Me, I want to know what happened to BC Rail ... how it happened, why it happened, and whether it was legal.

I also want to know how business is done in the BC Legislature and if organized crime is operating within it.

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Here's one more nagging question: 'bid-rigging' is a criminal offence. CPRail and OmniTrax both complained (in writing) of unfair actions during the bidding for BC Rail. Was that OK? Or should we be checking that out via the BC Rail trial?

BC Mary's blog, tirelessly collecting information on the complex issue of the Legislature Raid and its connections to the BC Rail sale deal, is probably the most intense citizen scrutiny of a political scandal ever made in BC. To read more: visit BC Mary's blog at <http://bctrailofbasi-virk.blogspot.com/>; also www.islandtides.com's 'BC Politics' archive to read 'North to Alaska' November 18, 2004, 'Riding the rails: tracking the BC Rail deal' November 17, 2007, 'Basi-Virk trial fogged in technicality and secrecy' December 13, 2007, and 'Justice and Politics' August 7, 2008. ✉

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