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## **Needed: The guts for a revolution**

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**ROYSON JAMES**

The best thing about yesterday's front-page banner headline was that it originated in Mississauga, not Toronto; and it came from the mouth of Hazel McCallion, mayor of Canada, not David Miller, mayor of Toronto.

The worst part? This may have been a solo effort – another kamikaze mission, one fears, destined to cause a mini-eruption before evaporating into a puff of nothingness.

Somewhere in between is an effective strategy waiting to be discovered. And there is no time like the present to find the kryptonite when the issue is the degradation of infrastructure all across the country – roads, sewers, bridges, transit.

McCallion, the octogenarian mayor of Mississauga – a city of 670,000 poised to be the GTA's first suburban city to experience Toronto-like urban decay and challenges – didn't pull punches as she laid out the challenge for cities across Canada.

Speaking to her city's business leaders, she challenged them to get organized, get off their duffers, eschew old political alliances, and go to bat for their city, which is stressed by lack of federal support.

"We are so far behind in this country, it is pitiful," McCallion said. "We need help. Our infrastructure is lacking badly."

Nothing new there. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities puts the national infrastructure deficit at \$122 billion. Mississauga has imposed a 1 per cent tax surcharge to help cover such costs. Toronto is in grave debt. The feds underfund Ontario cities for unemployment training and immigrant settlement ... You get the idea.

This should be the stuff of revolutionary dissent – except too many of our mayors are lazy, smug, do-nothings more intent on protecting their political party friends than looking after constituents.

From time to time our mayors get together and talk vaguely about a new deal for cities and getting one cent of the GST and a national transit program or some other pipe dream. But if they believe in the cause, they don't act like it, or on it.

We are into another federal election. Canada is one of the few western countries that doesn't have a national transit program. Our national government is not in the housing business. Roads are falling apart but the federal finance minister – who lives in the GTA and represents the Oshawa/Whitby area – has the gall to say, "We're not in the pothole business" and to describe cities as whiners.

So, what is the strategy developed by the mayors, knowing that a minority government might fall any time and the political parties would be hungry for urban votes?

Rumours are afloat that big-city mayors plan a conference call today to decide if they fight alone or together. What dullards. That should have been decided long ago.

Of course, it is difficult to get all mayors onside. Too many of them are Tories. Or Liberals. Or afraid to infuriate politicians who might become vindictive, post-election. But that's why you get bright minds to craft an effective strategy – urban and rural, if you want; a made-in-Quebec approach; one with an Ontario slant; a Western initiative.

And if all else fails, at least provide ammunition with which to arm citizens. McCallion tried to plumb this Tuesday and mobilize residents: "Just because your father or mother were Conservatives or Liberals or NDPers, forget about it, eh? And deal with the issues," she said. "My gosh, there's some people that would die rather than vote (for another party). It's time they die."

Harsh, yes. Revolution isn't for the faint of heart.

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