

oath on this thing: first, it must do no harm to his leadership. So it mustn't degenerate into a forum for clannish infighting or a source of quotes for future Conservative attack ads. If it actually produces any ideas that's a sort of bonus.

One other party must adjust to the yawning chasm of non-crisis that lies ahead. Jack Layton's NDP doesn't get much attention around Ottawa these days, but viewed properly, that's a problem. Layton decided in January he would do the opposite of whatever Ignatieff did. When Ignatieff was desperate to avoid an election, Layton was voting non-confidence at every turn and mocking Ignatieff's timidity. When Ignatieff reversed polarity in September, so did Layton. Suddenly he was the Only Man Who Wanted Parliament To Work. If Ignatieff's moves have been dumb, Layton's must be clever. And yet, in poll after poll, the New Democrats can't get off the floor. I think Layton has been a good leader for the NDP, but there seems to be a ceiling to his appeal. Now that the party has time to replace him, he must ask himself whether to get that process started by handing in his resignation. **M**

ON THE WEB: For more Paul Wells, visit his blog at www.macleans.ca/inklesswells

Dogs are victims in a scary war



BARBARA AMIEL

Looking at life from a dog's point of view can refocus matters great and small. Take the Berlin Wall, which crumbled 20 years ago. Thousands of dogs policed that wall and just like that they were all out of a job—some 7,000 of them, apparently. The guard dog of choice was the Caucasian ovcharka, which coincidentally is a dog I hope to add to my two Hungarian kuvaszok if I am up to it. Some people rescue homeless dogs; I look for native East European breeds who share in an ersatz Jewish identity to this extent: in that part of the world, historically speaking, someone will try and do them in.

The wall fell and West Berliners feared packs of ovcharkas storming into the city. Given the dog's size (up to 90 kg) and its heritage—tearing the throats out of wolves and escapees alike—I can't blame them. Just a month earlier, after brutally repressing demonstrations before the October visit of

Mikhail Gorbachev to East Berlin and fearing more, the murderous Stasi chief Eric Mielke stated, "I will now... show that our authority still has teeth... [demonstrators] are cowardly dogs... they will run like rabbits as soon as they've seen our dogs."

West Berliners were spared. Most "wall dogs" are said to have been shot, some taken by guards, and a few rescued by Berliners. Though my own heart belongs to the kuvaszok, I can't think of a more awesome or physically striking dog on this earth than the ovcharka, definitely not a breed for most but a great loss if allowed to become extinct. The Montreal children's film festival this year showed the Finnish children's film *Myrsky*, retitled *Stormheart* for English-speaking audiences. A Finnish family rescue a puppy for their daughter when the Berlin Wall falls, not realizing it is an ovcharka. The sweet cuddly puppy grows up to be a giant and devoted protector of its young owner.

The trailer showing a full-grown ovcharka in all its glory is at Stormheart.fi.

As go the Caucasus so went the ovcharka. Originally shepherds' dogs, with an ancient history, they were loyal guardians beloved by their owners. As politics changed so did their lifespan. Ovcharkas were first murdered in large numbers by Soviet commissars who feared private ownership, then subjected to a canine population transfer, when Stalin confiscated them for his state kennels in the 1930s. More recently, 100 caged ovcharkas were kept by Georgian warlord Aslan Abashidze to protect his 13-year fiefdom in the Black Sea "republic" of Ajaria before finally, in 2004, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili managed to chase him out. Thunder-Hawk Caucasians kennel owner Tamara Folett lives blissfully with her seven in Ontario and I recommend her authoritative book *Caucasian Ovcharka* with its 300 photos if you're interested in the breed.

My own kuvaszok were a breed also murdered by Soviets when they invaded Hungary in the Second World War. I suppose I can't blame the Russians: being confronted by a loyal kuvasz protecting his farm territory might be unnerving, and I can't blame the kuvasz for charging—they were unlikely to have been told of the upcoming regime change. The breed was all but exterminated.

Most flock guardian dogs belong to a group loosely known as Molossers, which include breeds as disparate as ovcharkas, kuvaszok, various pit bull types, mastiffs and Akitas. In

December, the film based on the life of the idolized Japanese Akita "Hachiko," starring Richard Gere, will be released. Hachiko was the companion of a Japanese professor in the 1920s. When the professor died at work, Hachiko, though adopted by the professor's relatives, returned daily for nine years to the train station, waiting for the professor's return. After the Second World War, when Akitas had suffered the usual ravages of war, a statue of him was put up at the Tokyo station honouring his devotion.



THE MAGNIFICENT ovcharka

Every dog owner knows that devotion, rhapsodically referred to as unconditional love. I wallow in it myself, though I can't help noticing that the depth of affection in my dogs' eyes is immeasurably deeper when I have food in my hand. Dogs need food and shelter from us; we humans want their hearts. Hachiko's tale tells us more about the culture of Japan than that of the dog. In that structured pre-war society, people often led solitary lives

mirrored by their dogs. Hachiko reflected this in his "one man-one dog" behaviour. Admirable though this trait is, it makes the Akita more difficult to socialize.

Here in Canada and America, dogs are victims in a different sort of war, that of statism versus individual liberty. Under various acts and bylaws, our local and provincial authorities have the power to confiscate, ban, "put down" or mutilate dogs arbitrarily, often without regard to individual behaviour. Entire breeds like the Staffordshire terrier have been banned or forcibly castrated according to local bylaws as if they were some lethal virus. Let some authority decide a dog looks "like a pit bull," and off they go in the name of public safety under draconian legislation such as Bill 132—produced by Ontario's former attorney general, Michael Bryant, that sterling symbol of public safety himself. The dreaded animal control officer can turn up unannounced on a doorstep after a neighbour's complaint about barking (which becomes "menacing behaviour" and subject to penalties including confiscation of the dog), or a patrol officer's view that a Labrador is really a pit bull.

Dogs have become a tool in controlling our lifestyle. Every dog large or small (except the basenji) barks. Every dog can potentially nip or bite. Future restrictions on all breeds will inevitably evolve. Statism metastasizes. So please God, help man's best friend. Man and governments won't. **M**

barbara.amiel@macleans.rogers.com