

The Acton Free Press

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Business and Editorial Office

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Underground money

Did you know that Canadians now pay a whopping 40 per cent of the money they earn in taxes, either up-front or hidden? That figure includes income tax, customs duties, federal sales tax, property tax and capital gains tax as well as a lot of the money spent on lottery tickets, bingo and even speeding and parking tickets, a few of the government fund raisers.

According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the high tax rate has precipitated a method of tax cheating which could amount to about \$50-billion in untaxed income.

How is it done? By paying for services in cold, hard cash. There are no records for the collector to trace and the result is those who use that method of beating the taxman leave it up to their fellow Canadians to

make up the shortfall.

Why do normally upstanding waitresses and waiters accept the risk of heavy penalties when they don't report all their tips? Why do plumbers, carpenters, mechanics, and other tradespeople who moonlight at after-hour jobs not report their additional cash?

Is it greed or do they resent the free give-aways and waste all levels of government seem to spawn and use it as a means of protest? They are wrong, of course, because the burden of extra taxes falls on those already heavily burdened. However, the more we pay in taxes the more cheaters we likely will get. Growth in the underground economy will continue to escalate, the Federation of Independent Business maintains.

And we'll pay for it.

Dreams of power

Back when Ontario Hydro was paving the way for its 500 kv corridor through Halton Hills it was loudly trumpeted that we were on the threshold of bold new initiatives. The result would be great benefits for power consumers in Ontario. It was suggested costs for power would stay well within the purchasing power of even the hard pressed consumer.

But the forecasts of golden days ahead proved to be dreams. A nightmare might be a better description. Consumers already faced with large bills found power costs increased each year and the golden age of electricity was fast fading.

Each year Hydro forecast greater costs and demanded more revenue, exceeding inflation by leaps and bounds.

Ontario Hydro now acknowledges it got caught in the recession trap and demand for power was far below their expectations. But it never seemed to slow down their expansion. Even during those tumultuous days when the local Interested Citizens' Group proclaimed that Hydro was overbuilding their empire and officials of the giant utility refused to face the

obvious. They continued to press for more and bigger facilities to expand the empire.

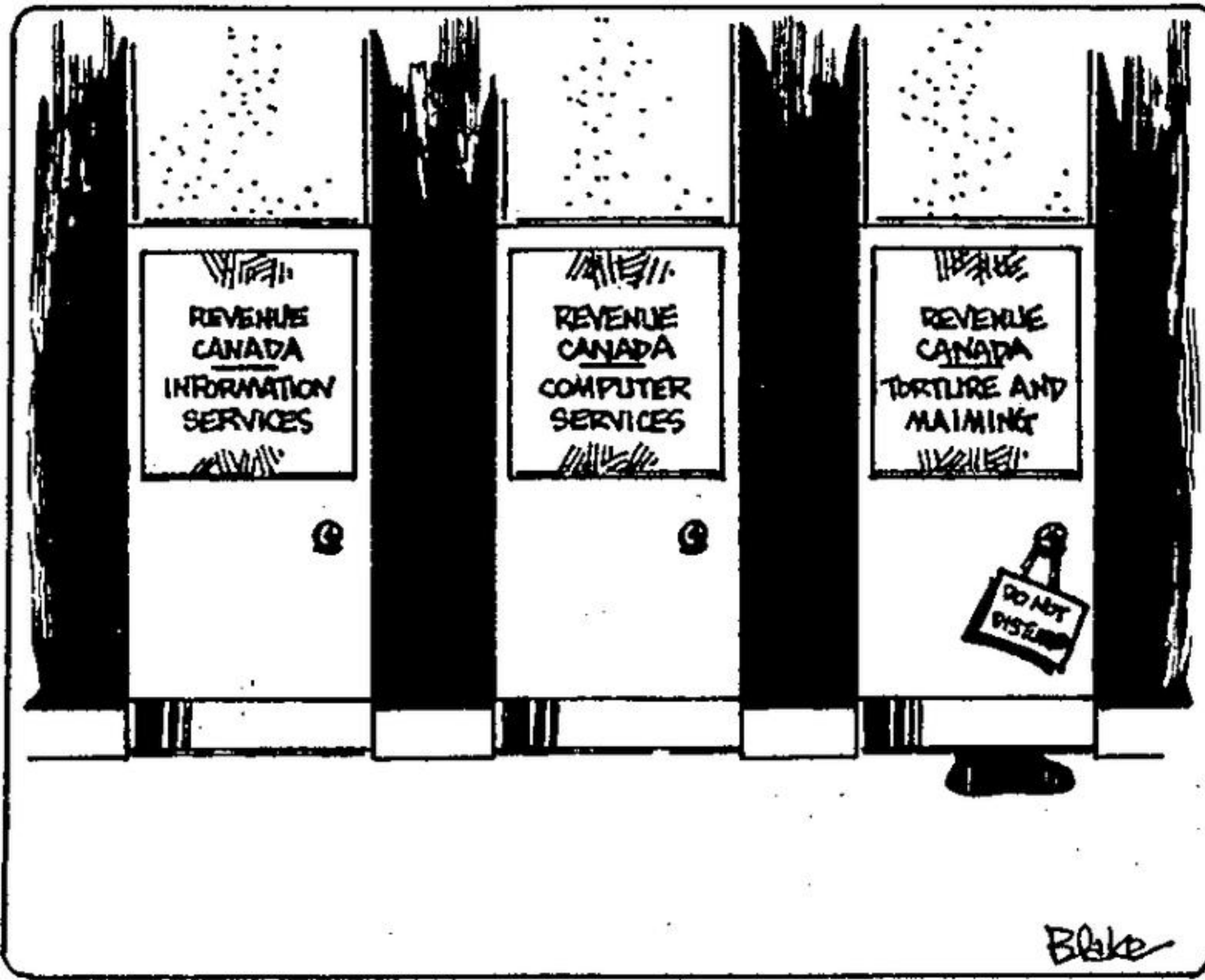
Eventually the bubble burst and consumers had to face the obvious—costly power and a forecast that it would get even more costly as the years progress. Inflation might be controlled but it was futile to try and wrestle power costs to the ground.

When you pay your hydro bill now think back to the promises we heard during those expansionist days. Remember to rely on your own common sense and that of your fellow citizens rather than the often glib promises from bureaucrats and politicians who let dreams divorce them from reality.

Who cares?

Finance Chairman Ross Knechtel told this little story, just after the budget was passed, Monday night.

An electrician, a banker and a politician were asked if input exceeded output what is it called? The electrician said overload, the banker said overdraft and the politician said "who cares?" Ain't it the truth.



From the editor's desk

Give every voter a say in selection of leaders

In mid-June 3,500 citizens will decide who our next PM will be.

Presumably sometime not too long after that new PM takes office, he/she will call an election. The leader of the Liberal party will either retain the prime minister's post or relinquish it to Brian Mulroney of the Tories.

Therefore, probably by the end of 1984, whoever is PM will have been selected for us by a gathering of either 3,000 or 3,500 citizens.

Put another way, a maximum of 6,500 Canadians will have presented a choice of two people to us for the most important job in the nation. (I'm sorry to all the socialists in the audience, I am presupposing Ed Broadbent has no chance of winning the PM's post).

Now, does this seem fair to you? It certainly doesn't seem fair to me, that such a small, select crowd of died in the wool Grits and Tories will have made this important decision for us.

Is it any wonder that so many Canadians wind up leaving the polls disenchanted or feeling they've just voted against someone and not for someone else?

The average Joe who is an independent, or not a heavyweight in the local Grit or Tory association, has virtually no say in who we'll choose to lead our country much of the remainder of this decade.

Having just returned from a close look at the American system of choosing presidential candidates in Florida and other states, I must confess envy.

The average voter down there has so much more input into the candidate selection process than we Canadians do.

I know the States is much larger. I know their system is radically different. I know Joe taxpayer has never had any input, or tradition of

input, up here into the selection of party leaders.

But it's still not fair.

Granted, the American system is inconsistent and complicated (some states hold primaries, others caucuses; some states they select bound delegates, others don't; some primaries are closed to only voters for a registered party, members of the other party and independents don't get ballots, other states it's wide open to any voter, etc.) but regardless of its many drawbacks, it does seem considerably more democratic than the way we select party leaders.

I realize that, in effect, we don't directly vote for prime minister, we vote for his party's representative or candidate in our riding.

But, the vast majority of voters are in fact voting for the prime minister. If that wasn't the case, election ads wouldn't emphasize the leader so much.

Currently all that delegates to leadership conventions have to guide them in knowing which candidates have support from the voters are polls. Just ask Fritz Mondale or his New Hampshire workers how good polls are.

Heck, darn few delegates from these parts to recent conventions have even bothered telling the party rank and file which candidate they're backing before being chosen for the trip.

Do delegates reflect many of us? Darn few. Maybe they're out of tune with us.

No, it's a far too narrow and privileged base of voters making this important decision for all of us.

What I'd like to see done up here is each province hold a primary "beauty contest." That way delegates would know far better



by Gord Murray
Free Press editor

who the voters back home favor and by how much.

Okay, so now the delegates know which leadership candidates we (the voters) favor most. Then have the parties apportion half of the delegates from a given province out to the leadership hopefuls on the basis of each candidate's percentage of vote strength in the "beauty contest" poll.

The remaining half of the delegates from each province could then be chosen the traditional way and be guided by the factors which guide them now—ideology, personal encounter with hopefuls, polls, etc. This would allow the party footsoldiers to have a large say in the decision made at the convention.

Of course, opting for such a system in Canadian politics as foreign to our ways as it may be, would require a permanent voters list which is updated regularly, something which has been discussed in this country in the past. I'm not suggesting we have voter registration, with people voluntarily giving their party affiliation, up here, just a voters list for the nation which requires each elector to have his voting seat changed when he or she moves.

Right now it looks like it will be John Turner versus Mulroney in the next election.

But maybe, if more than 3,500 of us had some kind of a say in who the Grits will pick, or even a chance to express a preference, then we'd uncover our own version of Gary Hart or it might be John Crosbie leading the Tories

Back issues

10 years ago

March 29, 1974

A 720 foot wide swath of hydro towers will likely be cut through the centre of the new town of Halton Hills, was the result of a report by the Soland Commission, revealed this week.

Another incident of rabies this time within the Rockwood limits has aroused more public concern. Fred Meadows, a village resident, feels citizens cannot be warned strongly enough to make them more aware of the potential danger prevalent in the area of the village and district at present.

Halton Board of Education members gave their tentative approval to the \$52,168,693 education budget at their meeting Thursday as a vote carried 10-6 after the board heard suggestions that the estimates should be cut down five per cent or by up to 10 per cent.

20 years ago

March 19, 1964

In response to inquiries, a committee has sought information on the acquiring of separate curling facilities in Acton.

Queen St. E. and Young St. are scheduled to be widened under the Department of Highways plans this summer, council learned this Tuesday in correspondence from the department. It is understood Queen St. work will be paid entirely by the department and 90 per cent of the Young St. cost will be borne by the department with the town paying 10 per cent under the connecting link agreement.

An Acton man, George Harris, Vimy St. and Guelph resident Egildo Romanello found Friday, March 13 unlucky when their cars were in collision on Main St. N.

50 years ago

March 15, 1934

Weekly payments to men on relief work have been amended.

The regular meeting of the Bannockburn Busters Club was held Friday evening. Mr. Wm. Anthony acted as chairman. The audience was favored with an instrumental by Miss Margaret Brown; a reading by Irma Watson; a violin solo by Mr. Clarridge; and a musical selection by Messrs Harry and Melvin McCullough. An interesting feature was the reading of the Bannockburn Eye-Opener.

Mr. Gowdy is busy in the Limehouse saw mill making real nice lumber. The neighbors are getting their wood piles cut into stove wood. Other years there has been some competition but this year Mr. John Standish of Stewarttown, who owns and operates a splendid machine, has the field all to himself.

Lakeside chapter of the I.O.D.E. held a progressive crokinole party at the home of Miss Pearl Wallace. Prizes were won by Miss Marquerite Ryder and Mrs. V. B. Rumley.

Chataqua, which once filled a great need, has faded from the scene.

75 years ago

Mr. Spence of Brantford, has leased the 200 acre farm of Mrs. John McKinnon and will be moving to the property this week. The farm has been owned and occupied by the McKinnon family since 1882.

To fill in the vacancy caused by the leave of absence granted Miss Kate Kennedy, a teacher of the primary grades at the Acton Public School, the board of education has been very fortunate in securing the services of Miss Edith Nicklin.

Complaint is made again that the freight trains are permitted to stand at the Mill St. crossing longer than the law allows.

The robins have returned to the area and the maple syrup is coming to market.

100 years ago

March 27, 1884

The residents of Bower Ave. demand a sidewalk this summer.

The Salvation Army have rented the Congregational Church (now St. Joseph's) and will attack Acton shortly.

Messrs. W. H. Storey and Son have broken ground for the new glove factory on Bower Ave.

Owing to the bad roads Rev. Dr. Castle was unable to get from Georgetown to Acton to preach in the Baptist Church.

Mr. H. J. Morton has purchased the harness business of Mr. R. Creech and will manufacture all classes of harness.

Eggs are down to 17 cents. Skating season is over. Sleighing's done and the merry sleigh bells have been put away. The roads are in very bad condition.

Newcastle resident warns against market-value assessment

Dear Sir,

The Town of Newcastle Ratepayers' Association in the Region of Durham has an urgent message for all property owners in the area served by your newspaper. Our Association is currently engaged in a local fight against skyrocketing property taxes and inequitable property assessments.

Ten years ago our peaceful community was thrust into regional government. Subsequently our new town council was convinced by provincial civil servants to be one of the first communities to experiment with market-value property assessment. The Ontario Ministry of Revenue has repeatedly suggested that the market-value assessment procedure would "equalize" property assessments. In fact each time a reassessment is now performed in our community the Ministry refers to the process as an "equalization of assessments."

We must warn all property taxpayers in Ontario that although use of the term "equalization" implies fairness and equality, actual application of the principle of "equalization" under Section 63 of the Assessment Act is deceitful, discriminatory and arbitrary. Section 63 permits the use of discriminatory class factors which allow some homes to be assessed at

lower percentages of market value than others. Section 63 allows the assessors to apply widely different market values to virtually identical lands. It is now obvious that the Assessment Act permits assessors to assign punitive values to small acreages. Additionally the Ontario government's taxation policy permits certain and substantial classes of property owners to claim back more than half of the actual taxes paid. To add further insult and discrimination, the average homeowner must pay his property taxes from "after-tax" take-home pay, while some property owners pay their property taxes from "before-tax" income.

Property values in some parts of our community have been driven up by speculators and developers whose ultimate objectives are profits. Those left behind to bear the tax load on these higher values are the established property owners who have for years formed the backbone of the community and who do not participate in the profit-taking.

The market-value assessment system was brought to our town five years ago and is now creating greater property tax disparity than that which it was to correct. In any community subjected to this insidious system, the taxes collected on a property no longer have any

relationship to the services provided. Although the services to homes in a neighborhood are the same for each household, market-value assessment collects large amounts of property tax from some households and small amounts from others. In some sections of our widely disbursed, disparate and artificial "town" the services are substantially less than in other sections; yet market-value assessment does not recognize the truth in this fact.

Assessment equalization sounds great if applied to a theoretical model community. But it has become obvious in the Town of Newcastle that the theory is not being applied and does not work. Section 63 permits glaring inequities and produced staggering and unpredictable property tax increases in the absence of increased services. Provincial assessors proved that they now have the power to double a homeowner's taxes without regard for the services received.

Market-value assessment has homeowners in the Town of Newcastle scared because no longer do they control the factors upon which their property taxes are calculated. Following our recent reassessment many homeowners have seen absurd estimated market values placed on their

homes by the assessors, and consequently outrageously higher levels of property taxation for which there is no justification. Many homeowners are now afraid that they will no longer be able to afford the property taxes on their homes especially during economic recession, unemployment or retirement.

Market-value assessment has instilled fear and resentment into the backbone of the community because not only are homeowners punished for the diligence they have displayed in establishing their homes, but they could be driven from their homes by uncontrolled market values and an insensitive, perverted assessment policy.

It has become obvious from our experience that the majority of local politicians have little interest in helping the property owners of our community to obtain a fair deal; they are solely interested in defending their own actions, protecting their image at Queen's Park.

It is for these reasons that the ratepayers of the Town of Newcastle have decided we should share our concerns with your readers. We are only a small community of 31,900 people spread over 230 square miles of this vast province. It is inevitable that our

ratepayers' association will have little impact by itself on the policy makers at Queen's Park. But it is our belief that there are many frustrated property owners throughout the province who feel abused and taken for granted by the property tax system.

If your community has not yet been introduced to market-value assessment, be warned. If however your local council has already been duped by agents of the Ministry of Revenue, you should take immediate action to spurn any suggestion that your community be reassessed under Section 63 of the Assessment Act. It is time that the Ontario Assessment Act be rewritten to remove the inherent discrimination and the disincentives, and to assure that each property taxpayer unite into local ratepayers' associations, and that all ratepayers' associations in Ontario unite to fight for property tax reform.

Our association would welcome a written communication from individual taxpayers and any ratepayers' associations in Ontario interested in joining us in what will be a tough and worthwhile fight.

James Slyfield
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