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A Christmas thought

It is ironic that, in the midst of putting our house in holiday array—in decking "the halls with boughs of holly," and in doing all the other happy chores of Christmas, we are often bereft of the inner spiritual grace that can light our lives.

Let us continue to make merry—to add swag of greenery to our front

door, and wreaths high and beautiful. But let us also open our hearts and minds to the true meaning of Christmas. Let the shadow of these wanderers grace our homes in every way. Let us make the Virgin Mother, the kindly Joseph—yes, the donkey—and their precious cargo welcome now and always!

The symbolism of Christmas

Christmas is a time for families to share the joy of being together. People living in another province booked flights home as early as October. Friends that have been too busy to drop over, suddenly appear at the front door.

Everyone starts thinking of the next Christmas on Dec. 26. Shoppers buy new decorations and Christmas cards on Boxing Day, taking advantage of the sales. Yet, it's funny, very few old decorations get thrown out. They hold memories of Christmas's gone by.

The Christmas story comes from the Bible (Luke 2 and Matthew 1:2) Luke tells a story of shepherds who were watching their flocks when an angel appeared to them and told them a Saviour had been born in Bethlehem. The shepherds went to Bethlehem to see Jesus. Matthew tells how the wise men gave Jesus gifts of

gold, frankincense and myrrh. The custom of exchanging gifts began in memory of the gifts the wise men brought the Christ Child. The people in the Netherlands, believe their gifts come from Saint Nicholas, a kindly bishop famous for giving surprise presents. One of the most joyous symbols of gift-giving is Santa Claus. This jolly roly-poly gentleman sets a mood of happiness and good cheer at Christmastime.

People today know their Christmas spirits by many names. In France he is Pere Noel; in Italy, Las Befana; and in Switzerland, Christkindli. Whatever, he is called, boys and girls throughout the world recognize him as the kindly symbol of Christmas.

The Star is used everywhere as a Christmas symbol. It represents the Star in the East which the wise men followed to the stable where Christ lay. Lights at Christmas represent Christ as the Light of the World. Many churches hold candlelight services on Christmas Eve.

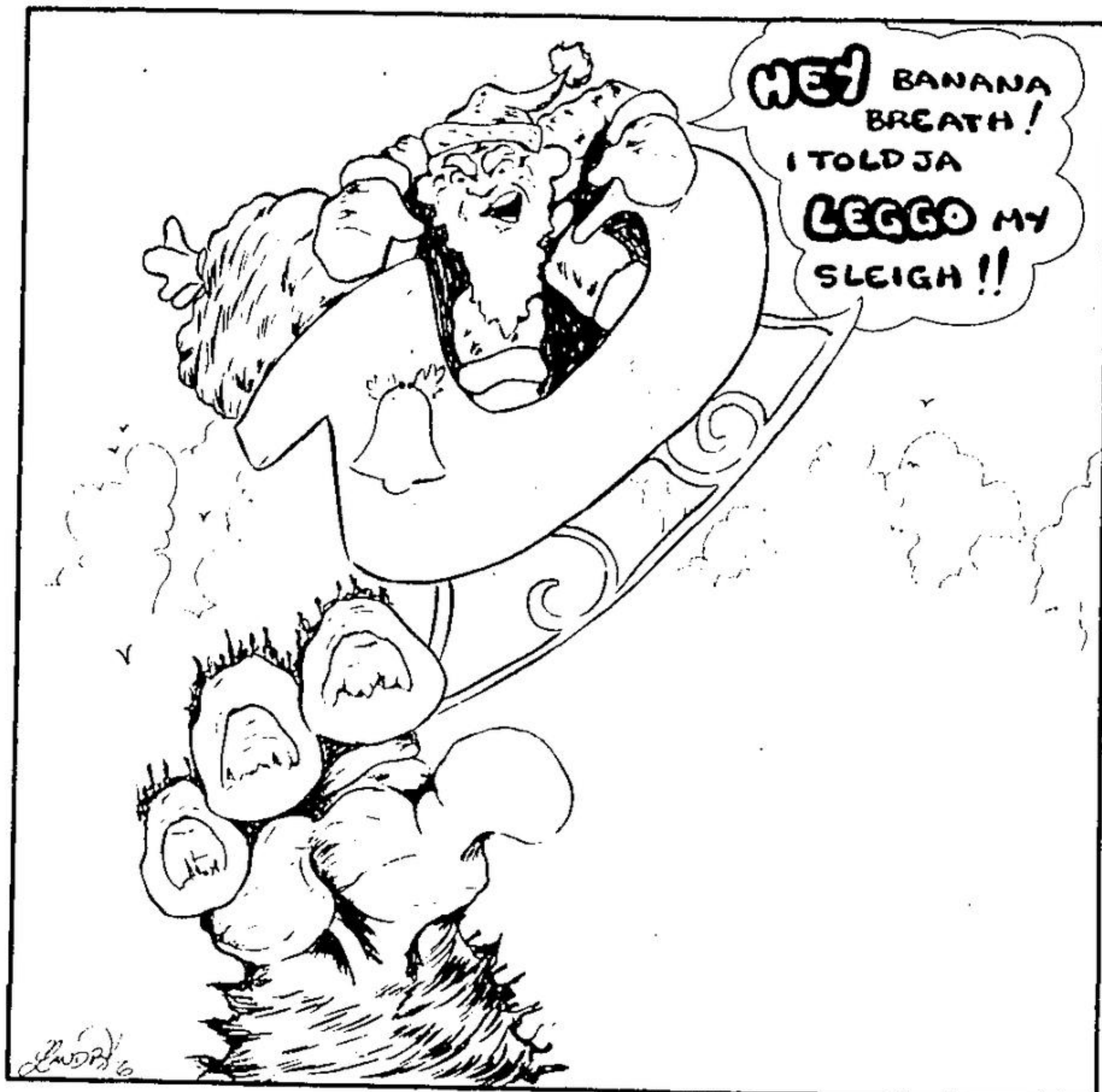
The custom of decorating homes and churches with evergreens began in ancient times. The Romans exchanged green tree branches for good luck on the first day of January. The English took this over for Christmas. Although today

most people have artificial trees, for convenience, or preservation of trees, the spirit is still there. The poinsettia is one of the best-selling Christmas pot plants, and its spectacular "Blooms" are said in Mexico, to represent the Star of Bethlehem. The plant is also said to hate changes of temperature and gas and oil fumes and cigarette smoke.

Street caroling is more popular in Europe than Canada. One of the most popular Christmas carols is "O Come All Ye Faithful," but no one knows who wrote the original Latin words. The British are fond of "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen."

The first Christmas card was produced in 1843 and showed a happy family toasting absent friends. It infuriated the Temperance Movement by depicting innocent children in conjunction with demon drink. But the card-making habit caught on and by the 1880 the post office was impeding people to post early for Christmas.

Although people complain of how commercialized Christmas has become, how expensive gifts are, the good feeling that comes at Christmas remains. The spirit of Christmas should last all year.



A precious thought for you to have a joyous holiday

BY GERRY LANDSBOROUGH

In honour of the Christmas season we will leave the everyday world behind this week and share this Christmas wish with you.

Thoughts to Share on a Christmas Eve
We watch the softly falling snowflakes drift lazily by the window.

Reflecting the glow of the blue and green and red and gold of the shimmering Christmas lights.

Blinking out the message of the festivities for all to see.

The air filtering the gentle strains of Silent Night and Come All Ye Faithful from the midnight church services.

And all within is quiet and still as the magic hour of midnight.
Slips quietly upon us.
Christmas again - Christmas -

The tree aglow of sparkling tinsel and brightly coloured balls and ribbons.
The gifts thrown in gaily wrapped cloaks of many colours
Spread as a regal robe beneath the splendour of the tree.

Symbolically a magic moment
Christmas Eve.

The rush of the past few weeks over.
The promise of a day ahead of merriment and well wishers
The smells and noises and laughter.

Festivities all brought about by a tiny babe whose message of love and brotherhood
Has circled the globe and lived on for five thousand years.

Christmas Eve.
As the happy tired of the big day crashes down upon us

The joyous noel of Christmases everywhere
Rushes through the crisp winter white night air.

In a lighter vein . . .

Lost and found

A man lost a valuable dog and advertised in a newspaper, offering \$500 for it, but got no replies. He called at the newspaper office.

"I want to see the advertising manager," he said.
"He's out," said the office boy.
"Well, how about his assistant?"
"He's out, too, sir."
"Goodness! Is everybody out?"
"Yes, they're all hunting for your dog."

We think of those Christmases are not as ours.
We are thankful for the affluence our Canadian lifestyle affords us.
We think of other lands where guns and civil wars are a Christmas reality.

We wrap ourselves in the luxury of peace.
A peace that always has to be earned that never comes with apathy.

We think of those whose Christmas will be spent at a hospital bedside.
We give thanks for the health that for 364 days a year we take for granted.

The eyes that see the Christmas sparkle, the ears that hear the merriment and happy Christmas noises.

The arms and legs that are straight and whole and have given the mobility for the mad rush of the holiday season.
So much to be thankful for.

The health of the little ones who will awake to the Christmas delights.
And of course the health of the aged who will be here for yet another Christmas.
And hopefully many more yet to come.

Christmas Eve
Thoughts that tumble through the mind reflecting our Canadian lifestyle
Glimmering in the glow of Christmas magic.
May your Christmas be special as you are special.
To the uniqueness that is you.
To the uniqueness that is Christmas 1976 for you and yours

May all happiness befall you in the coming year.
And may the joy of Christmas Eve touch your heart and soul.
Letting out a special Christmas magic.
To huddle to the surface of your mind.
Unexpectedly.
Throughout all the trying days and eves of the coming year.

From my house to yours
May God grant what you need
And may your Christmases always be special.
Building precious memories for year upon year to come.

On The Home Front Christmas is here

By SUSAN DE FACENDIS
The Christmas season is a 'Here and Now' moment for children. It is the agonising culmination of a four or six week countdown carefully marked on hand-drawn calendars; a breathless anticipation of hoped for gifts and a respite from the usual school grind.

It is the freedom to indulge in an excess of cookies and other delights; the welcoming of visitors; decorating the tree and artistically arranging the gifts beneath it, making sure of course that their own are well to the forefront.

It is a time for learning that giving is as much fun as receiving and closed bedroom doors, bearing 'Private - Keep Out' signs, conceal the wrapping of carefully chosen surprises for parents, brothers and sisters - surprised that are only marginally kept, because of the children's irrefragable desire to pass on hints and clues.

"I'll give you three guesses," becomes again a familiar phrase and: "Wait 'til you see it mom, you'll freak right out!" - and parents go along with the game, warmed by the knowledge that these gifts come from the heart and represent hard-saved allowances; earnings from snow-shovelled driveways, newspaper routes and hours of babysitting. What greater gift than an expression of love such as this, could any parent ask for?

For the adults, Christmas is an amalgamation of every Christmas they can remember. It is the sharing of your children's excitement, because you too can remember one feeling that same tingle of anticipation. It is that special warmth in knowing that one is perpetuating family traditions, or creating new ones, that will live on in future years through your own child. It is the birth of memories for the child, so that in years to come he will be able to say: "Do you remember when...?" Just as you now say it, remember when...

Remembering as I do, the early morning hours when, as a child, you awoke in the darkness to check with a tentative stretch of your hand whether Santa had been.

The joyful discovery once determined, of a bulky stocking at the end of your bed that crackled and rattled most tantalisingly, and then you were quickly and silently padding down a darkened hallway to rouse your brothers and visiting cousins.

Amid giggling and "OOHs" and "AAHs" we gathered together to sit cross-legged on someone's bed to open our stockings. And all mixed together with the laughter; the candy-wrappers; the crushed ribbons and many whispered cries of "SUUUU! You'll wake Mum and Dad!" was the delightful knowledge that we were merely on the brink of a whole beautiful, endless day.

The traditional dinner at Grandmother's house, with two varieties of homemade cream for the Christmas pudding - and the agony of choice being solved by having a serving of each. How can one forget the youngest cousin, who only ever ate one carrot at dinner for years - and the gift of a book from grandmother who, by some mysterious means, always knew exactly which one you wanted.

Or does one pick out the individual years? I am content to occasionally draw on the memories and let them sift through my hands, one running into another, in a happy blur of time.

Those memories, inextricably linked to loved people who are now gone from this life, can be conjured up at will because of the shared happiness we brought to each other.

Somehow, when the solemn toast is proposed at the dinner table, those dearly remembered people rejoin us for a short while; smile and nod their heads as though to say: "See, we have not really left you. While we continue to live in your thoughts, we remain your companions through life."

Christmas is special.

It is in the delightful smell of a pine tree and a crackling fire, in the fragrance of mincecandied tarts, turkey and ham.

It is there in a mosaic of sounds. Laughter; church bells; voices rising in unison to sing the old familiar Christmas carols; in the belly laugh of a plaza Santa and in salutations between friends.

Christmas can be seen. It is on the faces of little children when the coloured lights sparkle against the snow and in the delicate tracings of frost upon the windowpanes. It is the brightly wrapped parcels under a tree and the greeting cards festooning walls and doors.

Christmas is a feeling. It is the unusual glow in a brief meeting of eyes between adult strangers in church on this special day, a rare moment of silent communication passed across the heads of children that says: "I know you. I understand how you feel and I wish you happiness."

Christmas is indeed an entire package of beautiful sensations. I hope it will be a very good season for all of you. May you find three gifts containing happiness, contentment and serenity awaiting you under your tree this year.

On Parliament Hill

CAOQUETTE: 'We're going to miss him'

By STEWART MACLEOD
Ottawa Bureau

As I sit here reading the tributes that are pouring from our political leaders to the memory of Iteal Caouette, let's flash back to 1962 when he burst into Parliament, almost feared as a Quebec nationalist.

"Fiery Quebec nationalist elected," said one newspaper. In those days that's about as close as we came to the word "separatist."

Who would have thought that 14 years later, Prime Minister Trudeau would be paying tribute to the late Mr. Caouette for his great contribution to Canadian unity? "Iteal Caouette had an unshakable faith in this country that could serve as an example to us all," he said.

Mr. Caouette, it should be said, was never a separatist. But back in the early 1960's when the Social Credit MP was spreading his flamboyant oratory across his beloved province, many of us seemed to be highly suspicious of anyone with nationalist tendencies. And when the spellbinding Caouette entered Parliament, there was an air of

alarm in some quarters. Here was a Quebec nationalist, free to speak his mind without being influenced by a Liberal or Conservative caucus. What would he say?

The fact that such fears existed perhaps is an indictment of our two solitudes. We obviously knew very little about the man who would later become national leader of the Social Credit Party.

QUEBEC PROMOTED
He had been a highly vocal opponent of the Canadian National Railways naming its Montreal hotel the Queen Elizabeth. And he persistently attacked the then CNR president Donald Gordon, for not promoting enough French-speaking executives. He talked about bilingualism in the public service long before it became a government project, and it seemed that his only interest was in promoting Quebec.

In those days, it seems, that made you suspect. But it didn't take long for the real Iteal Caouette to emerge after he began speaking from a national forum. And few could dislike what they say.

If the Social Credit MP, with his burning belief in monetary reform, was preoccupied with the betterment of Quebecers, it was all advocated within the framework of a Canada he obviously loved. As New Democratic Leader Ed Broadbent says, "he based most of his political activity on his profound commitment to the continuation of our more than 100-year history of federalism."

And, to the surprise of many, it turned out that his opposition to the Queen Elizabeth Hotel had nothing to do with his views on the monarchy.

"Under our gracious Queen," Mr. Caouette said in 1966, "we have freedoms and living standards that are the envy of the world."

When the Itouyn, Que., car salesman said that, English-Canadians suddenly listened. LIKED GORDON
And after all the terrible things he said about Donald Gordon, it was interesting to see the two men meet for the first time in the office of Davie Fulton, former justice minister in the Diefenbaker government. It

was after a parliamentary party, and a large group had been invited in for a sing-song.

Everyone wondered what would happen when Mr. Caouette spotted the dreaded Mr. Gordon. Would he walk out?
Not likely. Within minutes, the two men had their arms on each other's shoulders singing "I've been working on the railroad," and "Atouette."

That was typical of the former Social Credit Leader. Those who saw him only while he ranted and raved from a podium, or sent scorching sarcasms across the floor of the Commons, really missed a great deal. He was always much more revealing in his own office, laughing at himself.

"Of course I look indignant much of the time," he used to say. "I am in opposition and we must be indignant about what the government is doing. That applies to any government."
"But that's not the real me. Hell, did you ever see an indignant car salesman who is a success?"
We are all going to miss that successful car salesman.

Queen's Park

Legislature freebies

By DON O'HEARN
Queen's Park Bureau
Of The Herald

One of the minor problems of the government over the years has been trying to frustrate efforts of the NDP and the old CCF to work the system for publicly freebies.

True there have been more momentous matters.

But from time to time some lighter mementos have been provided as the other party has tried to trip the government with its own dollar sign.

MESSIT
One notable such incident was many years ago when Leslie Frost was first in power.
George Drew when he took office in 1943 started a Hansard record of the debates of the house for the first time.
And he had the daily record printed, in much the same tidy format as today.

When Frost came in he quickly put a stop to this - not to the record but to the printing. He ordered that the daily report should not be printed but be mimeographed, meaning, a big, messy and awkward volume every day.

He didn't say so publicly but his reason was that with the old record CCF members were having large numbers of their speeches reprinted and mailed out to their constituents - mainly at government expense.
Frost's adventure came to an abrupt end,

however. It was pointed out to him that the cost of his mimeographed travesty was much more than the printed booklet.

And to him a dollar meant everything - even more than frustrating the CCF.

MAO NEXT?
The most recent instance of party publicity pogy concerns three NDP members who have been publishing an NDP paper in Italian (they are listed only as "editorial committee members"), but it is assumed they or the party are the owners.
Then it turned out that Forze Neuve was getting government advertising.

A question was asked in the house, and all that Industry and Tourism minister Claude Bennett could do was defend the advertising. His ministry had placed it.

The paper, he said, met the standards of his ministry for media and therefore had been put on the list.
Stephen Lewis later issued a statement claiming that his members were entirely innocent, but to avoid any wrong impressions they were resigning from the editorial committee.

However he thought the advertising should continue. "Clearly," he said, "it would be terribly prejudicial if a journal was disqualified on the grounds of political viewpoint."
Next a publication of the sayings of Chairman Mao - with government advertising?