

Opinion

Camping? You must be kidding

Camping. Who in their right mind would want to go camping?

I'm talking volunteers here. I'm talking people who actually plan these trips with smiles on their cherubic little faces.

Of course, what most people fail to realize, primarily because paintings don't lend themselves to IQ tests, is that cherubs are dumb as posts. You think these kids have been to school? Ha, fat little kids with wings on their backs didn't go to any school I was ever associated with.

We've spent the last, oh I don't know, five million years trying desperately to get out of the jungle and now when the person to flush toilet ratio is nearing 1:1, we head right back to the trees.

Explain to me the thrill of trekking north for hours, dumping a canoe in a freezing northern lake, and paddling around like a madman with the goal of returning to the spot you left from. Why leave in the first place? In fact, why drive there at all, if you realize the futility of actually paddling?

Running water is what it's all about. Shooting the rapids is not the same as taking a shower and while the former might be exhilarating once in a while, take away the latter and see how happy you are after a couple of days.

We've spent 200 years of sweat and energy hacking an existence out of the thick forests of southern Ontario, only to throw it all away. Say to your great-grandmother, "Just for fun, let's be pioneers again," and she'll probably stuff a rough hewn chair down your throat.

I don't get it. We work hard to build our cities, homes, and lives and then, when we get the chance, we flee the very existence that we've chosen and shed every vestige of technology that we can stand to be without. Which means only the hardcore campers leave civilization without a portable generator.

Why? It's nice for a change of scenery now and again but you can do that by changing channels. The really adventurous change TVs, even if that means changing rooms. In the service of the great outdoors, sometimes you gotta suffer. Right?

It would have been nice to wander around southern Ontario 300 years ago. Imagine the

Reaume with a View

with BRAD REAUME



wonder, the beauty and power of Niagara Falls, without the garish hotels and amusements which surround it today. Imagine cruising through forests without really knowing what you'd see around the next wooded corner. Now that's camping.

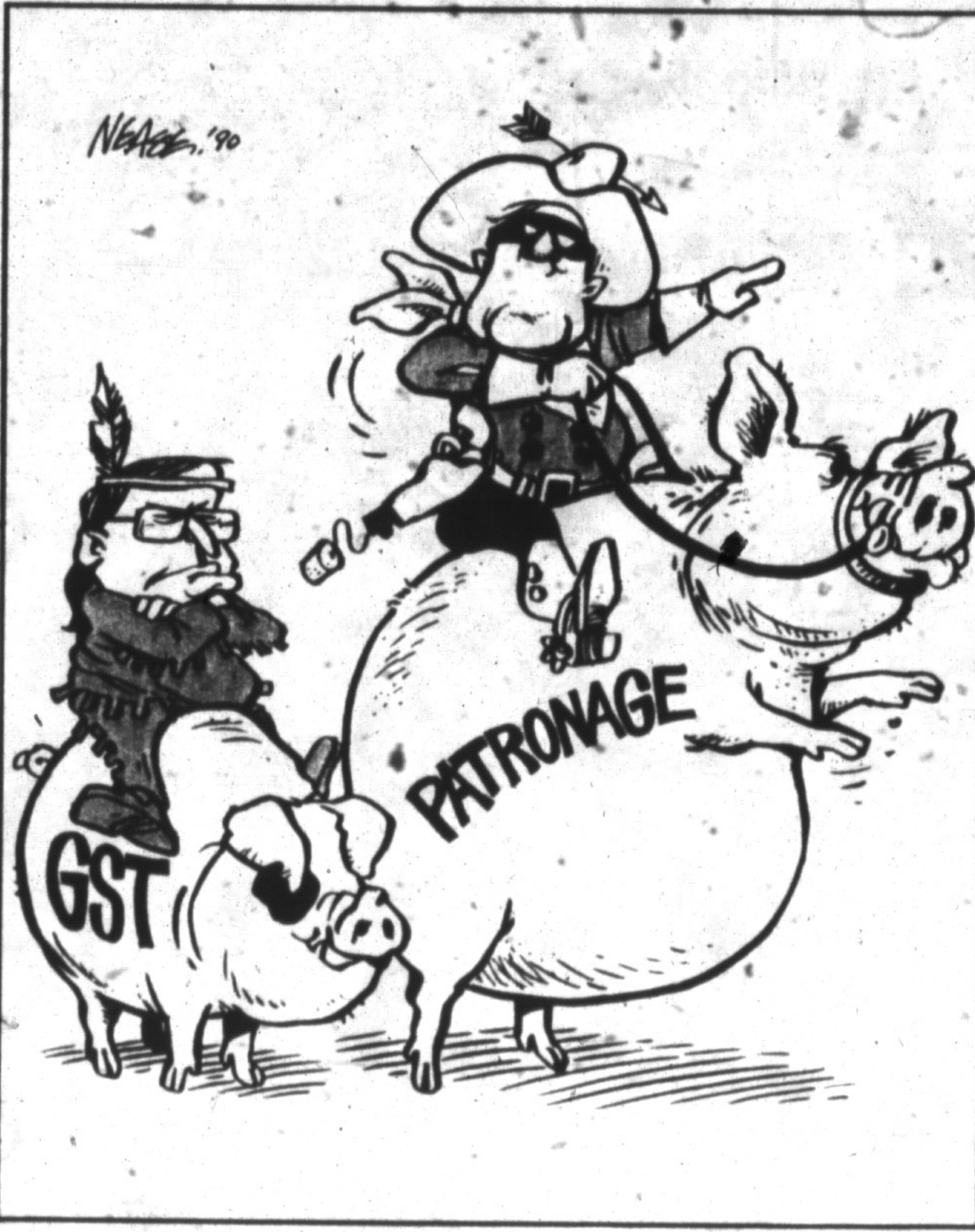
I'm altogether too familiar with geography to ever really be surprised or impressed with anything in today's Ontario. Frightened, disgusted, shocked and saddened (my personal favourite), or merely bored; yeah, I can do those when faced with bears, pollution, clear-cut logging or the prospect of not having a deck of cards to while away the time.

On any expedition I've only got so much awe in me. I can oooohhhh, I can aaaahhhh, I can speak in hushed reverent tones — but after a dose or two of that I'm done. I can't be deeply impressed anymore. That's why I've never gone to Europe. I figure I'd run out of hushed reverent tones about the middle of England and then I'd traipse around the continent wondering what the big deal is.

We colonials carry a pretty heavy burden of pro-modern culture shock. I have trouble dealing with the birth of civilization and I have trouble camping, even as a form of solidarity with our pioneer ancestors. I wonder if you can buy a shiny glass and structural steel tent?

With A View Update: Driving up Appleby Line I saw a corn stand about a mile south of Derry Road. Where did this come from? Looks like some smart farmer is taking advantage of a little free publicity after last week's column.

Editor's Note: The operator of the 'honour' system corn stand called the paper to let us know that some of her customers were concerned after reading Brad's column last week that the stand no longer existed. Carol Reid, the operator, says it's usually open on weekends only so Brad had missed seeing it during his weekday travels.



Helplessness a core of depression

In 1974 American researcher Martin Seligman published his now classic book on 'learned helplessness'. Since that time, it has become one of the most prominent and widely researched theories explaining depression.

The central notion of this theory is one of control — can you control what happens to you? Although we all get anxious at first in stressful situations, people will also get depressed if they feel that they cannot handle the problem at hand.

Moreover, and this is crucial, when they often fail to resolve problems, they will soon begin to fail in situations where they could have in fact succeeded in removing the problems. They learn to give up. They learn that they are unable, impotent, and then they don't try. They come to feel helpless.

In one of his first studies on learned helplessness, Seligman gave dogs electric shocks in two different situations. Some dogs were first placed in a large box and given a number of shocks from which they could not escape. (Note: Ethical issues on the use of animals in research will be discussed in a future column).

In the second part of the experiment these animals, as well as dogs who did not have prior experience with inescapable shock, were again placed in a box. This time, however, they could escape the shocks by simply jumping over a partition into another compartment of the box when they saw a warning light go on.

The behaviour of the dogs was dramatically affected by whether or not they had previously experienced inescapable shock. Animals who had not had been shocked became upset but quickly learned to jump over the partition. The animals previously exposed to inescapable shock, however, behaved quite differently. They ran around for awhile and then just stopped. They seemed to give up and accept the shock. In fact, most of them retreated to a corner and whined.

Such experiments suggest that animals can acquire a general sense of helplessness when they are exposed to unavoidable adverse stimulation. This helplessness can interfere later with their performance in stressful situations. They appear to lose the ability and



Psychology

with DR. A RINCOVER

motivation to respond to stresses.

On the basis of this and other work, Seligman felt that learned helplessness in animals provided a model for at least some forms of depression. Like many depressed people, the animals appeared to be passive in the face of stress. They failed to initiate actions that could allow them to cope. They had difficulty eating or retaining what was eaten, and lost weight.

On a physiological level, Seligman's dogs were found to be low in a specific neurotransmitter, called norepinephrine. (Neurotransmitters are the chemical information that passes from one brain cell to another — they are the way our cells 'communicate' with each other).

It's important because injections to increase norepinephrine will alleviate depression in humans. This supports the notion that learned helplessness is associated with the chemical, and with depression.

The causes of human depression are not as clear as in the case of Seligman's dogs, of course. We all have many stresses, successes and failures, and it is hard to pinpoint how all of those experiences will interact.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy how often therapists of different theoretical persuasions point to events over which the depressed person had little or not control — the loss of loved ones, physical disease, aging and failure — as central to depression.

Moreover, experiments with humans have shown results similar to those with animals. Normal, non-depressed people who are exposed to inescapable noise, or unsolvable problems, later fail to escape the noise (when it is escapable) and solve simple problems. Clearly, broad exposure to unresolvable stress or failure will have a damaging effect on our ability to cope later on.

Another postal strike looms

The prospect of another strike at Canada Post is not exactly news for Canadians who have, out of necessity, grown somewhat accustomed to this annoying fact of life.

Years of labour difficulties at the post office have hardened the public to the inconveniences, if not downright damage, of Canada Post's peculiar form of service. Unfortunately, we are all going to be facing more of the same as early as this month when things come to a boil between postal management and the union.

We've heard it all before. The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), which has been without a contract since July 31, 1988, is threatening to strike if an Aug. 31 deadline expires without agreement. And that means disrupted mail service come mid-September — an event to which many will respond "so, what else is new?"

What's new this time is the potential for the largest postal walkout ever in this country, a walkout which would combine all the sound and fury of CUPW's patented strike technique intensified by the fact that, thanks to the 1989 union merger of CUPW and the Letter Carriers Union of Canada (LCUC), letter carriers and inside workers would walk out at the same time.

Bill Parsons, director of national affairs for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB), says that there is no reason to expect that the usual hard bargaining negotiations, along with the customary threats from both sides, will be any different this time around. "It's going to be acrimonious," says

Mainstream Canada

with TERRY O'SHAUGHNESSY

Mr. Parsons. "Whether it will get as ugly as last time remains to be seen."

Mr. Parsons hastens to add, however, that the effects of a postal strike on small businesses in 1990 will be quite different than in previous years.

"There's no doubt that a postal strike would again hurt small firms," he says, "but not as much as during the recession of 1981-82, when more companies were dependent on mail delivery and (it) resulted in many actually going out of business because of the strike."

"The increased use of fax machines, for example, makes a big difference. More than half of CFIB's 87,000 members now have fax equipment and this helps to offset the effects of any strike action."

Of course, one aggravation the fax can't relieve is the simple disgust that many will feel at the thought of being at the mercy of striking posties yet again. But the fact of the matter is, despite improved delivery standards, the customer is always last at postal strike time.

This column is provided by the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses and reflects the opinions of that organization.



The Canadian Champion

Milton's Business of the Year for 1989

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Phone 878-2341
Toronto Line 621-3837
Second class mail Registration No. 8813



The Canadian Champion, published every Wednesday and Friday at 191 Main St. E., Milton, Ont., L9T 4N9 (Box 248), is one of The Metroland Printing, Publishing & Distributing group of suburban companies which includes: The Action Free Press, Ajax/Pickering News Advertiser, Aurora Banner, Barrie Banner Advance, Brampton Guardian, Burlington Post, Erin/Hillsburgh Echo, Etobicoke Guardian, Georgetown Independent, Halton Hills Weekend, Kingston This Week, Markham Economist & Sun, Mississauga News, Newmarket Era, Oakville Beaver, Oshawa/Whitby This Week, Peterborough This Week, Richmond Hill Liberal, Rockwood Review, Scarborough Mirror, Stouffville Tribune, Today's Seniors, Uxbridge Tribune, Vaughan Liberal, and The Willowdale Mirror. Metroland Printing, Publishing & Distributing is a division of Harlequin Enterprises Ltd.

Price: Six copies 40 cents each; Wednesday edition home delivery 40 cents weekly, \$20.80 annually. Friday edition \$75 annually by mail in Canada; \$85 in other countries.

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