

Opinion

From rags to mega wardrobe

Into the wide world I trudge, money clenched fiercely in my fist, a wild, desperate expression on my face. It's time to drive the engine of the economy. It's one of the most horrible realizations in a man's life; it's time to buy clothes.

Now, if I'm lucky enough to need a baseball mitt, new spikes, a hockey stick, or, perhaps dinner, I will happily wend my way to a local shopping megamall. There I will check the manufacturers' specs with the actual product, I'll ask the salesman for phone numbers of the last few guys who bought the product in question and I'll visit the plant and talk to the guy who made it.

After being absolutely sure of the product I will comparison shop until I'm convinced that the product cannot be bought for less money anywhere east of the Mississippi. Then and only then, will I think about it for a few days, mulling over the opportunity costs associated with the purchase.

Hey I could be using that money to go bowling or something. I dash those hopes and dreams of my evil twin and slap down the money right quick, stealing off into the night, my new wiggle clenched firmly under my arm.

When it comes to clothes shopping I'm just not capable of staring at racks of cotton for hours on end. I can't do it. It's a genetic mismatch.

So when I'm finally reduced to rags I decide to muster my courage, and clench my teeth in steely determination. I take a few last deep breaths and plunge headlong into the climate controlled shopping cocoon known as a mall.

I spend maybe 45 minutes casing the place. Good deal here, going broke sales there, nice product somewhere else. All is duly noted, seared into my memory, and ready for total recall 24 hours later.

After enlisting the help of a cost/efficiency expert, addressed deferentially as Mom, I trooped off to reap the benefits her expertise and my research.



Reaume With a View

with
BRAD REAUME

I had been prepared for deals but I was shocked at the state of retail. Rumour of my determination to buy ran up the mall like a wave. First retailers would take a few tremulous steps outside the cosy confines of their establishment, see my fistful of dollars and scurry back inside to prepare for my visit.

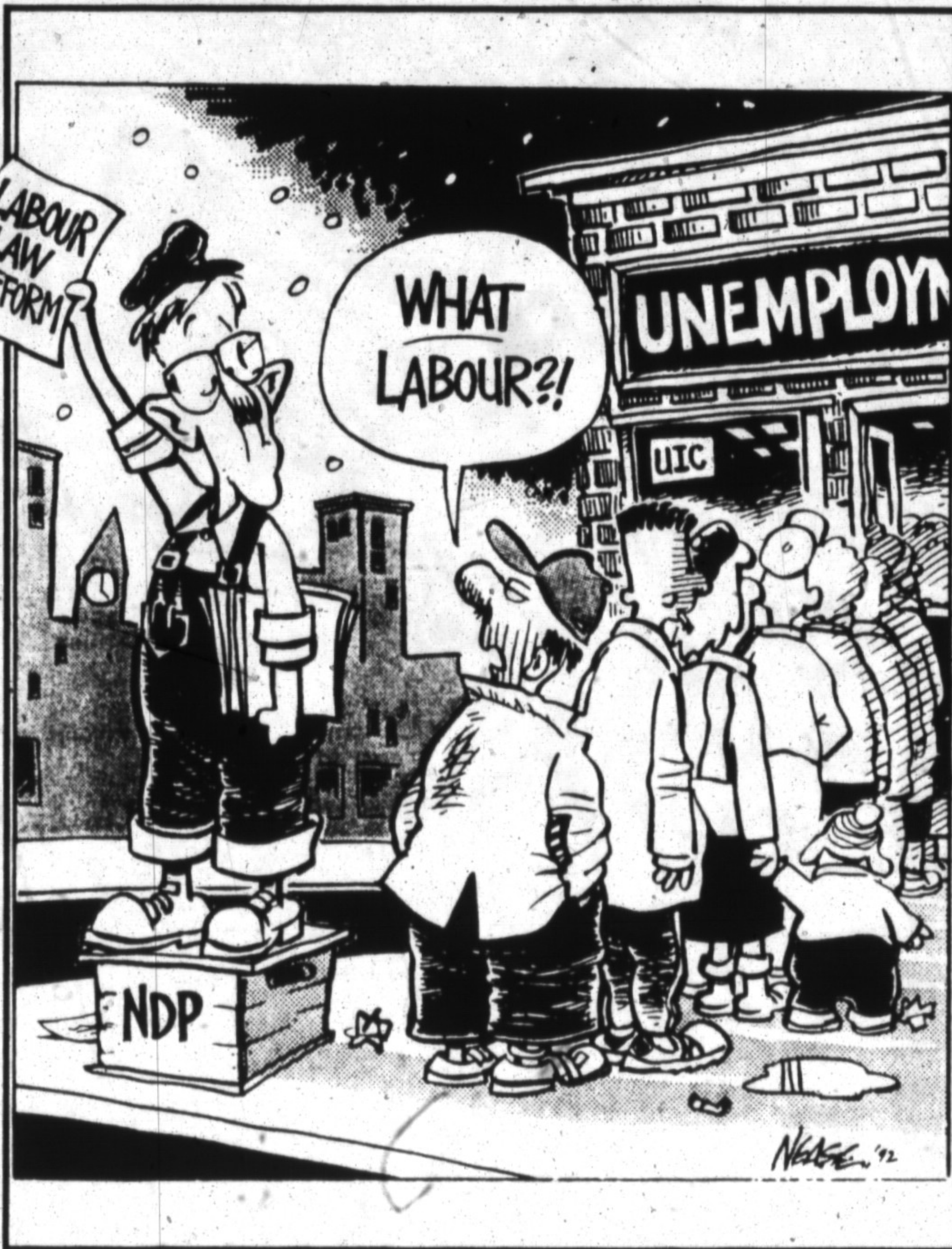
The hubbub gained strength as rumour of someone spending money matched the reality of my spending spree. No little act of selflessness was this. I needed a newer looking image and I was willing to pay sale prices to do it.

The rumour of my passing gained strength. This buyer was for real, spending hard-earned honest-to-goodness cash. Myself, I was in a frenzy of trying things on and trotting up to various cash registers. At one sales counter, people were so happy to be making a sale I almost felt bad, though I choked back an attempt to pay full price.

So now I'm in the same boat as everybody else in this recession. Broke but well-dressed.

I think things have bottomed out. I noticed significant heaps of clothing were not reduced in price. In fact, I even bought some. With that news some people will think our economy has turned a corner.

Perhaps it has. North Americans are changing their way of life. They are searching for a balance of production, environment and consumption. The information age is with us full force and now we have a new world order, both political and economic to balance with it. Good thing I'll meet this new horizon in snappy new duds.



Relentless pursuit of leisure

Twenty-eight hours. I added them up — all those minutes our three children are involved in leisure-time activities during any week. No wonder I am tired and burned out.

It's a cumulative thing — a half hour here, an hour there. The children, naturally, would double or triple those hours if they had a choice, but I raise my hand in desperation and yell: "No more, I can't take anymore!"

How have these new interests altered our household? We could start with piano lessons. Because of its central location in the living room, the piano is repeatedly attacked as kids walk by, and of course, they argue over who gets first dibs on it. (Any excuse for a sibling dispute is the name of the game.) Little fingers are drawn to the yellowed ivories and cannot resist playing out a tune.

Scouts and Brownies impinge on the orderly running of the household when two hours before meeting time, a frantic Brownie or Scout will announce that he or she has badge requirements that need to be fulfilled immediately. And will I help them?

Most recently, the eight-year-old began attending art classes. She comes home spotted in a rainbow of colours. She also has to give us a detailed rundown on the techniques of wedging when working with clay.

Then there are the swim classes for all three. Damp towels and bathing suits adorn the bathroom. Worse yet, the bedroom floors.

Ballet, another new one for the eight-year-old, brings to our household a refined look. Before every class, we hurriedly scoop up her hair "a la ballet", not as easy feat since her hair is too long to be short and too short to be long. We end up with peculiar ponytails stuck straight out from each side of her head and strands of hair falling onto her face and down



On the Home Front

with ESTHER
CALDWELL

the nape of her neck. But the young, coiffed dancer's ready in her black leotard and pink tights and shoes.

This child walks purposefully, taking time to place one little pointed toe after the other, spine straight and head held high. Obviously, all the world's a stage and she insists on performing her demi-plies, battements tendus, echappes, and all those other French moves, even when she washes the dinner dishes.

And let us not forget figure skating — one of the most expensive sports around. We fell into this one totally unprepared. Although I managed to steer our daughter away from skating and into ballet, which has proven so far to be less expensive, the 13-year-old, laced up in his \$500 skates, carries on.

Financial hazards aren't the only dangers lurking in this endeavour. This kid brings his jumps home with him, all five feet and eight inches of him leaping from one small, crowded room to the next, whacking into furniture, knocking plants off shelves, and terrorizing the cats. He springs from Axel to Lutz to Salchow, oblivious to the vulnerable television screen and the low-hanging ceiling lights. Whir. Thump. Crash. He'll execute one anytime any place when you least expect it — even on the street or in the shops.

What do parents of gymnasts have to contend with on their home front?

How to cope with infertility

Most young people assume they can have a child anytime they want. Though they may put it on the back burner for a while — to improve their financial condition, pursue a career, or perhaps just to put off being tied down by some much responsibility — they think they can start a family once they decide it's time.

Many of these people are in for a shock. We are seeing infertility problems in unprecedented numbers during the past few years. Surveys estimate that between 9 and 17 per cent of young couples are infertile, meaning that they could not conceive after at least one year of unprotected, regular sexual intercourse, or they couldn't carry a pregnancy to a live birth.

It's not that it is occurring more often, but rather there are more treatments available (hormone therapies, various kinds of surgery, in vitro fertilization, etc.) and these are being sought out by these couples.

In the past, people simply had to accept their infertility and go on with life. As new treatments have come into play, however, people's hopes stay alive indefinitely as they try one approach, then another. As a result, psychologists have begun to play an important role in counselling infertile couples.

The effects of infertility can be truly devastating. Couples often undergo a roller coaster of emotions (which resembles grieving) as mood swings vacillate unmercifully — wildly optimistic one moment, feeling depressed and hopeless the next.

They often feel guilty about infertility, wondering if they caused the problem. They fear they are disappointing their parents. They may see the loss as a calamitous break in the life-cycle, the end of the family name or their role in it, with no legacy to leave. They may feel cut off or alienated from family and friends.

Recent research points to eight specific types of personal loss in infertile couples, each of which is known to be a major contributor to depression, including the loss of: an important relationship; self-esteem; health; status or prestige in the eyes of others; financial, social or job security; the hope of fulfilling an important



Psychology

with ARNOLD
RINCOVER

fantasy; something or someone of great symbolic value; self-confidence, competence or control.

To make matters worse, couples often don't talk about the problem, at least not openly and honestly. They may hold back because men are afraid it will make their wife feel worse, while women think the men don't want to listen after a certain point.

As a result, the relationship becomes strained, and any other unresolved problems are magnified manyfold.

Fortunately, there is a good deal of psychological (and other) help available now. First, of course, is to help the couple explore all the alternatives available to them, ranging from adoption to various medical techniques to pursuing a full life without children.

There have been radical improvements during the last 15 years in identifying problems and treatments associated with infertility, which of course means there is more hope for more couples than ever before.

Second, it is important to assure these couples that their feelings are normal, and put some myths to rest (eg. that it is their fault).

Third, relaxation and behaviour modification techniques will often be used to help couples cope with their fears and gain some control and direction over their lives.

Fourth, treatment will help the couple to communicate more openly and honestly with each other, in an attempt to prevent infertility from causing other personal and marital problems.

Finally, for those couples who cannot have children despite all the latest advances, they may need some help in deciding when enough is enough. They need help to move on, and perhaps to learn how to live a full and enjoyable life without children.

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