

# Editorial Page

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## Is this a democracy or a dictatorship?

Taxes. Maybe I shouldn't mention that word considering it is that time of year, and many people are none too pleased about the issue.

But, in light of the announcement by Federal Finance Minister Michael Wilson regarding the upcoming budget, people had better stock up on Pepto Bismol so they will be able to stomach it.

Wilson has suddenly discovered Canada's national debt. He's telling us we'll have to live with broken promises made only five months ago during the federal election campaign.

All of a sudden Wilson has decided the \$330 billion debt is the prime concern of the Mulroney government. A variety of government programs - everything from social programs to health care to transfer payments - are now in jeopardy.

What gives? Where has Michael Wilson been the last four-and-a-half-years that he has held his position?

The federal deficit did not magically appear overnight. It has been steadily increasing for many, many years.

But this didn't seem to bother Mulroney during the election campaign. He travelled the country making extravagant promises as to what his government would do if re-elected. His main reason for calling the election was in order to have the Canadian people decide the fate of Free Trade.

He promised increased trade with the United States would help the Canadian economy flourish. Not enough, apparently, to reduce our deficit. Not enough for Mulroney to keep the rest of his election promises.

So now we are going to be asked to tighten our belts yet another notch. And if you don't wear a belt you'd better go out and buy one. But not on your credit card - because Wilson is contemplating the implementation of a surtax on the use of plastic...and loans and mortgages and who knows what else.

Tell me if I'm wrong, but I thought we lived in a democracy. A place where citizens could trust governments to live up to their word - at least more or less. Maybe I'm just naive.

As far as I'm concerned, Wilson has thrown trust out the window along with his government's election promises. If you can't trust a government to live up to its word, you may as well switch over to totalitarianism. Brian Mulroney, Dictator of Canada - how does that sound? Maybe we're not there yet, but if things keep up the way they are, we can't be that far off.



## Tax-payer corresponding with government over school tax issue

This is a copy of a letter which was sent to Chris Ward, Minister of Education by Mr. Charles Kneipp. He has asked that this letter be reprinted in order to inform tax-payers as to the current situation.

Dear Minister:

Thank you for your letter dated Feb. 14th, 1989, in which you explain your position to our objection to the high Tax-Base which was forced on us by the Arbitration Process the Municipal Clerks of Manitowadge, Marathon, Terrace Bay and Schreiber, in the Lake Superior

School Board District, used.

Bill 100 stopped this procedure and one can only speculate what further increases would have been the result. However, the fact that the meeting set for July 11th, 1988 was stopped by your action and your statement in Thunder Bay before the media acknowledges that we are wronged.

We appreciate your efforts in equalizing taxes in the area, however, this applies to the Municipalities! Jackfish and Rossport were always market-value assessed, yet they had no

choice in the matter since they were Unorganized. When Hemlo came into existence, the School District was enlarged to encompass the areas from Gravel River (180 km west of Hemlo) to nearly White River. Properties in these areas were not subject to the 1970 Equalization Factor, but market-value assessed. The increases in the subsequent years (as outlined in previous correspondence) on top of our market-value assessment has brought our School Tax Total to \$5,582.70 compared to a

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# Not illiterate, just innumerate

Long ago, when I was just a little guppy in the fishbowl of life, my mother dragged me off to see a Gypsy fortuneteller. Madame Zapotnik, decked out in greasy turban and rumped bathrobe, read my pudgy palm, poked a gnarled forefinger through the dregs in the bottom of my teacup, gazed soulfully into a glass bowling ball on the card table between us, closed her eyes and announced in an accent thicker than Hungarian goulash:

"I see for thees boy...ivy-covaired walls....many scholars...Hee ees professair...ov mat ee mateeks."

It's not often you'll run into a gypsy fortuneteller who's that far off the mark. Closest I ever got to university was when I worked as a sheet metal labourer one summer tearing the duct work out of the old Botany building on the campus of the University of Toronto. (Yes, I'm the one who knocked over that display of tropical monocotyledons -- God, it's good to get that off my

chest!)

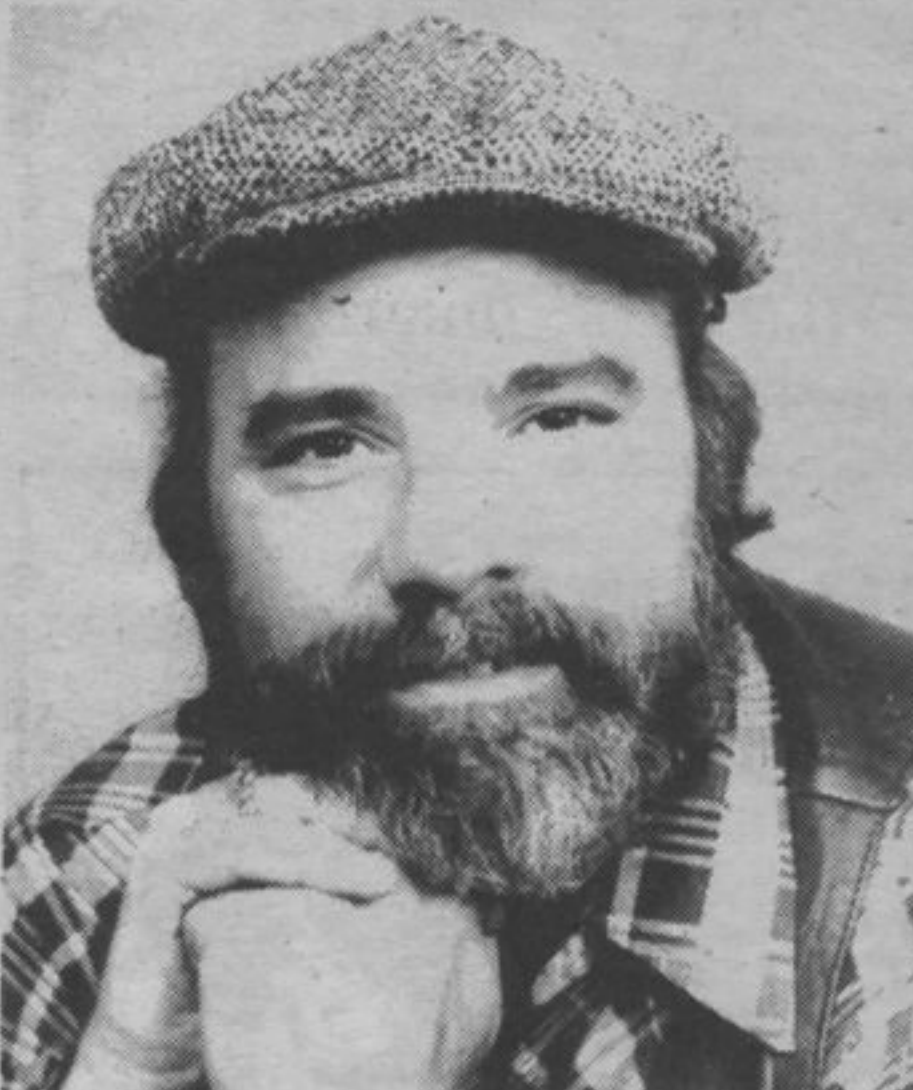
As for a professorship in mathematics -- Hah! I've got a better shot at getting on the Board of Directors of *Ms.* magazine than I have of landing any job that involves the manipulation of numbers.

You know how a lot of folks are illiterate? I am innumerate -- which is to say, congenitally unable to relate to numbers and their meaning, if any.

Well, that's overstating the case. I can add. And subtract. I can even do simple multiplication and division if you don't rush me. But as for the higher realms of mathematical endeavour -- square root, cosines, logarithms and a balanced cheque book -- you'll have to talk to my accountant. Or one of my kids.

Truth is, I've been an arithmetical also-ran 'way back in the primary grades. One day I was sitting at my desk, easily keeping up with the rest of the kids as we followed the Mrs.

Jones sage ("If Mrs. Jones had six apples and she gave two of them to Johnny, how many...") -- when suddenly I felt a painful constriction in my throat. "I feel sick" I told the teacher. I was



Arthur Black

Tonsillitis. When I got back to the classroom six weeks later, Mrs. Jones and her stash of apples had disappeared and my pint-size colleagues were chatting nonchalantly about the

Multiplication Tables.

By the time I figured out that that was not where you went to make babies, the other kids moved on to something equally baffling called decimalization.

That's when I fell behind, and 35 years later, I still haven't caught up.

To tell you the truth it hasn't mattered all that much. So what if I went through life thinking that Calculus was a confidential affair between me and my dentist? Who cares if I taught my kids that Algebra was a painful disease of the joints -- or that for years I believed Trigonometry was a cult philosophy devoted to the worship of Roy Roger's Horse? Oh, sure...there were some embarrassing moments at the K-Mart checkout counter and the teller's wicket, but on the whole, I didn't miss mathematics and mathematics didn't miss me.

But then I discovered I had made one fatal, you will pardon the irony, miscalculation.

I had always believed that

mathematics, like Latin and Etruscan Pottery Appreciation, was a dead issue. That it had been buried with Einstein, Euclid, Pythagoras, Archimedes and all those other enumerating busybodies.

Not so. Mathematics *lives*. One of its latest offspring is Fractal Geometry -- a theory that you can assign a numerical value to anything irregular -- cloud formations, the Dow Jones average, the spread of AIDS -- and then measure and simulate that irregular object by computer. They claim Fractal Geometry can be used "to find hidden order in the apparent chaos of nature."

Well, we've been down that road before. I used to know someone who tried to find hidden order in the apparent chaos of nature -- but she didn't use computers and she didn't wear a white lab coat.

She wore a rumped bathrobe. Her name was Madame Zapotnik.