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Planetary survival

Need leaders, not followers

The 1990's is being called the decade for planetary survival. Government, business and industry are aware that the environment is a primary issue with the public and responding to that concern.

However, they are having trouble realizing that environmental problems from the past will be with us for some time and will have to be paid for.

In October a pond of toxic mine tailings, from a gold mine abandoned in 1953-54 by Matachewan Consolidated Mines Ltd., overflowed during a heavy rainfall and contaminated Elk Lake's drinking water.

The Ministry of the Environment has since cleaned the spill.

Who will pay the bill for the clean-up and who will repair the tailings pond?

The president of Matachewan Consolidated Mines has said the spill wasn't the mine's fault. He doesn't believe the mine should be liable for rain. If the company were to repair the pond it would be forced into bankruptcy, he said. What really upset him was the loss of the tailings and the probable 2,000 - 5,000 ounces of gold in them.

Mining companies, and their stockholders, have reaped the majority of the benefits from their operations over the years and ultimately they have to be responsible for the waste their profits created.

The mining industry has suggested a way to avoid this type of problem in the future. It is proposing each mine be allowed to set up tax-free environmental clean-up funds.

Similar to Registered Retirement Savings Plans, these tax-free funds, industry officials say, would give mining companies an incentive to save money to return sites to an environmentally sound condition, "reclaiming" in industry terms.

The idea has merit for the future but does not address environmental problems of the past which will continue to show up again and again.

As well, the mining industry, and others, should not require incentives from governments to be responsible corporate citizens. They should be leaders in implementing solutions to environmental problems, using their resources to avoid, as much as possible, the need for clean-up in the first place.

Governments, business and industry must get behind planetary survival, not only because the public think it's important to their future, but because it's important to the future of government, business and industry.

Robert A. Cotton

Letters

Community sectors inter-dependent

Dear Editor:

The following is a short summary of the "Forum on the Socio-Economic Health of Northwestern Ontario" which I attended at Quetico Centre, Nov. 7-9, 1990. The information might be interesting to your readers.

I attended this forum as a member of the Community Futures Board and as a worker in the adult literacy field. My special concern is assessing the skills level of the workforce and if necessary, establishing programs to address the training needs of workers.

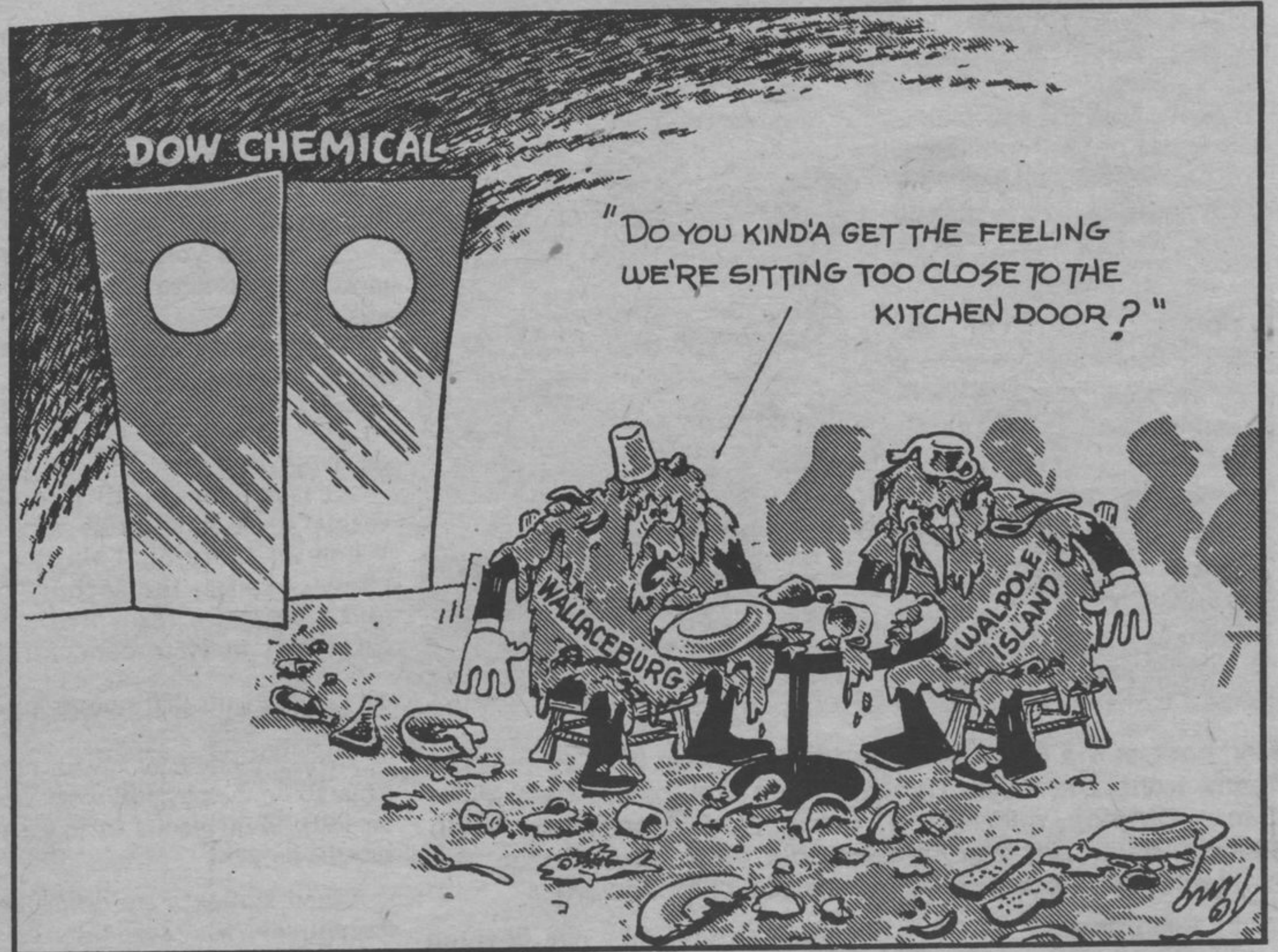
This was the first annual forum on the socio-economic health of Northwestern Ontario.

Quetico Centre organized the forum and donated their services in the belief that this meeting of community leaders was essential at this time in the development of North-western Ontario. Many key sectors were represented: education, municipal government, provincial government, the native community and business.

Most of the work of the conference was done in small groups. After a small group discussion of an issue, a presentation on the work of the group was made to everyone.

The first session concentrated on the effects of global changes of Northwestern Ontario.

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Adopt your own ditch

I think it's the styrofoam pop cooler that depresses me most. It's there every morning when I take my dog for a walk, poking the shards of its grey white bulk out of the ditch that runs beside the road I take. If it wasn't for the pop cooler, the scene would be worthy of a Robert Bateman landscape -- a grove of gnarled cedars fanning out left and right, the black and ancient Grand River snaking through the background, a squadron of Canada Geese in a low-level flypast looking for a likely corn field. I don't know how long the busted-up styrofoam cooler has been lodged in the ditch -- maybe years. Long enough to endure more than a few rains and snows without budging. Long enough to snag dozens of wrappers and plastic bags and other toss-offs of twentieth century flotsam and jetsam that people throw over their shoulders or out their car windows without a second thought.

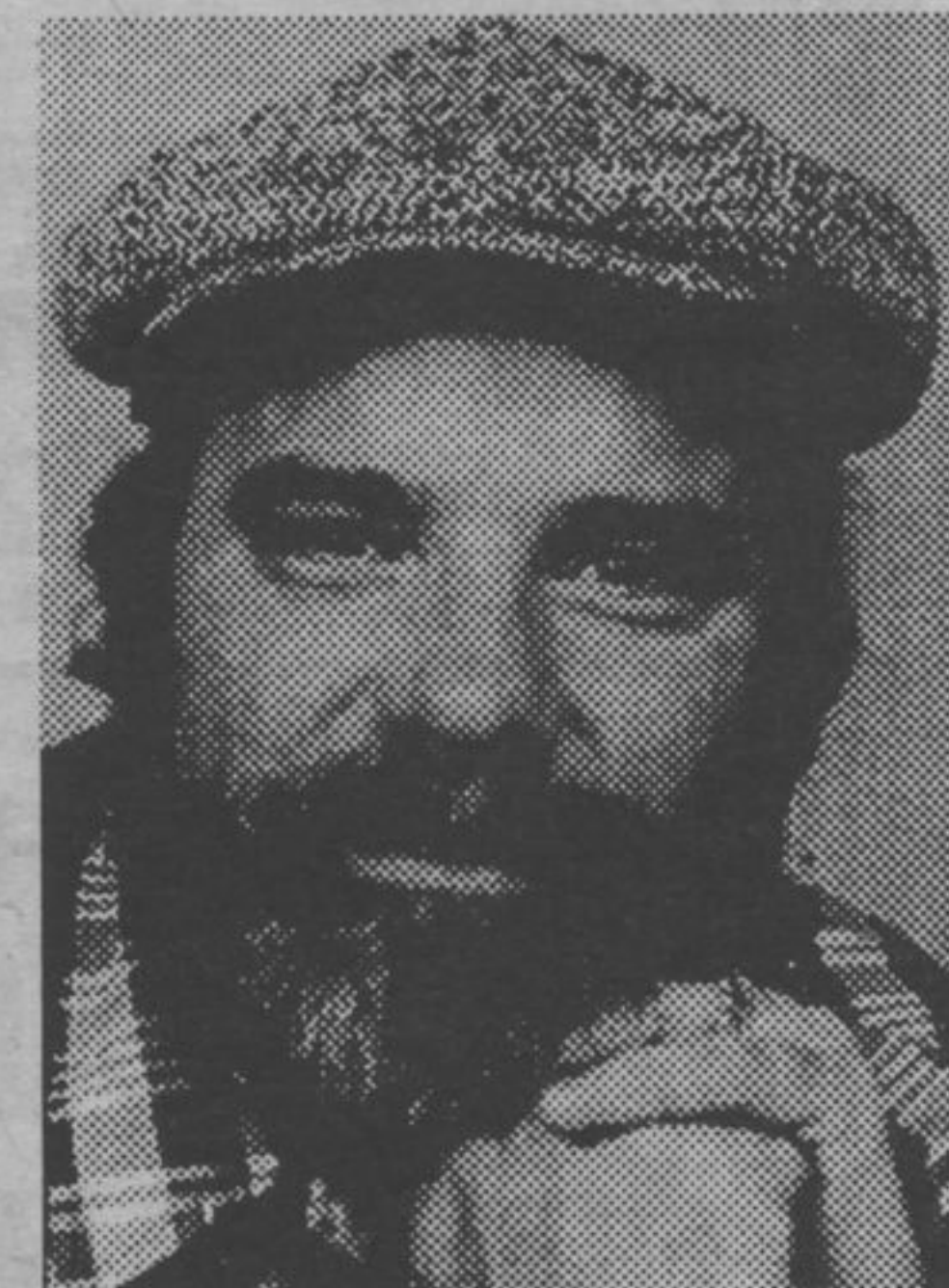
Every time I walk past the remains of that cooler I think to myself, what manner of brain-dead bozo would drive down this back road, see these trees, that river, those Canadas and say to him or herself "Wow! What a perfect place to get rid of that old styrofoam pop cooler!"

Somebody did. And not just a pop cooler either. I don't have to squint to see the other crap we passerby have consigned to the ditch -- beer bottles, pop cans, cigarette wrappers, Big Mac containers, Dunkin' Donuts bags.

As a species, we really are a pack of slobs

Well, not all of us. There are people like Gordon Carle.

Mister Carle is a commercial fisherman living on the outskirts of La Ronge in northern Saskatchewan. Driving in to town one day, looking out his side window at several years of accumulated trash in the ditch, Mister Carle cursed to himself



Arthur Black

and muttered something along the lines of "What a sight! Somebody should do something about that mess."

Which is when it dawned on Mister Carle that he was driving alone, hence he was talking to himself.

If "somebody" was going to do something about that mess, it might as well be him.

But even in a relatively unspoiled spot like La Ronge, the ditches are too much for one man to handle. Carle decided to go for help. In his own frontier way. He didn't ask for government money. He didn't bug the Rotarians or Kiwanis or the Lions. He just approached all the people he know in the

"Whaddyasay we adopt a ditch?"

The La Ronge Adopt-A-Ditch program was born. "We asked local people to volunteer to clean up just one kilometre of ditch, both sides," says Carle, "and we asked them to make a commitment to do it four times over the summer."

The idea took off. A La Ronge radio station supported the plan. Nearby communities jumped on the bandwagon. Mayors, downtown merchants, whole families and members of a nearby native reserve jumped on the bandwagon. By summer's end 300 community volunteers had plucked the junk from more than 90 kilometres of ditches around La Ronge.

Next spring, Carle and company plan to tackle the junk that has collected for most of this century around the area's lakes and canoe routes -- in addition to keeping the ditches clean.

We don't have a lot of lakes and canoe routes where I live, but we have a ton of dirty ditches. Bet you do too.

Think about it the next time you go for a drive. Check out the number of old mattresses, beer cartons, pop bottles and Pampers you pass in one kilometre. Not too daunting, eh? Nothing a half dozen volunteers with a pickup couldn't handle, in say one Saturday afternoon in spring?

Why not start your own Adopt-A-Ditch program? It's not patented. You willing? I am.

But not this afternoon. This afternoon I have to go out and nick up a styrofoam pop cooler.