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## Can you be socialist and not spend money?

There are interesting parallels between what has happened recently to Northern Development and Mines Minister Shelley Martel and to the NDP government as a whole. Both have fallen victim to twin ailments: a lack of credible policy initiatives and a moral decline common to anyone in power.

Martel's recent off the cuff fabrications about a Sudbury doctor is just the latest incident to take some of the shine off the NDM Minister's previously fresh face. Added to the obvious lack of judgement shown in that controversy is Martel's attempt last summer to influence a judge, which also almost cost her ministerial standing. By any objective standard, and most certainly by the standards espoused by the NDP while in opposition, Martel should no longer be in cabinet.

As a party that has long claimed the ethical high ground for itself, the NDP has damaged itself by keeping her around. In showing more loyalty to Shelley Martel than to his principles, Bob Rae suddenly looks a lot more like every other politician we love to hate. But Martel's — and the NDP's — problems don't end there. There's also the Bearskin Airlines fiasco to consider.

The incident, which has been largely ignored by the Northeastern Ontario media, had Martel barrelling ahead with plans to provide Kenora with Dash 8 service to Thunder Bay. Had the scheme gone ahead, Bearskin would have laid off about 22 employees — a move that would have swelled the already bulging ranks of unemployed workers in this province.

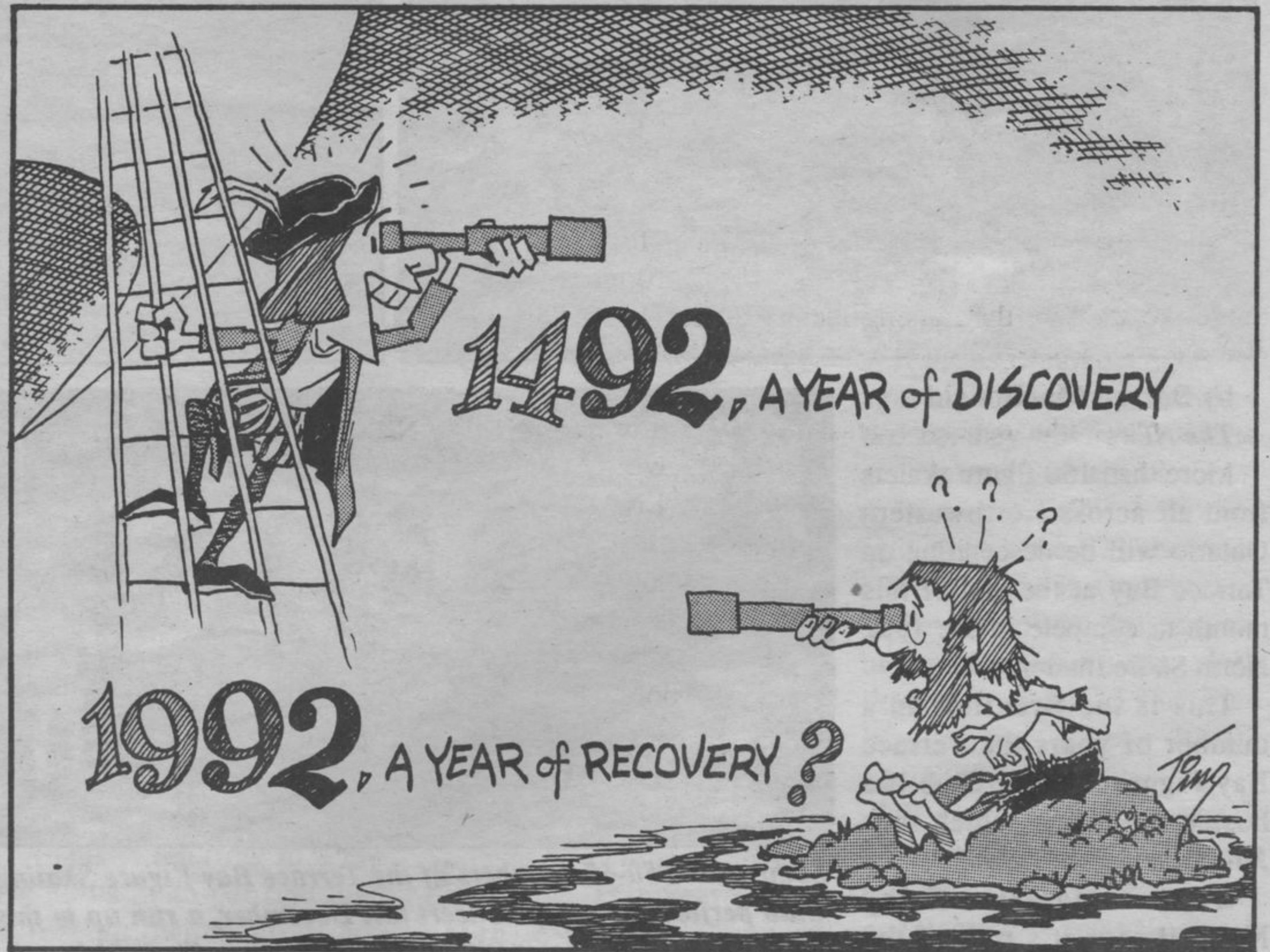
Worse still, by Martel's own acknowledgement the route would have been a chronic money loser — and this at a time when the government is desperately looking for ways to limit its already record deficit. So the move would have had the effect of putting more people on the public payroll, putting more people on the unemployment and welfare rolls, and increasing the deficit. What kind of judgement does that show?

Dash 8 service for Kenora would have been nice, and come to think of it, Dash 8 service into Terrace Bay and Schreiber would be nice as well. But that's not the point. It may be socialist to replace private operations with inefficient public ones, but like everyone else, the NDP must face a reality every new government faces: many of their election promises are too politically and economically expensive.

So into the trash goes public auto insurance, OHIP-billing caps, and who knows what next. In fact, don't be surprised if we still have the same highway next year, and the year after that too.

Politicians live and die by the quality of their judgements. Everyday they make decisions and must live with the consequences. Well, all politicians except Shelley Martel, it seems.

And how does a government whose basic policy is to spend a lot and tax a lot govern when people have been taxed to death and really are concerned about deficits? Fact is, not very well. If you can't throw money at problems, then you're not really a socialist. In the vacuum of credible policy initiatives, the NDP had up until now relied on a moral authority grounded in the fact that they had never tainted themselves by actually governing. Well, they are now tainted.



## Stone walls live on

*Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That sends the frozen ground-swell under it.*

Robert Frost

I do a lot of country walking, and one of the great pleasures of my rambles comes when I stumble across a stone wall, those architectural artifacts of settlers long dead. They wind along the crests of hills and undulate through groves of poplar and cedar like lumpy gothic serpents, separating ancient, overgrown pastures from the remnants of once-fruitful apple orchards. More often than not, the farmhouses that sheltered the people who built the walls have fallen to ruin — disappeared even — swallowed up by brush and bramble and burdock.

But the walls live on, though they're often tumbledown and gap-toothed, reduced to playing host to lichens and rodents and skinny, stubborn maple and walnut saplings. Robert Frost was right — something there is that doesn't love a wall — and that something is an implacable landlady by the name of Mother Nature.

Hardly anyone builds stone walls in my part of the country anymore. Post and wire, steel mesh and of course the electrified barbed wire fence are all much easier and more cost-effective.

And utterly graceless.

The old stone walls are a marvel to behold. There's not a goblet of mortar or a lick of cement to hold them together. No diploma-dripping engineer had a hand in their construction — and yet, there they are, still standing, still, more or less doing their job: separating This from That — forty, fifty, even a hundred years later.

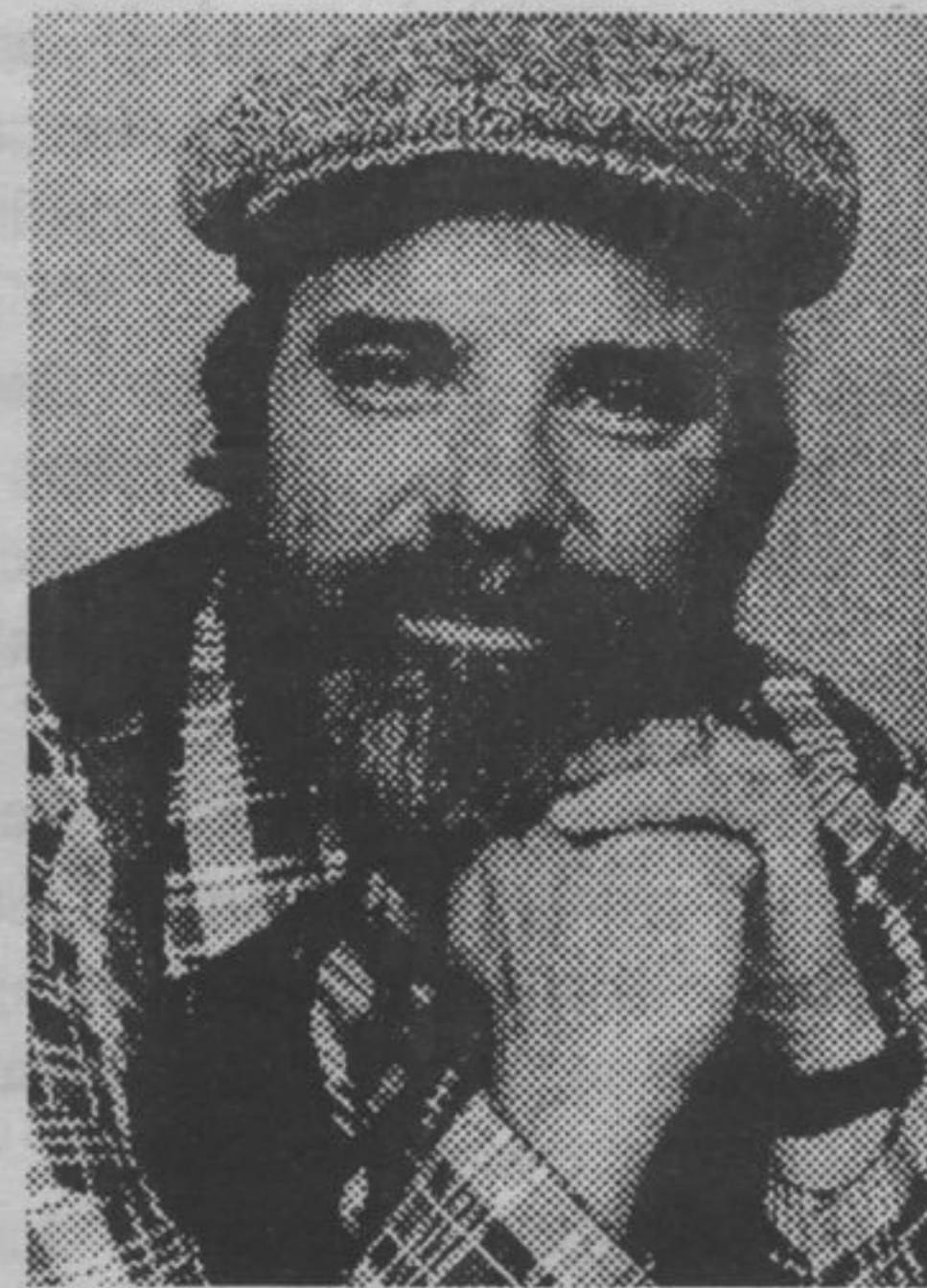
Or in some cases, thousands of years later. I'm told that there are still stone walls running across the fields of Cornwall in England that were built by the rough, red hands of Ancient Britons, back in the time of the Caesars.

The stone walls on this side of the Atlantic are somewhat younger, but no less magnificent.

Extensive, too. I have no idea how many miles

of stone walls you could find if you tape-measured the rocky remnants from Joe Batt's Arm to overgrown homesteads on Vancouver Island, but I do know there's a U.S. Agriculture Department census from 1871 that indicates there were some 252,000 miles of stone wall in New York and New England alone. And that was 120 years ago.

You still don't have to walk too far in most of rural settled Canada before you stub your hiking boot on the leftovers of somebody's back wrenching labour, generations past.



Arthur Black

Do I over-romanticize these granite and limestone mementos of pioneer days? Perhaps. There's a geologist at the university of Connecticut who says those old stone walls are not all that noble. According to Robert Thorson they aren't even fences, primarily. What they are, says the professor, is pioneer garbage dumps. "Linear landfills" to use his phrase.

Professor Thorson says those old stone walls merely represent the first man-made upheaval of the environment. The opening salvo in a massive deforestation offensive.

Well, I suppose farmers clearing land in order to grow crops and raise cattle could be viewed as environmental assaulters.

But you have to wonder whether Professor Thorson ever speculates about where his bread and potatoes come from.

For my part, I believe I will continue to walk in the woods and look for those old hand-made, man-made walls. And when I find one I plan to park my bum on it and run my hands across it, and think a few kind thoughts about the men and women who paid in sweat and aching muscles to put it there.

They may be ghosts now, but they're still my neighbours.

And as Robert Frost observed: good fences make good neighbours.

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