

OPINION

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Regional blunder passed on to taxpayers

To present a balanced budget, York Regional council would have had to cut \$6 million from its operating budget. Instead, it approved a 4.9 per cent increase for 1993. We paid on average \$360 to the region in 1992 and owe \$416.74 in 1993.

Costs of the palatial new regional headquarters (which a majority of taxpayers will never see) rose from \$20 million in 1986 to the present \$63.5 million. The budget alone rose to \$47 million and the remaining \$16 odd million is for completing the headquarters - \$1.4 million is for furnishings and equipment, \$3.4 million for architect's fees, \$1.4 million for legal claim costs which could be



Viewpoint

Jo Ann Stevenson

redeemed should fired architect Douglas Cardinal reimburse the builder.

Hindsight is a skilled economist and granted, back in the affluent '80s when this project was conceived, few would have predicted the recessionary climate of the '90s. Wise governments should be socking away savings during boom times so they can spend when labor and

construction costs are lower. This didn't happen. Fine. Regional government is not alone in making this error in judgement.

But the project got way out of hand. Who is accountable for the runaway costs, for the continued dedication to the original lavish plan? The curved structure with a mirrored exterior is an affront to the unwilling taxpayer. Were we, the people who are being asked to pay for this anachronism, asked whether we backed the project?

York Region presently rents or leases about 11 buildings. The new headquarters will pull the tardy 911 system, the police and regional staff under one

roof. Did any of the politicians consider renting or purchasing some of the readily available commercial space in the south of York Region?

If they had to construct a headquarters building why aren't there significant cost savings for locating it in Newmarket where land is cheaper rather than where the majority of taxpayers live?

We taxpayers deserved a zero per cent increase.

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Only in Britain eh? Thank Heavens



Basic Black

Arthur Black

You read a lot of sad stuff in the newspapers these days but one of the saddest things I've read of late was a statistic. It came from a survey published in a London newspaper last month. Gallup pollsters asked 1,030 adult Britons a simple question: "Would you like to settle in another country if you were free to do so?"

Forty-nine per cent of the respondents said yes, if they could, they'd leave.

Forty-nine per cent! How is it possible that virtually half the native inhabitants of Great Britain would emigrate if they could?

This is the "green and pleasant land"! This is the country that colored two-thirds of the world Imperial Pink on my old Grade Nine Geography Rand McNally map! The Empire On Which the Sun Never Set. The Entity that Ruled the Waves. The cultural fountainhead that gave the world Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Blake, the Beatles...

The birthplace of Burns and Yeats, Churchill and Cecil Rhodes, whose advice to young Britons was "always remember that you are an Englishman, and have consequently won first prize in the lottery of life."

How can something as magnificent as all that be - to cop a phrase from the Bard - "shrunk to this little measure?"

Well, the recession helped. Here in Canada, we felt the economic downturn pretty bad, but the Brits really got clobbered. At last count, the U.K. had more than three million unemployed on its rolls. British businesses and factories are still sloughing off employees by the thousands as they struggle to stay afloat in a sea of red ink.

Margaret Thatcher helped to scupper the operation too. She swept to power like a metaphorical new broom, promising to set the British economy to rights with some good old-fashioned housecleaning. Survivors say that in fact she gutted the joint, replacing the old British ethic of Fair Play with a rah rah chant of "Me First!". She privatized everything in sight and left Northern Ireland, Scotland and the north of England economic wastelands. Europe? She

cocked a snook at Europe, preferring to cash her chips at the Bank of America through her good pal Ronnie Reagan.

Sound familiar? The 12 years under Margaret Thatcher were a bit like a hit from a crack pipe - heady and exciting at first, but ultimately a massive downer, leaving the victim not much more than a basket case.

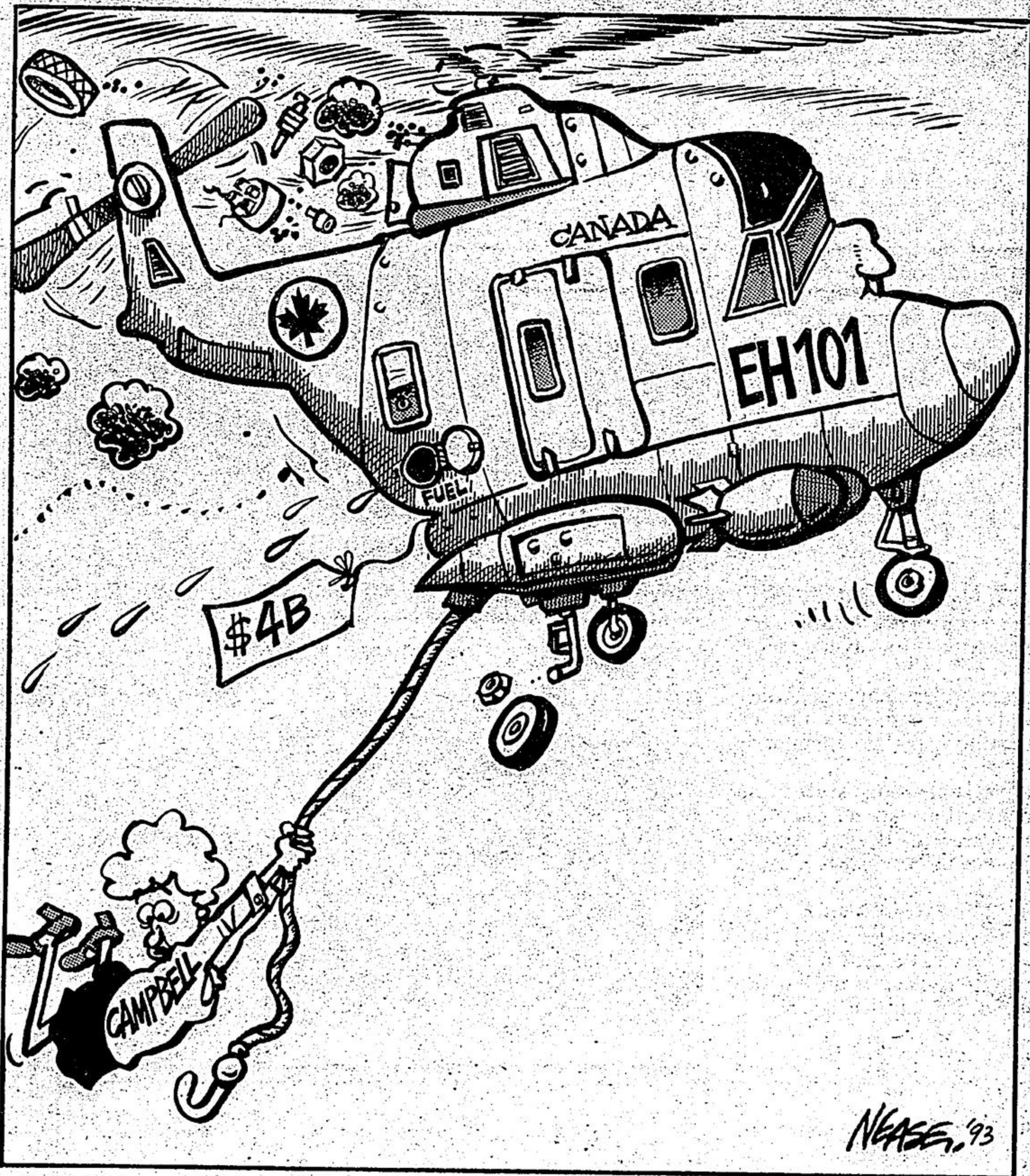
It didn't help that the undeniably vibrant Margaret Thatcher was replaced by the undeniably disraglike John Major. A nice man, perhaps even competent, but not a man to inspire a confidence-stricken nation to follow him "over the top." John Major is rather, as the London Times described him "a well-intentioned chap - the sort you would like to see marry your problem daughter."

And then there were the Royal Troubles. One thing that has long distinguished Great Britain from the rest of the world is its veneration of royalty. Regrettably, the British Royals chose this moment in history to become publicly unglued.

First there was Fergie, plastered all over the front pages of the tabloids, having her toes sucked by her Texan financial advisor. Then Chuck and Di called it quits, and the selfsame tabs got hold of their private cellular phone calls and...

Enough. Small wonder, really, that 49 per cent of polled Britons say they'd "up stakes" and move off the Sceptred Isle in a flash. Small wonder that more than 75 per cent of those interviewed said they expected things in the U.K. to get worse before they got better.

We have our share of problems here in Canada, but I doubt very much that anything like 50 per cent of us would emigrate. To paraphrase the old tea commercial: "Only in Britain, you say? Thank heaven."



ADAM

by Brian Basset

