

# Living beyond our means

The same Prime Minister who once told fishermen on the Atlantic Coast to do something else if they couldn't make a living recently told unemployed university graduates to go to another country if they couldn't find work in Canada. "If it's just a job you want," he said, "my heart does not bleed for you in Toronto," as if hoping to find work were something extraordinary. The Prime Minister was being surprisingly frank, for such comments give the impression that he just doesn't care about the almost one million Canadians who are officially unemployed, not to mention all those who are not counted in the statistics.

Trudeau's remarks are quite consistent with the government's general view of Canada's problems. According to this view, if the economy is not functioning properly, it is you and I — average Canadians — who are to blame. During the parliamentary debate on unemployment, and later during an address in Toronto, the Prime Minister told Canadians that they are "living beyond their means". As a whole they are living "too high off the hog". They must make sacrifices.

Few people in the Atlantic region will find this explanation palatable. If our regional economy is suffering, it is not because most of us have too good a life. Trudeau did not distinguish between the "means" of different classes of Canadians, between the disposable income of the rich and that of the rest of us. We are supposed to believe that the unemployed and the low and middle-income earners are just as guilty of consuming more than they need as are the millionaires like Trudeau. It is clear that the Prime Minister and his government assume that the grossly inequitable distribution of wealth in this country — where the richest 20% of the population receive over 42% of the national income, while the poorest 20% receive less than 4% — is simply to be taken for granted. The philosophy of the federal government seems to be something like this: if you are unemployed, too bad; if your income is low or moderate, learn to live with less.

This attitude translates itself into legislation like the new bill cutting back unemployment insurance benefits. It also appears in Finance Minister Donald Macdonald's new federal budget. The main features of the budget are a whole series of tax credits for the domestic and foreign owners of companies and for top level executives, which, it is claimed, should stimulate the economy. Spending on job creation programmes is kept to a bare minimum, and one of the principal aims of the budget is (in the words of the *Globe and Mail*) to "hold down labour costs", that is, to maintain or reduce the average person's share of the nation's wealth.

There is, ironically, a sense in which Trudeau is quite right when he says we are living beyond our means. An economy which is organized around the principle of maximizing profits necessarily generates various irrational forms of waste, because it depends on a continual turnover of products. If, for example, a car lasted thirty years instead of five years, General Motors would be broke and its employees without jobs. The result of this is such things as planned obsolescence, excessive advertising and packaging, creation of artificial needs, and other forms of institutionalized waste. As a society we are in fact using more natural resources than we can afford. But it is not because the average person, and certainly not because the average Atlantic Canadian, is living in an exorbitant manner. It is because all the basic economic decisions are made by a proportionately small group of wealthy and powerful individuals who are working for their own interests and not those of the whole society.

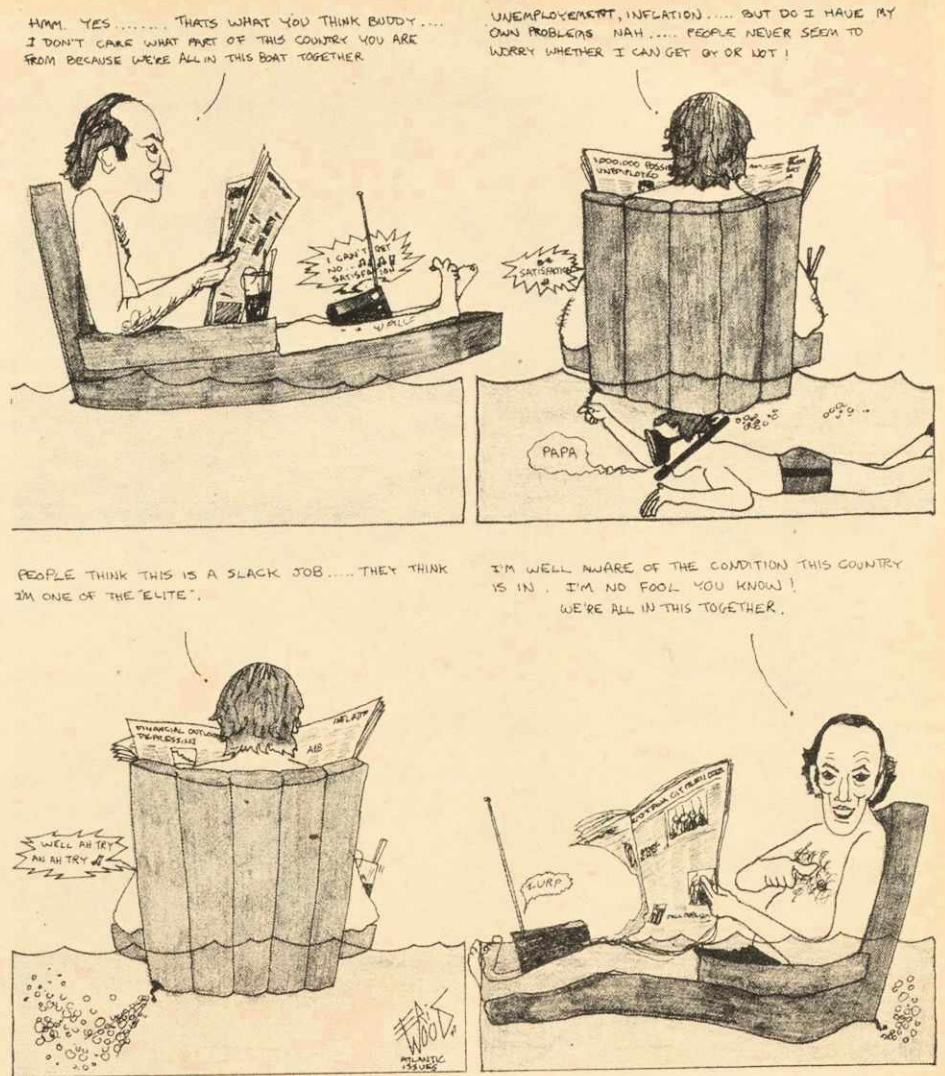
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<b>Mike Bradfield</b>	<b>Susan Perly</b>	<b>Donna Treen</b>
<b>Mike Donovan</b>	<b>Rick Williams</b>	<b>Eric Wood</b>



## Letters

Dear Kindred Spirits:

I picked up a copy of your new sheet...I am encouraged to be able to read the stuff of Ralph Surette and my good friend Don Cameron and to know that the good and truer word is being spread, although I suspect too much among the committed.

The New Brunswick view is not as prominent as I would like, and I realize people like me are mainly responsible, since we run off to the flesh pots of wicked Montreal or hog-town and seemingly forsake our homeland...All of which is leading to my offer to turn out some NB material to bolster the stuff that tells it like it is in your first issue.

Richard Wilbur  
Concordia University

To the Editors:

Congratulations! I had almost despaired of seeing a publication out of the Maritimes dealing with such critical issues...

Keep up the good work.

Beatrice R. Buszek,  
Wolfville

To the Editors:

Recently I had the opportunity to read one of your organizations newsletters and, I must admit, was very excited by the approach taken. It expressed a deep commitment to human rights, freedom and the importance of political analysis, to all of which I am committed...

Edwin J. Franette  
Moncton

To the Editors:

...I would like to compliment **Oxfam** for its sponsorship of *Atlantic Issues*. I enclose a \$10 donation for the support of this newsletter..

Richard Keshen  
North Sydney

To the Editors:

...I have read volume No.1 and have found it very interesting, as well as being very useful as a learning aid with the students in our Junior High School..

Vic Gouthro  
Bras d'Or, Cape Breton

To the Editors:

...We think "Atlantic Issues" is an excellent publication and wish its producers every success...

Ray and Elizabeth Bradbury  
Hampton, New Brunswick

To the Editors:

A fantastic paper! Keep up the good work...

Robert Matthews  
Halifax

To the Editors:

I was favourably impressed with the first issue and believe this publication can be valuable in presenting the case for changing the erroneous government policy of embarking on huge and expensive projects that in the past few years have proved disastrous in all four Atlantic Provinces.

Your next editorial step probably should be to give some practical suggestions and examples of types of small industry that can flourish here. A listing of present federal and provincial government aids for small industry and cooperatives might be included...

Success to the fishermen and God speed the plough!

Ralph S. Morton  
Halifax

P.S. Congratulations on the excellent way you have financed the project.

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