

# What is Davis really like?

by Hartley Coles  
Recently Toronto Life ran a caricature on the front page showing Ontario's Progressive Conservative premier reeling on ring ropes, entitled Portrait of an Embattled Premier.

Inside the sympathetic article touched on the problems of the province's premier, suggesting Mr. Davis was a pure man who somehow got into a dirty bucket. Canadian Magazine is also trying to figure Mr. Davis out. They've had a reporter-photographer team following Mr. Davis recently trying to pigeon-hole the man who's an enigma to many and yet received one of the largest majorities ever accorded a government in the province. We doubt they'll ever really record on paper what Bill Davis is really like because they are looking for something very complex in a man who may be uncomplicated and sincere.



BILL DAVIS

Who knows? Well, the premier or his aides decided it was time some of the weekly editors and publishers of the province had an opportunity to talk informally with Mr. Davis and point out to him just where he has gone wrong. The let-a-lete with eight editors and publishers took place in a Royal Connaught hotel room in Hamilton Friday night in between some of the frequent appearances the premier is making lately, suggesting an election is soon in the offing. I was one of those who attended the discussion which started with Mr. Davis arriving slightly late and shaking hands and introducing himself to each person individually. It was a warm hand shake, unlike a previous one the premier bestowed in the frenzy of a convention where this scribbler thought he was much like the eye in a hurricane—calm and unharmed.

He lit up a cigar and invited everyone to sit around a table with him and discuss the problems peculiar to their own area.

It didn't take long for the editors to speak up. "Mr. Davis," said the publisher of the German-Canadian weekly Der Zeitung, "you looked and acted like a strong leader when you were first elected but that image has disappeared. What's happened?" He suggested the premier should pay less attention to the professional opinion makers who he felt had diminished his profile and make more decisions of his own.

"We are longing for strong leadership," the publisher of Zeitung said with conviction.

A lady editor in the group agreed. Mr. Davis noted all the inadequacies in the Government were eventually laid at his doorstep.

"I'm where the buck stops," he acknowledged.

Phil Deachman of the Grimsky Independent said it was his feeling that lifetime Conservatives haven't been happy with the Government's performance but perhaps former Premier John Robarts was a hard act to follow and Mr. Davis was not cut from the same kind of cloth.

Mr. Davis relit his cigar, took a deep breath, and noted the political climate was much different from the times in which Robarts was premier of all the people and comparisons were hardly apt.

The German-Canadian publisher persisted in insisting the Government's decisions were too little and too late with regard to the land speculation tax which was designed to take the heat out of escalating housing prices. Mr. Davis said he might have a point but felt there were

many pressures there which maybe the publisher had not considered. He acknowledged that blocks of houses had been bought by speculators in new subdivisions and then sold a few weeks later at profits of from \$2,000 to \$3,000 per unit but then launched into a strong defense of the government's land speculation tax and the problem of inadequate housing starts.

"Our greatest trouble is with the municipalities. They are refusing to cooperate with Government schemes to relieve the housing shortage," the premier replied. He said the government has offered reasonable grants, considered all the alternatives including septic tank subdivisions (which experience showed paid a toll later) and came to the conclusion the system of grants and incentives was the only feasible way to get things going.

"The market was overheated," he admitted. Did he think the \$1500 grant offered to first time home buyers would improve the market or as NDP leader David Lewis charged just drive house prices up higher?

Evidence already in at Queen's Park suggests that the grant is going to improve the market but it would be a few months before the results showed, he claimed.

Didn't the decision on the Parkway Belt and the Niagara Escarpment slow down growth and shouldn't that be laid at the feet of the Government?

"Growth," the premier mused, relighting the stub of his cigar, "No one has ever been able to calculate the price of growth." He wondered aloud if growth for growth's sake was only fooling ourselves.

"We are trying to look ahead," he said, defending the government's decision. We don't want the problems Buffalo, Detroit, Chicago and other American cities have encountered with their lack of municipal organization. He insisted that if the government hadn't taken the strong position of slowing down the market in some areas, the piper would have to be paid later.

"But it is hard to show the tangible

benefits," he admitted.

He suggested the eight newsmen around the table should look at Metro Toronto, the granddaddy of all regional governments as a model for the new form of government. Regional government, he said, practiced in Ontario was admired in other countries. In fact, a recent visit to Italy was to be returned by officials from Milan coming to study our form of regional government.

"We should have had regional government 10 years ago," he insisted, pointing to Brampton as an example; a town of 20,000 20 years ago and now hitting the 100,000 mark. "It gives us a far better chance to preserve some quality in development."

He got arguments. But aren't you taking the decision making power away from the grass roots with regional government? Wasn't it instituted to give some of the powers back to the municipalities that formerly had been the business of Queen's Park?

Mr. Davis evaded that question. He also acknowledged there now was a moratorium on regional governments in Ontario not because it wasn't working but because the Government felt the "hot spot growth areas" of the province had been covered. "There are very few areas of the province left with growth pressures that great."

Two tier or one tier? that was the question. Mr. Davis acknowledged Metro Toronto operated well on two tier.

Well then, why was Allan Masson, regional chairman of Halton, charging around the region preaching one tier government for Halton, I asked.

There was no Government blessing for Mr. Masson's thoughts on the subject, Mr. Davis said. They are entirely his own.

"Regional government, he prophesied, would soon work as well as the unified school boards he introduced when Minister of Education.

Wasn't the introduction of the county school boards a trigger that unleashed the permissiveness that now exists in Ontario schools?

"No way," said the premier. The school system is the reflection of our own society. We can't lay the blame on the school system for that.

He suggested students who see as many as 18,000 killings on TV, for instance, are building a tolerance of attitudes we would never have accepted 20 years ago. He said this not only reflected in the children but in the adults as well who developed tolerance

for ideas thought abhorrent a few years ago.

But the German Canadian newsmen wasn't soothed. He said the government should be leading the way with more discipline. In his opinion the Conservatives were really liberals in some of their decisions. He defined his thoughts of a liberal as someone who stands for permissiveness.

Mr. Davis lit the stub of his cigar again and spouted figures which to his satisfaction anyway proved the schools were doing a better job today. Consider, he said, the 20 per cent retention factor of 20 years ago and the 80 per cent retention factor today for students.

"This administration is as conservative as it can get," he replied to the German-Canadian publisher who said he felt Canadians were looking for more discipline and order in their society.

At this point in the discussion Mr. Davis's aides became nervously aware the premier was soon due at a speaking engagement in Dundas. They eased him away with handshakes all around the room.

Somehow Mr. Davis missed me. The newsmen were left with a full bar and sandwiches to eat instead of questions they had no time to ask.

Nevertheless, the premier took the time to talk to the weeklies, purposely leaving the dailies out of the picture so local concerns could be discussed. Obviously he had been well briefed on local problems before he appeared. Newsmen there were glad of the opportunity to speak to the premier without the usual commotion and turmoil surrounding a public figure.

There was really no time to discuss such important issues such as the oil price hike and inflationary pressures which are everyday meat for the daily press but Mr. Davis said the weeklies were doing an excellent job of conveying the nitty-gritty local issues to the people.

Butting up, eh? And what is Bill Davis really like, then? asked a friend after the meeting.

He's like Bill Davis, I replied non-committally. Remember there's an election coming up and Mr. Davis is getting to be a gaffly about the province explaining his Government's position.

If there wasn't an election in the offing would you have received an invitation to speak with him?

Not likely. But remember neither David Lewis or Bob Nixon has afforded us a similar opportunity.

## Study could cost \$235,000

Halton Region's Planning Committee is considering a transportation study that will outline the direction for transportation within the region over the next 20 years.

Planner Ross Shepherd told the committee the region will be "investing millions and it has to know where the money will be spent the best."

The study, if it is conducted, will become part of the official plan for the region.

Several councillors were critical of spending up to \$235,000 on a study. Councillor Jim Watson asked, "would the region fall apart if we

didn't do this study? I see taxes soaring out of range. People won't be able to go out on the roads."

Planner Dick Meskal said, "there's a lot of things we can do without. The earth turns on an axis and so does development. We have to keep it on a path and these are the tools we need."

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### Not enough for 35% jump

Halton Regional Treasurer Don Farmer has expressed concern about a 35 per cent increase in Halton Children's Aid Society's budget for 1975.

Mr. Farmer told the meeting there just wouldn't be enough dollars across the province to withstand 35 per cent increases at each society.

He told the committee that a meeting involving himself, Chief Administrative Officer Ernie Reid and CAS Director Gordon Askwith had been planned to persuade the budget estimate.

A 35 per cent increase was out of line and should be cut unless the CAS could offer substantial proof for the need.

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Committee members Carl Erikson and Pat McKenzie both indicated the estimate of

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## Rec. Dept. moves

The Halton Hills recreation department will move into offices in the new arena in Georgetown with the blessing of the administration committee, but still must obtain the blessing of Halton Hills council.

informed of the proposed move. Recreation Director Doug Collison explained the offices were designated in the plans so he assumed council knew.

Pat Sheehan claimed the move would be more economical for the town.

Councillor Roy Booth emphasized he had never questioned the need to get the recreation offices out of the cramped space at Cedarvale, but simply the administration committee had never been

Booth said the plans said "director's office", which at the time they interpreted as the arena manager and perhaps arena staff. Facility Superintendent

The Halton Board of Education  
**NOTICE TO PARENTS KINDERGARTEN REGISTRATION**  
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Kindergarten registration for September 1975 in North Halton Public Schools will take place in the school which serves the attendance area in which the child resides on Friday, April 25th between the hours of 9 a.m. and 12:00 noon; 1:15 p.m. and 4:30 p.m.

Public School supporters may register their children who will have attained the age of 5 years on or before the last day of February, 1976.

Proof of Public School support will be accepted in the form of the 1975 tax bill or 1974 assessment notice, or a declaration from the Municipal Clerk's office. A birth certificate or baptismal certificate will be acceptable as proof of age.

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