



Bill Johnson rejects Mr. McKeough's statements

Bill Johnson

To: Hon. Darcy McKeough, Minister of Treasury, Economics and Intergovernmental Affairs.

Dear Mr. McKeough,

Thank you for your letter of Jan. 13, 1976. Let it be quite clear my letter to you, (of Nov. 30th, 1975) did not challenge you to comment on any statement. My letter challenged you to appear at a Nassagaweya Area Ratepayers Association meeting, and publicly defend your statement, and the challenge still stands.

I am sorry to inform you I cannot accept the whole, or any part of your statement to Halton Regional Council, i.e. that rural municipalities, prior to regional government, had paid too little, too long. Your letter to me does offer some explanations, but most of these I would readily contest. It is hard not to get political on this issue, but I can only point out that if your explanation is true, the full blame can only rest on the shoulders of those who have dominated Queen's Park for 30 odd years.

Until the last Provincial election, the Conservatives at Queen's Park have enjoyed sufficient majority to equalize rural urban taxation, or implement any other legislation. As one who has studied provincial politics for some years, I have found that when a government makes radical changes, it is wise to look beyond the public relations statements, and seek the real motives.

In this instance, (equalization of taxes) wouldn't the underlying motive be to woo the support of the urban voter? In the past, the Conservative Party wooed the rural voter. Due to constituency distribution his support at the polls was important, indeed essential. Now, with re-distribution, the rural vote is less significant.

It is interesting to note that in the last provincial election, Halton-Burlington, a newly created, predominantly rural constituency, which had previously been represented by two Cabinet Ministers, was left up for grabs. Neither Cabinet Minister chose to represent this area, both sought safe seats in Burlington and Cayuga. Obviously both felt the winds of change, they had the inside track. Does this not prove my point?

Now to your letter. Your explanation about police services is a classic example of political double-talk. For example, on the one hand you devote a paragraph to police service provided (as a justification of your remarks about our free ride) and on the other hand tell us taxation is not a fee for police service, but let us, for the sake of debate, look at police service.

As you point out, rural police service is a very watered down service, and I contend that many, if not the majority of O.P.P. calls to problems in rural areas, are caused by urbanites, and not necessarily local urbanites, i.e. accident, break / enter, poaching, trespass, etc. etc. For instance, O. P. P. calls or patrols to the accident-prone portion of the 401, west of Milton, could be assessed as rural service for statistical purposes, yet most calls in this area are not caused by the residents of the area. You readily point out that most ruralites work in the urban areas, and enjoy many benefits by living close to a prosperous, progressive, well managed town. (I wish you would name one) however, the rural dweller contributes and contributes heavily. He spends his money there. He helps the economy of such centres and therefore contributes directly to the ability of local merchants to meet their tax bills, expand, and indeed prosper.

To quote an old cliché, it's a two way street. We in the rural areas do not ask the urbanites to dispose of our sewage, provide us with water, we accept watered down police service and fire protection. We pay extra for hydro and telephones, and other hidden costs such as higher fire insurance, wear and tear on our automobiles, occasional road wash-outs etc. etc. We endure these things because we like the rural way of life.

I certainly challenge your claim that country living is clearly a luxury, which is presumably deemed worth the extra expense by those who calculate they can afford it, and that the individual has a choice.

I myself moved to the Township of Nassagaweya in 1955. If I wanted to own my own home I had no other choice. I could have picked any rural municipality, and there are thousands like me. I built as I could afford it, doing all the work myself, purchasing materials from local urban merchants. Until recently it was no luxury. The first six months was without hydro service, I had to collect the necessary signatures before the hydro was installed along this route.

My children went to an open concept (one room) school. The roads led much to be desired. Like the many other thousands like me, because of our labors and what we endured in the past, now we are beginning to sit back in relative comfort, but then along comes the Minister of the Treasury and finds us ripe fruit for picking, and if he has his way, many of us will find on retirement that we cannot afford the taxes on these homes we struggled so hard to build, as many of us are hourly paid workers.

You seem oblivious of the fact, Mr. McKeough, that everyone living in the rural areas did not inherit farm land or is a highly paid city executive, and I should think it worth pointing out, that it was at the insistence of Queen's Park that townships such as Nassagaweya implemented the restrictive zoning by-law, resulting in 2,000 sq. ft. homes on 10 acre lots. This has now been changed slightly, but not significantly.

To some extent this has created a problem which is almost akin to discrimination, and has contributed to the overcrowded cities. A young couple cannot build a small contemporary home, using less building and less energy on a small affordable lot, for who can afford five or ten acres of land these days?

On the subject of hidden benefits, it should not go unnoticed that we in Nassagaweya have a rural taxpayer known as the Mohawk Raceway, which contributes heavily to the municipal and Provincial tax coffers, a true hidden benefit to both the rural and urban population. Sometimes we ruralites complain of traffic problems connected with this, but most of us acknowledge the benefits derived from this facility. The Mohawk Raceway, like other rural taxpayers provides all its own services. It is apparent to me that the taxes derived from this rural taxpayer are more than adequate to pay for the policing and fire protection of Nassagaweya. If you do decide to come to a public meeting, I will endeavour to have the exact figures available to you.

It is true, as you state, that urban people are subject to zoning and subdivision controls. This is necessary in an orderly society. It is for their benefit, whereas the rural restrictions, zoning and controls, are mainly for the benefit of the urban dwellers. Massive tracts of land taken over for hydro transmission lines, expropriation for the urbanites garbage, green belts for their enjoyment, various conservation areas.

We rural people don't begrudge them any of these benefits, provided they are well planned or necessary, however they must be considered as benefits. You also state that no Provincial or municipal authority have been or will be permitted to rob owners of existing lots of the existing use to which their land is put—either in the town or the country. I think if you stood on a public platform and made this statement in North Halton, you would get some arguments. On this same subject I notice you skirt the problem of those who have suffered devaluation of their property by such zoning and restrictions.

Regarding fire protection, as you point out most townships enter into an agreement with urban centres. Surely such deals are mutual deals. No gun is pointed at anyone's head, no arms are twisted, both sides fully agree to the terms, and I expect a little give and take on other issues are taken into consideration, otherwise no deal would be made, and as happens in some instances, a rural municipality would provide its own volunteer service, or would form some kind of a deal with some other rural municipality, involving other shared services.

Is it not a fact that urban people use fire services more than the rural people, and due to rural financial support, small as it may be, can afford better equipment, and subsequently, better service to all people. Incidentally, regionalism caused North Halton increased fire protection costs, just as it causes increased costs in other services.

The rural taxpayers' 'free ride' entails many things, Mr. McKeough, the sword of Damocles looms constantly over our heads. We have bought, or are buying, and pay taxes on our own land, but we don't own it. Apart from provincial and municipal restrictions, a tax hungry municipality can rezone our land or adjacent land for industrial development, even though our land was purchased as, and zoned, residential.

The O.M.B. can rule in our favor, but a Cabinet member can overrule the O.M.B. decision. Of course, there is compensation, but how do you compensate a person who has spent the best years of his life building or improving his property at an age when he is too advanced in years to start anew?

I think many farmers would take you to task on your policy assessing agricultural land as farm land only, if it is sold by one practising farmer to another to be used for farming. I have heard this subject debated at many land use meetings. Most farmers consider their land their investment, and like other investors, feel they should be able to derive adequate compensation on a resale, pointing out that any other business derives tax benefits and certain considera-

tions, but are not restricted when it comes to resale. My own feeling on this subject is although a farm may embrace many acres of land, it is a rare farmer who is able, due to terrain (rocks, swamp, bush) to cultivate his entire farm. I think, therefore, a farmer should have the right to sell such land as he is unable to farm.

As an environmentalist I want to see the preservation of the open countryside. However, I am dismayed to see those authorities commissioned by the Provincial government to protect our environment, turn into private employes with overlapping authority, in many instances putting unnecessary, and sometimes frivolous obstructions in the way of our rural development. Again I invite you to the public platform to hear factual evidence.

To sum up, you have not substantiated to my satisfaction your claims that the introduction of regional government has corrected some inequities which had previously existed. On the contrary, regionalism has created more inequities.

William A. Johnson, President, Nassagaweya Area Ratepayers Association.

P.S.: If you are reluctant to attend a N.A.R.A. meeting, I will arrange a meeting in the Town of Halton Hills or Milton.

Mr. Johnson, NDP candidate in the last provincial election, is a resident of the former township of Nassagaweya, now part of the Town of Milton. He is employed at Dornier Fine Papers in Georgetown as a stationary engineer.

Roses, canvassing for Heart Fund

February is Heart Fund month and Vic Bristow and his 78 volunteers plan to make sure everyone in town knows about it.

Roses have been distributed to various stores in town for purchase by the public. Any price may be paid for these flowers, with \$25. worth bought last year. Mr. Bristow is certain this year's rose contributions will exceed those of last year.

Boxes of flowers have been placed in all four banks, the Brewers Retail, the I.C.B.O., Mrs. C. K. Browne's, Royal Variety, Sonny Joeque's store and the town offices. Last February, boxes only appeared in the banks.

Door knocking The volunteers will cover the town in a door to door canvass for funds. Twelve more people have been added to last year's list of volunteers because of the new families in town. Mr. Bristow explained that they expect to raise \$2200 this month, an increase of \$300 over the same month last year.

The national goal is \$7 million, with almost \$4 million as a goal for Ontario.

The canvassers, the chairman explained, are given the entire month to go to their designated homes. He pointed out that no one is given very many houses. "Twenty at the most", he said.

Mr. Bristow asks them to return to a house only once if someone was not home the first time envelopes are left at the home in which people may enclose their donation and mail it to him. Last year \$100 was brought in this way.

The Heart Fund flag, which hung so proudly from the Bank of Montreal flag pole last February, will be late in finding a home this year, if one is found at all.

Mr. Bristow explained that he had obtained permission from the Legion to hang it at the cenotaph, but discovered there was no rope. Other places, he said, already had flags occupying the poles. He is still looking for a pole near the downtown sector.

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Teacher meeting

Halton Elementary School Teachers Association professional development day activities went ahead Friday minus a number of planned programs which Halton Board of Education decided recently not to be discussed.

Instead of meeting in Burlington to hear speeches by provincial and local teacher's federation officials Friday morning, the teachers stayed at own schools where principals supervised professional development activities. The teachers were originally scheduled to hear speakers discuss 'Our Federation at Work' on Friday morning. In the afternoon teachers participated in five workshops held throughout the region. Two workshops dealing with contract negotiations and one with the pressures facing trustees were cancelled because of board objections.

Holiday

Youngsters enjoyed Professional Development Day—a holiday—on Friday.

Red Cross

The old coal bin in the basement of the Y has been converted into a loan cupboard for the Red Cross.

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