

Hinton leads new trustees stimulates lively discussions

by Gord Murray
Halton Board of Education has been enjoying some of its liveliest and most interesting meetings ever this year and much of the credit belongs to Bert Hinton.

Just eight months after staging a successful return to public life the school trustee for Acton and Esquemas has developed into one of the most vocal and controversial persons to ever sit on the eight year old regional board. Hinton who sat on Acton councils for many years and served a term as warden of Halton County in the early 60s had slipped from public view when he launched his comeback announcing he would try to unseat incumbent veteran board member Tom Watson last fall. While not maintaining as high a public profile, Hinton was still active before jumping back into the political arena, serving as chairman of the board of Sheridan College for a few years.

He ran a vigorous, issue oriented campaign stressing cost of education and a back to basics theme.

It worked very well for Hinton. He swamped his two opponents picking up 2,100 votes compared to 1,320 for Watson and 778 for Doug Pierce of Terra Cotta.

Hinton was one of eight new trustees to join the board in January of this year, a radical change on a public body which had been relatively stable in membership since its inception. He quickly became the leader of the new "rebels", taking on old board members for past policies and pushing many new ideas.

In a recent interview Hinton said he views the infusion of new blood the voters gave the board as significant. He says the 40 per cent change in board membership shows "the public is demanding change and answers."

Hinton notes he had specific objectives in running for the board which he tried to make clear to everyone and his actions of the past eight months are simply aimed at trying to achieve these objectives and not a bid for headlines.

So far Hinton hasn't been able to translate many of his ideas into new board policies but says he isn't disappointed or frustrated since he fully realizes "one person can't change the world. I will continue to try and bring about change regardless of the odds."

He feels his efforts haven't been wasted since his comments have prompted considerable debate around the board table. At the same time his remarks have also raised the ire of colleagues, especially those who have served a few terms, but this doesn't seem to bother him.

"If I can cause a discussion and force the administration to come up with answers about things then I have achieved something," he says.

"If a person sets out to create change he must be patient. An environment for change must be created. I have the patience to wait for the proper climate for change."

"I will feel no frustration as long as I am directing my efforts towards my constituents' needs."

Hinton believes that over the years the board slipped into a posture of simply accepting administration

proposals and policies but since he and other newcomers joined the board this situation has been changing with even veteran trustees probing a little deeper for solutions.

He says he approached the board, fortunately with the realization elementary and secondary education is different than college and while there are similarities between the Halton Board of Education and councils and boards he has served on in the past, he is discovering many new wrinkles to public life in the '70s.

For one thing Hinton observed the Halton Board of Education is "highly procedure conscious and you can hardly open your mouth if you haven't researched the rules of procedure thoroughly."

Hinton says he hasn't decided if the rules of procedure are too restrictive. At times it has appeared this year that the rules of procedure are being applied unfairly to stifle Hinton but he thinks chairman Garry Morton has been fair with him.

"When I do find the rules too limiting I demand a voice."

Hinton detects some changes at the board recently which he views as encouraging.

Early in this term it was evident a schism was developing which saw old trustees generally vote in a block against the newer members.

Over the past few months, however, there has been a shift and trustees are no longer lining up in an old versus new pattern.

Reviewing some of the issues he has raised since joining the board Hinton pointed to his hard work on this year's over \$80 million budget.

"I think this is the first time the board has ever been challenged on its budget and salary negotiations."

As a member of the finance committee Hinton fought hard to force the board to stop taking the previous year's budget and simply adding more money to it.

"There was a real lack of desire among committee members to use any sense of priorities in setting the budget."

He carried his fight from committee, where he lost, to the whole board but was a lone voice in the wilderness. Hinton urged the board to

start setting real priorities for spending each year instead of just adding to the budget to cover inflation. He made a lengthy speech which apparently fell on deaf ears.

While he failed in this bid to get the board back on what he considers is the right financial track at budget time, he feels his message did get across since there has been some consideration of zero base budgeting at recent meetings.

He says the board has to start cutting costs in the area of teacher and administration salaries to make worthwhile budget reductions. But Hinton isn't anti-teacher.

Hinton suggests there is no reason the board can't start at zero on wages. He thinks teachers should be paid comparative wages with similar work in the private and public sector but other guidelines should be the individual's worth and what Halton taxpayers can afford to pay.

"He thinks there is a considerable savings just around the corner if the board started cutting down the size of staff by eliminating superfluous employees."

"There is a hell of an opportunity to make cuts in the area of administration," he says.

Hinton believes principals should be given the powers they once had to run schools. Then, he says, the board wouldn't need all the consultants and co-ordinators pulling in hefty pay cheques.

"I'm not in favor of cutting teachers' salaries because they have a tremendous responsibility."

He thinks excellent teachers deserve good wages but is afraid there are many high priced teachers with lots of experience and academic qualifications who just aren't efficient or good enough to demand so much money.

Hinton says the board could get many excellent, less expensive teachers who may not have the years of experience and qualifications, but would perform just as well in the classroom. He doesn't think teaching excellence is dependent on qualifications or experience. "What is expensive about education is inefficient teachers in the system," he says.

Hinton is concerned about the drain out of Halton of excellent educators. He says teachers who aren't innovative and don't support the administration's education philosophy are overlooked for

advancement and often leave the board.

"The Ministry of Education isn't completely blameless either, for the state of education. They allowed boards and administrations to proceed without guidelines. Now people are demanding guidelines."

Another subject he is concerned about is the hiring of "gays" to teach.

He admits he has made some cracks in the past about gays which might be viewed as frivolous but says he is genuinely worried and wonders how many "gays" are teaching in Halton.

He says he doesn't mind "gays" having rights, although he does consider them deviants, but strongly objects to them being allowed to teach school.

Hinton hopes if there are "gay" teachers they keep personal views to themselves but expects this is probably a tough chore. "How can you expect morality to be transplanted to children if 'gays' are being hired?" he asks.

He is a strong booster of the public school system and is alarmed at the high number of parents moving children into separate and private schools. Hinton wishes these parents would keep their children in public school and fight for much needed reforms.

A long career in politics has helped Hinton develop a thick hide so he says he doesn't mind complaints and criticism. He has taken a lot of lumps since joining the board.

There have been raps for his bid to cut trustees' wages 100 per cent. He couldn't even get a seconder for the motion but he isn't giving up in his bid to see trustees' \$6,600 a year salaries chopped.

At a meeting later this month Hinton will put forth the motion that members serve without pay again and

this time he has a seconder, but not necessarily a supporter.

He isn't optimistic about the chances of the motion passing. Hinton expects the same attitude which prevented the subject from being discussed in July assures its defeat. He is hoping an amendment will be put forth though for at least a partial pay cut.

"Maybe if I can get the board to look at its own pay it will look at the whole question of the budget."

Hinton is glad he decided to run for the board and noted he feels very much at home at the board despite the fact many of his fellow trustees don't agree with his ideas. He believes he has grudging respect from colleagues for his approach to the job.

The tremendous power base Burlington has at the board prompts Hinton to think both the north and south of the region would be much better off if there were two boards. He thinks this might not be necessary, though, if there are as many changes in board membership in the next election as there were



H. H. Hinton

after the last one.

Despite much criticism, Hinton sticks to his previous statements that Halton high school teachers are "gutless". He says the teachers sold out on the chairmanship issue and abandoned their concern for quality education.

He likes the direction the new board is moving since educators can't run the system like a business, but trustees can. He is delighted to see the board is demanding more input.

"I think the old trustees are beginning to understand things will never be the same again," he says.

—Mr. Murray is the Free Press Halton School Board reporter.

Authority ed program better

Agreeing that the Credit Valley Conservation Authority's Education Program had "gone over bigger than expected" the Authority's executive received Education Officer George Roberts' report at a recent meeting. Chairman Grant Clarkson commented he thought education for children on water courses was "most important."

"All we need is one major flood...," he added. According to Robert's report, nearly 3,000 students used the Terra Cotta area for organized school activities during the '76 school year.

General and pond ecology was taught at the Terra Cotta Education centre comprising indoor sessions using projectors, films, audio-visual aids, and scientific discussion. Field work consists of nature walks, exposure to learned knowledge, scientific analysis, and general absorption.

Students were also educated in the purposes,

regulations, and responsibilities of the conservation authority and importance to future welfare of the area.

Roberts also reports many students are already booked for the coming school year and he predicted more "turn downs" than last year. Armed with this fact, he requested consideration of further education centre planning.

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New judge for Halton

A 45-year-old St. Catharines lawyer has been appointed a county judge for Halton.

Justice Minister Ron Basford announced last week that Thomas E. Quinlan would be joining judges Alan B. Sprague and J. Kenneth Blair on the Halton bench.

Judge Quinlan hopes to assume his new duties in October.

Currently he is looking for a house in Milton

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