

McKeough says regional government stays

Ontario Treasurer Darcy McKeough has a reputation for speaking bluntly and he preserved it when he spoke to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario last week.

McKeough said among other things, that regional government is here to stay, rejecting a return to the county system. He also said:

That 30 second TV clip solutions to local governments and particular regional governments—that if you don't like them disband them—won't work to anyone's advantage, particularly the taxpayers. He said the restructuring of local government began in the '60s as a logical alternative to the two very undesirable extremes of bitter annexations and increasing decision-making and responsibility at Queen's Park. If it isn't working then much of the responsibility lies with local representatives.

On the other hand, McKeough admitted regional or restructured government has not achieved perfection, in fact some of the most cogent criticisms of the performance of restructured areas have been produced by the Government itself. And, he told the Association that the Government is prepared to consider changes where shortcomings are identified.

"We may have, in many cases with so many special-purpose bodies, created a system that may be described as one in which... everyone is involved and no one is clearly responsible. This can have an inflationary impact because so many independent units indulge in what amounts to blind-budgeting that takes account only of their own and no one else's needs."

McKeough referred to conservation authorities and police commissions bodies who set their own needs but asked, "Who do we hold to account for the community in general?"

"It is a paradox that the level of government closest to the people is often the most confusing and least understood," he observed.

McKeough was particularly critical of projected 10 per cent increase in property taxes this year. "This is too rich for our current economic situation," he declared.

"On the municipal side the average increase is about nine per cent—while the increase for school purposes is about 12 per cent," McKeough said it was not the time to discuss school board affairs but he felt what applies on the municipal side applies as well to school boards.

Professing dismay at the "high tax increases" he also noted that local spending is projected to increase at the same rate as last year even though cost increases moderated significantly. He used the salaries of municipal employees and teachers as examples noting municipal wage settlements were running at about 14 per cent in 1976 but for 1977 are down around eight per cent while teachers' went down from 17 per cent to nine. But municipal spending will increase by about 11 per cent in 1977, compared with a three per cent growth rate last year.

"All this seems to me to mean that an end to restraint has been declared by some councils and school boards," McKeough complained.

Taxpayers want continued restraint, at all levels of government, he declared, and they want local government to show clear evidence spending levels are being held down.

McKeough says that excessive spending endangers the credibility of local governments and furnishes ammunition for those who want "extreme centralist remedies which would emasculate local government."

Dissatisfaction with regional government, McKeough claims, is often badly

distorted. For example criticisms about disproportionate increases in expenditures in restructured areas as compared with the rest of the province. "It really galls me when regional expenditure figures are quoted without reference to increases in population, family formation and economic activity," McKeough said. Thirty-second pot shot artists make no such distinctions, he says, yet if you look at the 1977 figures it is apparent some regions are working well, absorbing new responsibilities and showing only modest mill-rate increases.

He cited Newmarket—a high growth area in York Region—which has kept its mill rate flat even with increases in school costs in recent years. Less than five per cent in 1970.

Restructured areas can perform efficiently and curb spending levels or vice versa, McKeough says, depending on priorities. Most restructuring was done when the province was expanding rapidly and the emphasis was on service delivery. Now money is no longer so plentiful and the emphasis is on cost effectiveness, and it is up to the regional governments to meet the challenge, he said.

"I remain an advocate of local responsibility," McKeough insists, and reforms must always move to strengthen accountability.

Under the old fragmented system of local government "the rich got richer and the poor got poorer," according to McKeough. "I am not going to turn back the clock."

"We are not prepared to dismantle restructured local government resurrecting some 122 municipalities and some 251 boards and commissions that crowded the landscape in the good old days but could not address our realities."

Decentralization can only work if we have established local structures that can

cope. That among other things, implies a minimum size and grouping," McKeough asserted.

Under the old system there was no way to bring together executive power, resources and accountability to make a coherent and responsive approach to public policy, McKeough maintained, but it can be done under regional government if local governments use their powers responsibly. If they can do that then Queen's Park believes additional responsibility is in the works.

"For instance, the Ministry of the Environment has embarked upon a program of re-assigning operating responsibility of water and sewage treatment facilities to municipalities. It has been obvious from the outset, that the municipalities now serviced by the Ministry are rather reluctant to take this step."

"We hear a lot about the need for greater local authority. Yet, when the Province invites municipalities to operate their own local water and sewerage facilities, the enthusiasm for more responsibility hardly translates into action. I must ask, therefore: How serious are municipalities about running their own affairs? Surely, after providing its initial technical expertise and the facilities themselves, the Province should not be expected to also operate these facilities," McKeough said.

"I am not this morning telling you that I or the Government will somehow force you to hold the line on taxes, nor am I making a pitch for regional governments. My government's policy says it's up to you to set the tax rate and initiate re-structuring. What I am saying to myself and to you as politicians—and in the best sense of that word as leaders—believing as we do in local government, "Physician heal thyself."



THOMAS GIBBONS BROUGHT in this picture to the Free Press office to show readers what the Rev. Len Ewing, seated on the left, looked like in his school days. Photo is of Miss Royce's class in the early 1920's.

Crash kills area man

A Hillsburgh man died recently after suffering head injuries in a motorcycle accident.

Gordon John Walker, 32, of R.R. 1 Hillsburgh, sustained injuries in a single vehicle mishap August 17. He died the following Sunday.

Mr. Walker was south-

bound on Erin Township Line Two north of Sideroad 17 when the bike skidded. The motorcycle fell to the left and slid for some distance.

A passing motorist found Mr. Walker, and called police. The accident's cause is under investigation. Mr. Walker is survived by wife Sheila and three children: Martha, Kathy and Matthew.



MISS DAISY FOLSTER'S senior third book sits for the photographer in the early 1920's. From the photographer's point of view, the right row from front to back are Donald Mann, Clifford Precious, Irma Styles, John Meillon, Henry Cripps and John Donaldson. The second row, front to back, are Ernie Broughton, Isabel Bruce, Frank Winters, McCoomb, Catherine Stewart, Herbert Taylor, Styles, Mary Gibbons. In the third row, front to back, are Marjorie Hall, Jim McGeachie, Hilman, Howard Switzer, Olive Rooks, Mary Mills, Nora Waterhouse and Gord Currie. In the next row are Davies, Thomas Gibbons, Velma Blair, Billy Williams, John Barber, Masales and Gordon Babcock. The fifth row is made up of Stuart Lantz, Irene Cross, Lois Ackerson, Phyllis Lasby, Glen Ryder and Willa Lasby. The last row, front to back, are Claira Bower, Audris Weaver, Gordon Hansen and Gordon Reid.

Excess land

Manner of sale is questioned

Halt Region's Public Works Committee will recommend payment of \$3,420, in real estate fees to Stephen P. Saxe, but the committee members aren't very happy about it.

Burlington Councillor Vern Connell wondered why a real estate agent was involved in the sale of the excess region-owned lands in Stewarttown. He said he recalled the committee agreeing to sell the property, but he felt direction

had been given for staff to handle the sale direct instead of through an agent.

Halt Hills Mayor Tom Hill said he had received some flack about the region using the same firm for the sale as it does for some appraisal work.

The firm sold land for \$57,000. While no councillor on the committee questioned the realtor's right to the commission, they did question why the property was listed

with the firm in the first place.

Solicitor Mike Martin and Property Agent Vince Geraghty were both absent from the building when the matter came before committee. Chief Administration Officer Ernie Reid said he didn't know why the property was listed and agreed it wasn't the normal procedure. Mr. Reid was asked to find out why staff had deviated from the policy.

Flower Arranging Demonstration
Acton Public Library
2 p.m.
Saturday, September 10th, 1977
Please Register At Library
LIMITED TO 20 PEOPLE

Cheshire home soon

With the opening of the first Halton Cheshire Home in Burlington now only two months away, preparations are being stepped up. The home, a 100-year-old house on Ontario St. which is being specially adapted for housing seven handicapped people, is a non-profit project, part of the world-wide Cheshire Foundation.

The project is in the hands of a group of Burlington and

Oakville citizens and is backed by many service clubs in both communities, including Civitan, Zonta and May Court.

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