

Report from Queen's Park

by: JULIAN REED, M.P.P.

Halton-Burlington)
The Government has introduced a bill proposing a major overhaul of grievance arbitration, which would eliminate delays and reduce costs. This issue of costly delays in arbitration procedures has been a centre of controversy for a long time.

Each year, tens of thousands of grievances are filed in Ontario on behalf of union members, among which are some 1,000 arbitration cases. Unions have complained about long delays in the disposition of arbitration cases, the cost of taking a case to arbitration; and the problems of workers who have been discharged and have to wait up to a year or more for an arbitrator's decision.

The Minister of Labour, introducing the bill, maintained that its adoption would give this Province one of the finest grievance arbitration systems in North America. It would cut delays by setting time limits, giving the Minister power to appoint single arbitrators and establish fees for them. The Ontario Federation of Labour has complained that the grievance arbitration system has been a failure; and that the inequities of high cost, delay and harsh penalties have brought the system into disrepute among the people it is supposed to

serve.
Almost \$5 million is being taken away from the Province's largest children's treatment centres and training schools to finance programs aimed at keeping youngsters out of such last-resort institutions.

The Government will save about \$3.4 million by reducing the number of residential beds and other services at children's mental health centres which have annual operating budgets of about \$1 million or more. Fifteen of the province's 76 centres will be affected. More than \$1 million is expected to come from cutbacks and possible closings of some provincial training schools to be announced next month.

At a closed meeting with representatives of children's service agencies and associations, the Minister of Community and Social Services said the \$5 million, plus a further \$10.4 million from his ministry, has been earmarked for a major shift toward preventive programs in 1979-80. Before the meeting, he said in an interview that the reallocation of spending is part of a change in priorities by his children's services division "to move away from a reactive role (reacting and providing treatment after the damage is done), and into a prevention role."

According to a ministry official, the new emphasis will be on "front end services", which concentrate on early intervention and prevention of behavioural problems.

The two largest mental health centres affected by the spending changes are Thistletown Regional Centre in Toronto, which has been ordered to make a 5 per cent reduction over the next several months, and Browndale Ontario, which the Ministry last year awarded a \$9.1 million contract to provide treatment for emotionally disturbed children across the province. Browndale is to cut 30 to 40 beds from its province-wide operations totalling 280 beds, and to reduce non-residential services.

Money being taken from the various agencies "will be removed slowly over a period of several months so that there is no sudden shock to any of these institutions." The centres have been anticipating the change, and "they themselves have been moving in the direction of day services and outpatient services as opposed to residential services." The Minister does not, therefore, expect the reductions in residential care to give rise to any serious problems.

New measures to be financed include programs in the following areas: child abuse \$3,225,000; foster care

\$2.2 million; francophone services \$500,000; prevention \$1 million; hard-to-serve children \$500,000; mentally handicapped children \$2.7 million.

Under heavy attack by both Opposition Leaders, the Minister of Health has stated that he plans to change the Health Disciplines Act to require doctors to tell patients before treatment when their fees exceed the current OHIP rates. As the law stands at present, a doctor is only obliged to tell the patient when the fee will exceed the Ontario Medical Association rates, and those are now 30 to 42 per cent above the OHIP rates.

The Minister contended that billing practices at any of the teaching hospitals permitted groups of specialists to bill the plan at the OHIP rate, and that at those hospitals, "you will find... a very high percentage of claims had, in fact, been billed on an opted-in basis."

Liberal Leader Stuart Smith stated that this practice was subjecting the public to a means test administered by the specialists. The Minister said he doesn't like means tests either, but that as long as people have a choice, they aren't obliged to take the test. In an emergency, however, the victim "should not be charged in excess of OHIP".

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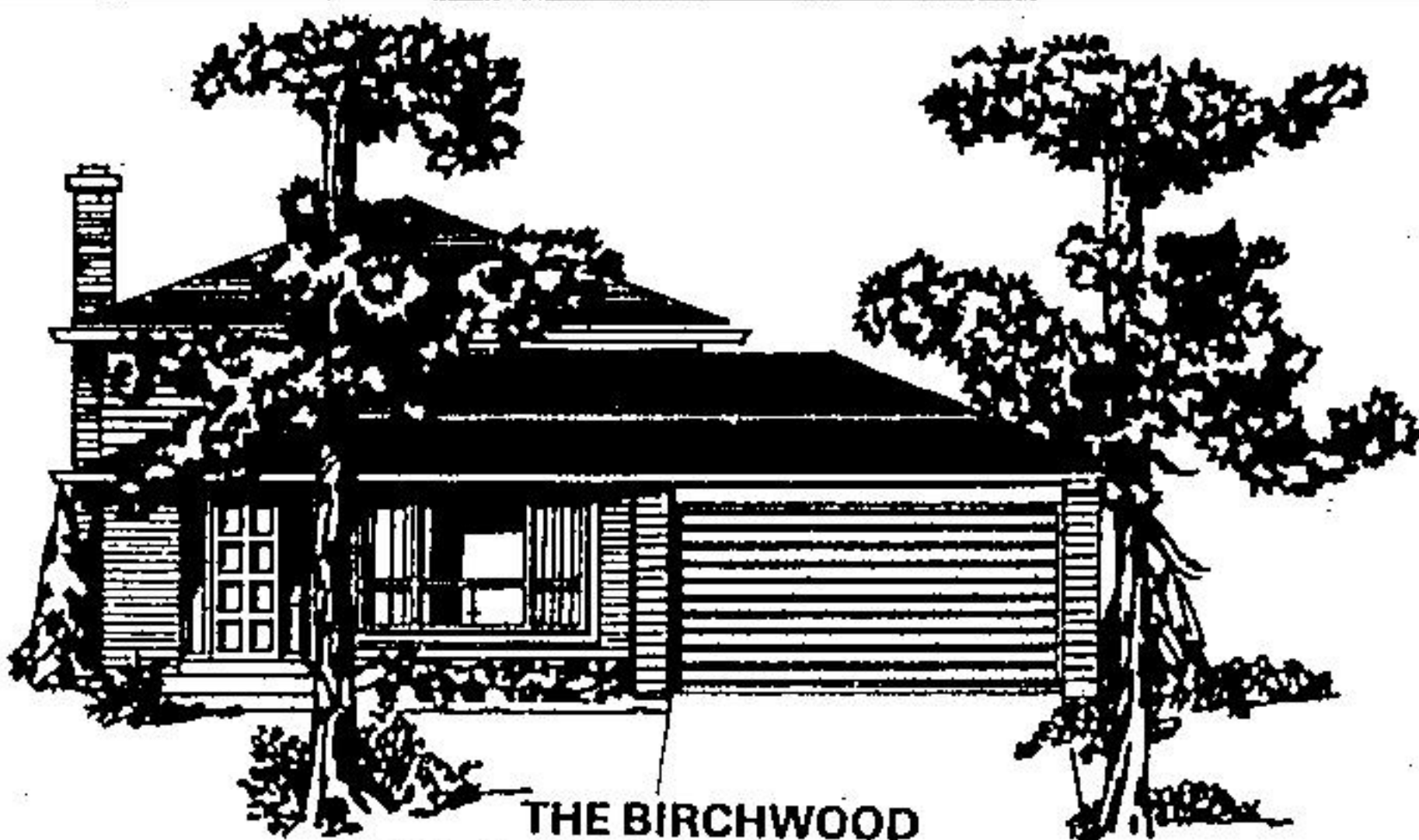
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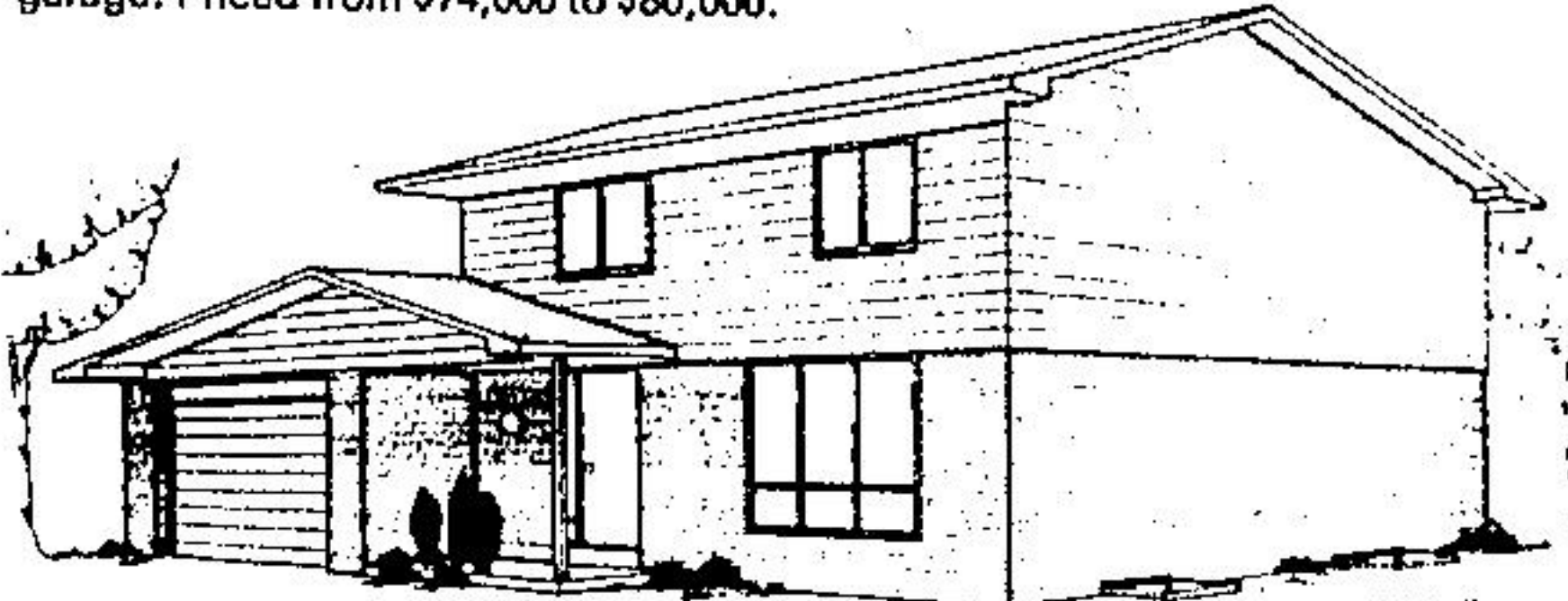
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