

Who serves who?

To the Editor of the Herald.

May I comment briefly on the interaction between the Halton Renaissance Committee, the Halton Education Action League (HEAL) and the Halton Board of Education. Mr. Johnson of HEAL is wrong in limiting the scope of Renaissance's concern to certain pieces of English literature suggested for the reading of Halton high school students. Mr. Campbell of Renaissance has pointed this out in recent issues of the newspaper.

However, Renaissance should note well the fact that Mr. Johnson, obviously a concerned man, could make such a statement. The main link of the public with Renaissance is the news media. Items of Renaissance actively have appeared in virtually every issue of local papers for the last few months. Yet such items of recent months have in fact dealt heavily with the reading list issue and particularly with one book called "Go Ask Alice." The unmistakable impression received is that the English literature question is all that Renaissance cares about. This is not true, but it is the impression received.

The whole situation is unfortunate since both HEAL and Renaissance seek to play the same dragon, an entrenched and unyielding school administration. HEAL is concerned about expenditures for administration buildings. Where is the money coming from? What is the new building for? Why can't we get straight answers to these two questions?

Renaissance lays siege to the board's elitism which piously tells parents that "experts" and "professionals" have chosen materials for their children to read, and heaven and earth will have to be moved before the decisions of the "experts" can be changed.

I find this second attitude of the board particularly galling for two reasons. One, there are hundreds of parents in Halton who are just as "professional" as the professionals in education. Two, simply because a person is expert in moral and social theory as well. It is moral and social theory that books like "Go Ask Alice" teach. Let the "experts" emerge from the cave of bureaucracy to the light of public scrutiny.

The fundamental question is "Does the public, through the school system, exist to serve the board, or does the board exist to serve the public through the school system?" Both HEAL and Renaissance are asking this question. Let there be no more skirmishes between these two public action committees, both of which provide public feedback to the school board. Let there be no more spats from the rank and file member of the public.

Peter Ralph



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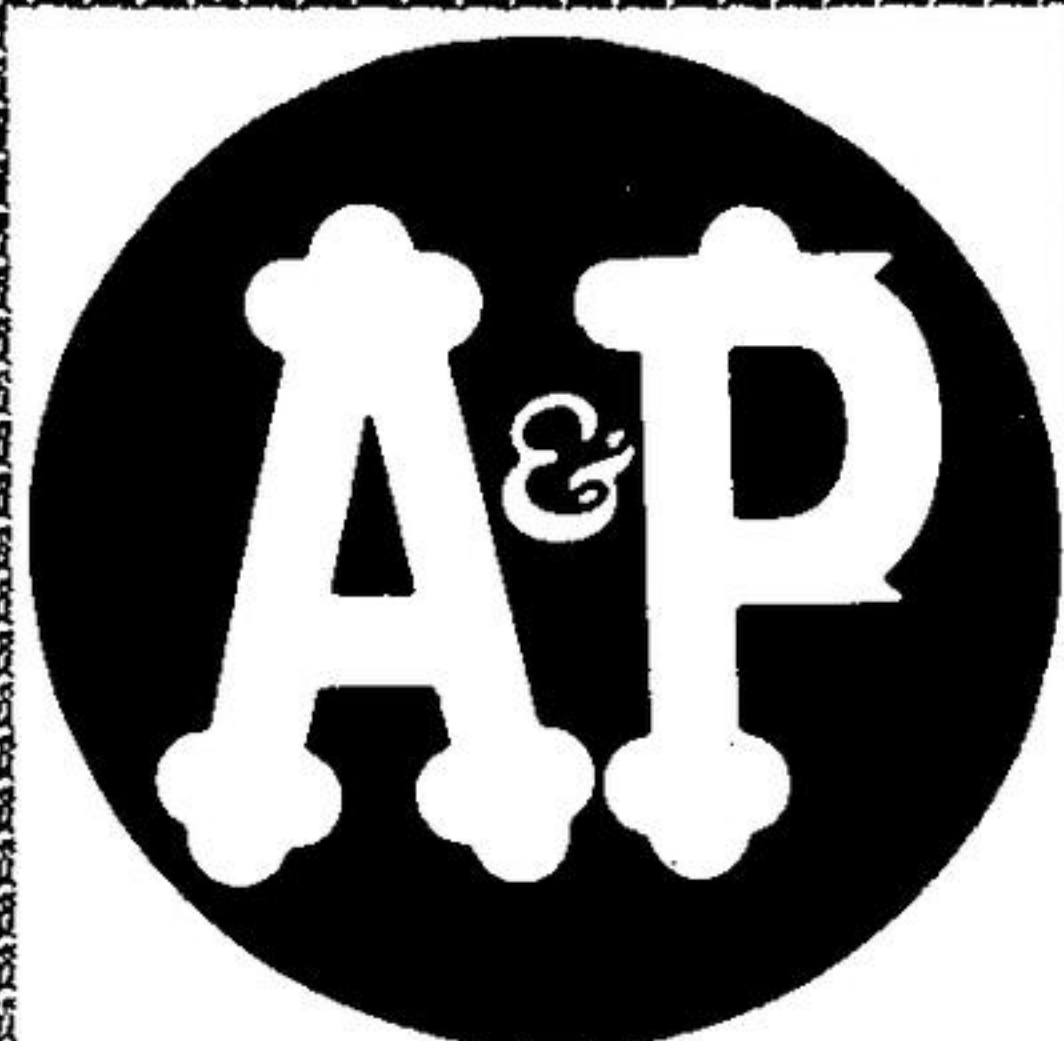
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