

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Reader questions police policy of no sirens

This letter sent to The Herald for publication.
Mr. K. Skerrett
Chief Constable
Halton Regional Police
1225 White Oak Blvd.
Oakville, Ontario.
Dear Sir:

On Thursday, August 18, 1977, at approximately 5 p.m. I was driving my car west on No. 7 Highway in the village of Norval.

Two fire department vehicles had passed me travelling East. These vehicles were easily seen because of size. Traffic was moderate in both directions at this time with children on bicycles and pedestrians moving freely about, no doubt drawn by these fire vehicles.

A few seconds later, I had turned the bend at the West-

end of Norval and realized that what I presumed were two police cruisers were coming towards me, travelling in the Eastbound traffic lane and it appeared trying to pull out of their line of traffic and pass. Highway No. 7 at this point is two lanes, with soft shoulders and a curbstone, being near a bridge and park entrance.

There was a very bright sun in a clear sky, low on the horizon, a situation which made it very difficult to tell whether or not the cruisers had their flashing red roof lights on. In fact, only the fact that these roof lights were fitted enabled me to decide they were in fact emergency vehicles. No siren could be heard and, in fact, no siren sound was heard as they passed me. There were vehicles travelling

in line between these two cruisers.

Later enquiries confirmed that the Halton Regional Police do not carry special audible warning devices, and that the policy of your Police Force is not to equip the said police vehicles with any audible warning device other than a regular automobile horn.

I would think that an experienced Police Officer would have the sense to realize that under any given number of road and weather conditions, a visual emergency signal is not always adequate unless supplemented with an audible signal of a siren or another type device to warn traffic of the presence of such emergency vehicles, with a recognized need to obtain road clearance to afford free passage to

go about its necessary business.

On an open highway, a regular type siren sound does not carry too well, and is most effective usually only in urban areas where buildings can reflect the sound but for your Force, covering a large area which is open highway, there are good electronic signals available which can be heard over most terrain and traffic noise.

If your Force policy is one of non-use of audible emergency signals, I must wonder at the obvious lack of intelligent thinking which has prompted this decision, particularly when the law puts specific rights and obligations on other road users to afford free passage to such vehicles when brought to their attention by

the driver of such a vehicle by means of a siren or other devices.

Your policy is circumventing these directives, or at the very least, placing obstacles in the way of other road users, and the emergency vehicle driver, in this case the constable, in carrying out these obligations and I would

hope that this is an isolated case of misdirection of a road Department and not part of an overall thoughtless and hazardous policy of operation.

Protection of Life & Property is the prime reason for the existence of any Police Force and the first concern of its senior officers must be sensible direction and the pursu-

ance of a policy which will attempt to ensure the safety of both its personnel on duty and other road users lawfully at large.

Your present policy regarding emergency audible warning signals leaves much doubt in my mind as to both the direction and thinking being put out by senior Halton Regional Police Officers. Your comments are requested.

Yours truly,
Harrison Wood

Also, if a siren is attached to the outside of the police vehicle snow and rain cause malfunctions to the siren's mechanism and, if, put under the hood of a vehicle the whistles tend to be

muffled.
Halton Regional Police is one of few forces without some type of audible emergency signal. "Personally, I prefer sirens," he said.

J. Kohari D.T. J. Novak D.T.

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Monopoly function, strike right must be reviewed and changed

To the editor of The Herald:

The recent air-controllers' strike has once again raised discussion on the larger subject of strikes in "essential services", however that may be defined. Last time it was the inside postal workers.

While all fair-minded people would agree that legal-strikes are an established part of the collective bargaining process, that the worker has the right to protect himself economically, and that all workers should have the same rights without discrimination, there is obviously general and serious public concern about the effects of strikes in some areas.

Those areas characteristically involve the deadly combination of a virtually monopoly function plus the right to strike. They have serious effects on the expenses and convenience of individual people, on businesses, and on the economy in general. They involve areas such as the public service, transportation, communication and security. They can result in serious civil disorder and economic loss. While most contract negotiations in both the private and public sectors have been settled without strike action or lost time, strikes in these crucial areas have had

devastating effects in recent years. This was not what the government had in mind when, with the best of intentions, it legislated the right to strike for these groups a few years ago, nor has it now. It cannot in future tolerate or permit serious harm to the public from such strikes and loss of essential services, especially those in the government sector. The public has made it clear that it simply will not stand for it. The economy has made it clear that it simply cannot stand for it.

What to do then? It is not easy or pleasant to remove a right once it has been granted, even though this may be necessary. The alternative is some other acceptable collective bargaining mechanism to replace the strike, such as binding arbitration or the "last best offer" system. Governments have been seeking such an answer for some time.

Some people believe that it is impossible to legislate against legal strikes because they will only become illegal strikes or other disruptions. I suppose this is one of the tests of a modern civilized industrial nation. But surely, if government has to be continually legislating workers back to work each and every time a strike is called, to keep order

in the country, it would be better to know beforehand that the strike is not a permitted part of the ground-rules. Surely overwhelming public opinion can appeal to the inherent sense of responsibility of our unions, of both their rank-and-file members as well as their leaders.

At any rate, with more such strikes anticipated in the essential services, e.g. the inside postal workers, transportation groups, and perhaps others, this subject will undoubtedly continue to be

a hot topic for discussion in caucus, Parliament and among the public over the next few years. Most people obviously do not want their essential services disrupted. Neither do I.

I would appreciate hearing my constituents' views, either in direct correspondence or the media, so that I may represent you even more effectively on this crucial subject in Ottawa.

Yours sincerely,
Dr. Frank A. Philbrook,
Member of Parliament,
Halton.

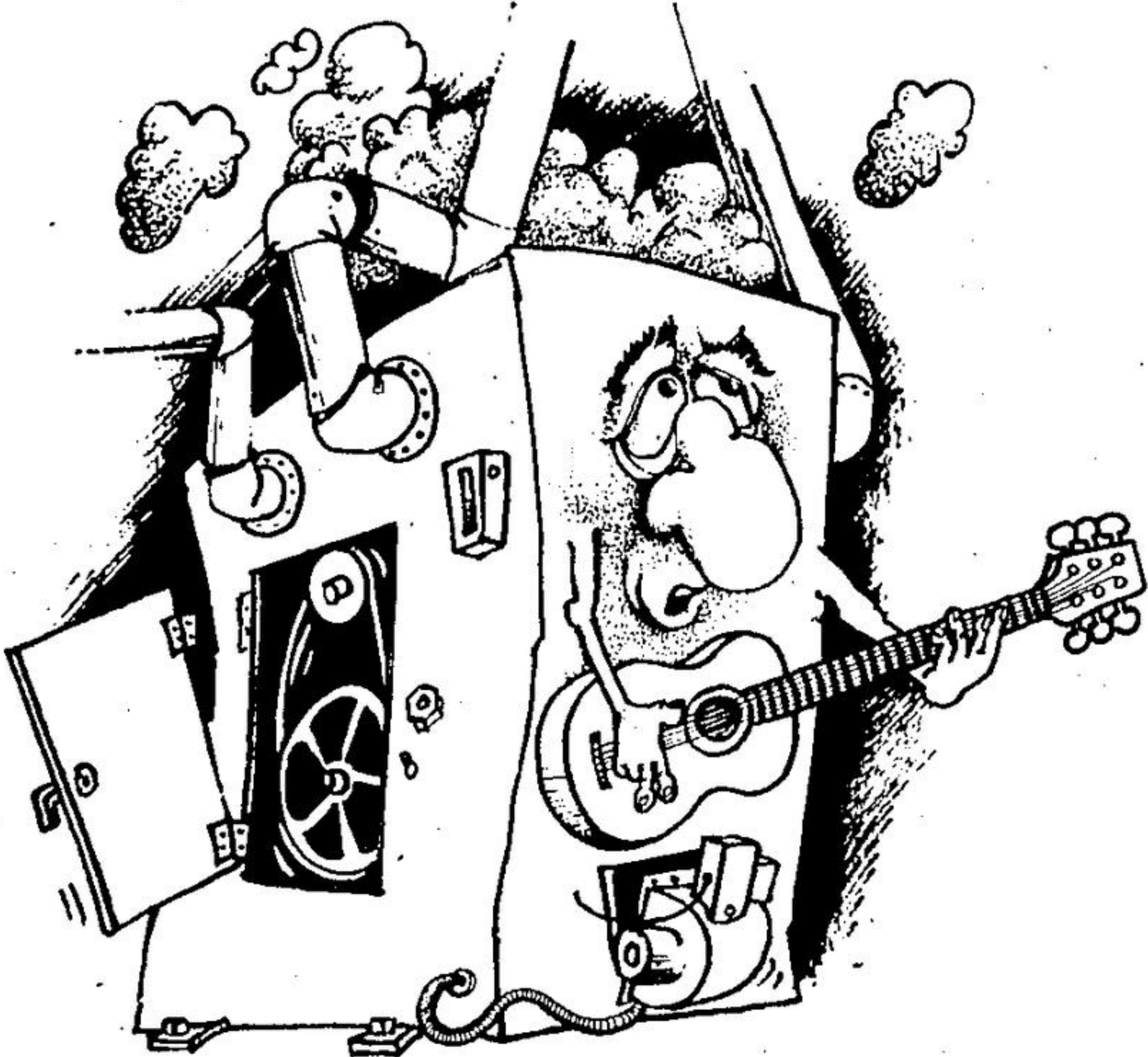
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