

Another study? An undeserving Region council

While it's interesting to see regional government continuing its efforts to make Halton a haven for new industry, along with the twin blessings of jobs and tax assessment, it is also distressing to hear of yet another study being launched - using taxpayers' dollars - to "appraise the situation".

Somewhat, as the middle ground or "no man's land" between the pompous but long-established provincial government and the earthy but amaleurish municipal government, the region has become a wasteland of planners, statisticians and speculators both privately hired and publicly elected.

As the new "kid" in town, the region has been prone to the ego-inflating influence of its provincial father as much as worrisome prodding of its municipal mother. Yet the child remains airy-headed, directionless and slothful in the midst of near-calamity.

Two images come to mind while searching for metaphors: one sees regional chairman Jack Raftis attempting to calm council members who are angered over reports of sewage sludge contamination by assuring them, "everything's under control".

Another image presents itself readily to any passing motorist on Highway 25; the regional headquarters itself, a sprawling factory of "functionals" and "contemporaries" that reflects in its water-filled moat the kind of modern aesthetics which characterize regional government. The building is like an automobile bought as a gift for a child much too young to drive. Region officials felt that five years was too long a time to wait for the new headquarters when it was opened earlier this year.

We, however, feel differently. The "great accomplishment" of Halton region's first half-decade was the completion of the first official plan, a comprehensive guide for municipal planners which will supposedly remain in effect for another 20 years.

But the official plan has yet to receive provincial approval; it is instead being passed around the ministry of housing while civil servants employ their bureaucratic tools to try and pry off the barnacles of dispute, dissent and dissatisfaction that have already attached themselves to the plan in its infancy.

The official plan was itself borne out of numerous public meetings and lengthy studies, which to a great extent are necessary, but only when the final result pleases the great majority. It is, however, a strong and vocal minority - many of its members farmers whose livelihoods might be challenged by certain aspects of the plan - which is keeping the plan in military hands, still the subject of some intense, if intermittent, controversy.

The region of Halton must be something of a record-holder when it comes to the numbers of studies launched into a single issue: the issue is landfilling, and the region's failure to simultaneously resolve outstanding problems and satisfy the taxpayers continues to make headlines.

We predict a solid waste nightmare in Halton during the next two to five years, as the region desperately fends off challenges from disconcerted voters and continues to plead its case in courts of law.

And this week comes news of a \$10,000 questionnaire-type survey by which the region hopes to evaluate the size of its labor force and the occupational skills available. The information collected will be presented with unabashed pride to corporate investors who express interest in Halton as a site for industry.

Asked whether he feels the region is correct in inviting new industry to urbanize predominantly-rural Halton, Chairman Raftis expressed confidence last week that the taxpayers are willing to trade a slice of their abundant farmland for much-needed industrial assessment and additional jobs.

This is probably true, as is the contention that survey results like those being sought here will assist regional officials in selling Halton to the big-money investors.

But it's a bitter pill to swallow when we must give our infant children spending money they haven't earned so they can buy gas for that car they never deserved.

Blackwell let Ontario go wet

Editor's Note: The political ingenuity involved in the 1945 revival of the open bar in Ontario is described today by Don O'Hearn in this series looking back over his 35 years at Queen's Park.

By DON O'HEARN
Queen's Park Bureau
Of The Herald

Mention Les Blackwell to anyone today and you get a blank stare. Even in his own time his real importance was known only to those few quite close to government and the legislature.

As the unusually strong second man in the Drew government Leslie Blackwell was a power.

Politically the boldest move of the Drew regime was to introduce the sale of hard liquor by the glass after the 1945 election. This was almost entirely a Blackwell production.

Drew was involved in setting the original policy. In fact it well could have been his idea. But then it was left to Blackwell to put it through.

Blackwell devised the approach of giving bars automatically to municipalities of over 50,000 population, which then covered the province's five major cities and only them, and requiring a local vote for all other municipalities. For years after there were local votes, and eventually, the province became almost entirely wet. But the strategem worked. Liquor never really became an important issue again.

SETTLED STRIKE
Blackwell was influential in many other things.

One was a very bitter strike in the auto industry in Windsor shortly after the war.

The United Auto Workers had the whole downtown area of Windsor jammed with cars and there were hundreds of OPP standing by. The situation looked both hopeless and potentially dangerous.

Blackwell tackled it by first getting Labor Minister Charles Daley (a good minister in this field but in above his head on this one) off to Europe on a sudden trip which had unexpectedly come up. Then Blackwell went to Detroit and called the leaders of the union and the company over.

He kept them there in a bull session and in 24 hours had the strike settled.

But most characteristic of him were his integrity and his toughness.

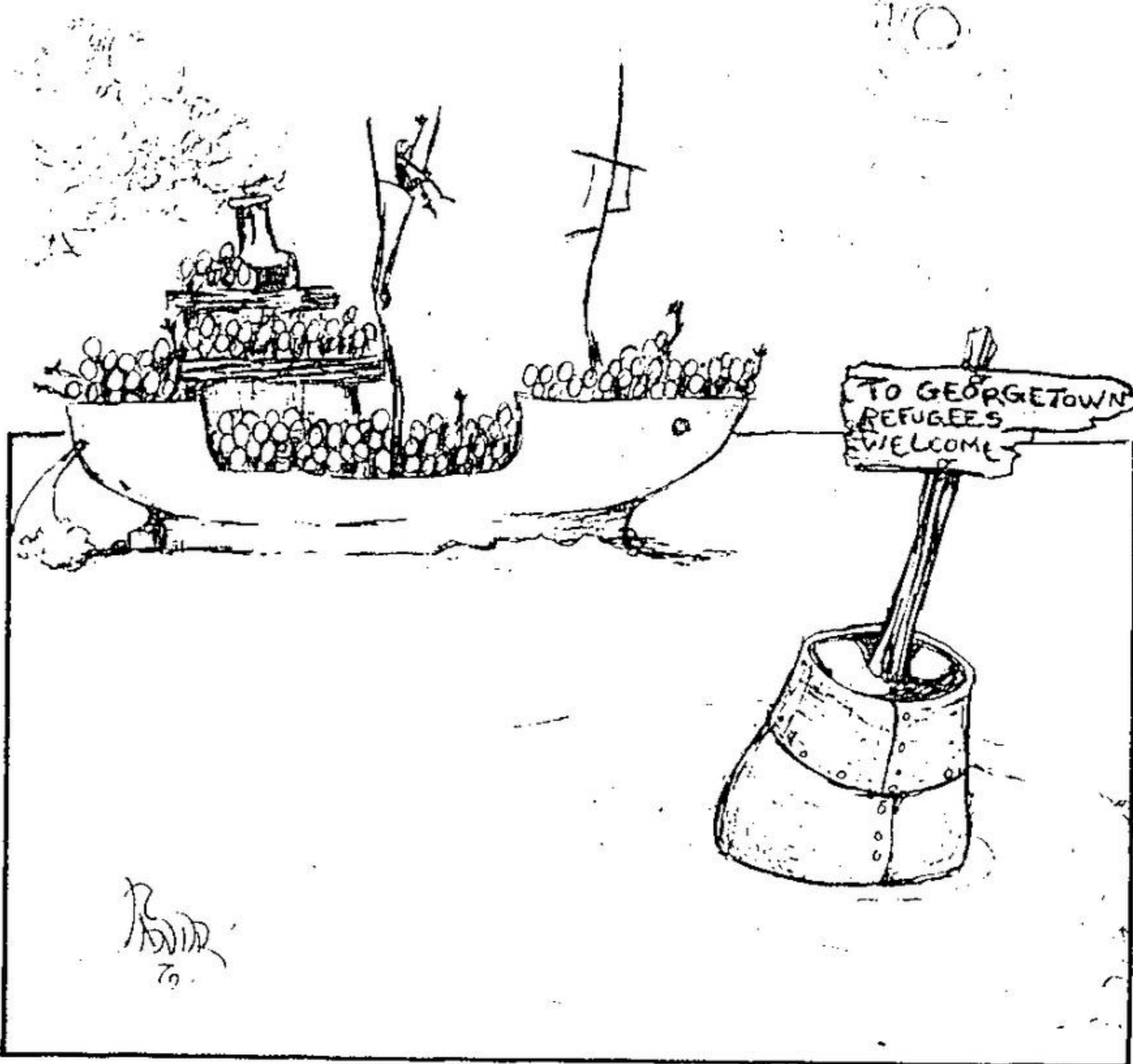
In the 1940s there was still a lot of hanky-panky and greedy hands in politics. This particularly applied to racketeering in liquor licences.

It was well known that a licence cost \$10,000-\$15,000 in Toronto, \$7,500 in Sudbury and so on. These were straight pay-offs. And they weren't going into party funds but into the pockets of top officials.

This drove Blackwell wild and finally he wouldn't take it any longer. One morning he called me down to his office and said "Don, I'm calling them in this afternoon and telling them if they don't stop I will jail them. And I mean it."

That afternoon I watched the four top PC party officials in the province stride in the attorney-general's office and half-an-hour later I watched them glumly file out.

Blackwell, of course, didn't jail them and I can't say for sure whether the toll gate was ended, but you didn't hear about it again.



Press kept at distance maybe it's a good idea

By STEWART MacLEOD
Ottawa Bureau
Of The Herald

Prime Minister Joe Clark has had his trials and tribulations during his first days in office, but he can pause and give thanks for one blessing - he hasn't had to endure the fending and fawning of an overly-friendly press.

I haven't researched this project back to Confederation, but so far as modern history is concerned, Clark may well be the first prime minister to assume office without celebrating an initial honeymoon period with the press. And while this may appear, at first glance, to be painful problem I suspect it may work to his advantage in the long term.

We all remember our honeymoon with Pierre Trudeau in 1968. Trudeauania was in full flight and we wrote glowingly about the new era dawning in Ottawa. The new prime minister couldn't walk across the lawns of Parliament without a horde of reporters in his wake. We loved his youthful, vigorous zest. When he dated, it was a monumental event. His news conferences were cultural happenings. His every word was carved in stone.

But from the beginning Trudeau recognized the dangers in his journalistic honeymoon. "The media," he said, "on more than one occasion, have a habit of devouring their heroes."

That swinging hero of 1968 has, I suppose, been devoured, at least for the time being. No one seems to pay much attention these days as he drives to his

new office to restructure his life as the leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Five years before Trudeau assumed the prime minister's mantle, Lester Pearson came into power, a genuine hero, the man who brought Canada the Nobel Peace Prize, perhaps the most likeable and approachable human being to occupy that high office.

There was a honeymoon alright, a good deal different than the one we had with Trudeau but nonetheless a real honeymoon. "Mike" Pearson was one of the boys, and we all loved his down-to-earth, self-deprecating humor.

Like Trudeau, Pearson enjoyed a highly positive press during his first years in office. Even his bungling was forgiven on the grounds that he obviously meant well.

And if you go back to 1957 there was a similar attitude toward John Diefenbaker when he wrestled the government away from the St. Laurent Liberals who, most people agreed, had become too arrogant and removed from the people. Diefenbaker was the man who would restore a sense of pride in Canada. Finally, "the average Canadian" would have his day in court.

By 1962, Diefenbaker's cabinet was splitting in all directions, and he was getting a journalistic roasting for everything from nuclear warheads to devalued dollars. His honeymoon ended with a resounding crash.

Pearson's honeymoon didn't end with any dramatic suddenness, but his image was clearly tarnished through a long

series of ministerial scandals, the divisive flag debate and the continuing controversy over bilingualism and biculturalism. The nitty-gritty of domestic politics had clearly taken its toll.

ROCKY START
As Joe Clark looks back on his predecessors, he must be grateful that he wasn't swept into office with a similar blast of journalistic euphoria. There is something to be said for starting at the bottom and working up.

A foreign correspondent who travelled on the Clark campaign remarked that he had never seen such an "anti-candidate sentiment" among the accompanying press. There were even anti-Clark jokes being passed around and, since Clark tended to follow a set speech, reporters even helped him finish sentences in unison. He was hammered by the press for his performance in the television debate and, since his election as prime minister, he has absorbed a severe pounding for his ill-conceived policies on the Middle East, for his unpopular promise to "privatize" Petro-Canada, and for certain cabinet appointments. When you think of it, Joe Clark really got off to a rather rocky start.

I suspect he is grateful. Right now, with a new minority government and with most Canadians obviously willing to give him a chance to prove himself, it matters little what journalists say about the new prime minister. And by the time it does matter, the cycle will probably have changed. As Clark's people see it, any change can only be for the better.

Ombudsman poses question, occupies the middle ground

By DEREK NELSON
Queen's Park Bureau
Of The Herald

TORONTO — There's a tricky principle involved in the existence of an ombudsman to look into complaints against actions by the provincial government.

While paid for by the taxpayer, the Ombudsman is in the unique position of reporting directly to the legislature.

He is a "creature of the House" to use the parliamentary jargon, rather than an instrument of the government.

Yet only government, and not the legislature, has the power to take action, to fix errors and it is the government that has to respond to the ombudsman's complaints about bureaucratic wrongdoing against the private citizen.

To help resolve that difficulty MPP Pat Lawlor (NDP-Lakeshore), chairman of the select committee on the ombudsman, was on his feet in the legislature just before the session recessed.

He presented a special report of seven recommendations that were going nowhere against the opposition of the ministries or boards involved.

MEAN SOMETHING
The committee is composed of 10 members, four of them Conservatives, and three each Liberals and NDP.

Their views were unanimous. In all seven cases, one dealing with the health ministry, and six with the Workmen's Compensation Board, they felt the ombudsman was right.

Lawlor wanted the legislature, the ombudsman's boss, to say so. And for it to

mean something.

Otherwise, there is no sanction for the office of the Ombudsman," he said.

With that Lawlor touched on the key problem for an Ombudsman.

If, after all his investigations are concluded, he feels a government ministry or agency made an error with a citizen he goes to the bureaucracy and tells them so.

But what happens if they in turn tell him to get lost?

OLD TALE

That in essence happened four years ago, when the ombudsman's office was first established, over the North Pickering expropriation question.

The resulting crisis produced a system for resolving ombudsman-government conflicts, which included setting up the select committee to hear arguments from both sides.

The results, from the point of view of Lawlor (and past chairman Michael Davidson (NDP-Hamilton Centre), who resigned on the issue) have not been good.

When the committee's last report was produced in the House none of the involved cabinet ministers even took the courtesy to show up and listen.

ONE SAFEGUARD

Now their latest report was before the House, and Lawlor bluntly said "we want this taken seriously. It hasn't been up to this date and it is high time it was."

Which is really the point. If the government wants an ombudsman, and makes him a servant of the House, then it should bow before decisions of that chamber expressed as unanimous committee recommendations.

Having all three parties agree screens

out the blatantly partisan stuff, such as the North Pickering dispute, where the Tories dissented.

Whether the government will, in fact, respond adequately to Lawlor's plea is still up in the air. We'll know by the fall session.

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