

Halton Hills Outlook

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Their Outlook

Jobs go begging but welfare steady



Your Business
By DIANNE MALEY, Business Analyst

\$9,500 a year
People earning the minimum wage may qualify for other benefits, such as health care. But a two-bedroom apartment in Toronto costs \$850 a month or more - if you can find one. That's \$10,200 a year. Cheaper, rent-controlled units rarely come on the market and people wait three years or more for subsidized housing.

Ambling along Bloor Street on my way to work, I was struck by the number of jobs going begging. "Secretary wanted," the sign in the window of the real estate office said. The Lebanese restaurant a few doors down wanted a waitress. The drug store needed clerks. The pizza house needed pizza makers, the stationery store a bookkeeper. All this within blocks of the University of Toronto, its students a traditional supply of cheap labor. People who own small businesses are desperate for help. The unemployment rate in Toronto is a remarkable 3.9 per cent. Statistically speaking, the city is fully employed. Across the province, the jobless rate has sunk to a 10-year low of 6.5 per cent.

So, while employers fuss and fume, unable to find workers, the welfare rolls swell. The solution, it seems, is to increase the minimum wage. This is not a popular idea. When Stephen Lewis, then the leader of the Ontario New Democratic Party, espoused it, his party fared poorly at the polls. Small business owners bristle at the thought. Higher wages would force them out of business, they say.

Knowing this, I was surprised to read the other day that the number of people on welfare rolls is rising. The reason, it seems, is that people from other provinces are flocking to Ontario to find work. The same thing happened to Alberta in the 1970s.

Opposition parties say that welfare subsidies are not generous enough. People are living in poverty and despair. What does that say about the minimum wage? We ignore the working poor at our peril.

Toronto in particular "is a bit of a magnet, a Mecca," one government official said. Yet people who think Toronto is the promised land are usually disappointed when they get here. Jobs are plentiful but salaries are low. The minimum wage of \$4.55 an hour wouldn't get you a closet in this town.

As it stands, the Ontario Government has added more than \$100 million to its welfare budget this year. Part of this money will go to help people find housing and work, which may take two or three months.

MORE FROM WELFARE
By comparison, a family of four can get about \$15,500 a year on welfare. This number combines federal and provincial subsidies, and reflects new rates coming into effect Jan. 1. A person earning \$4.55 an hour would bring home a paltry

Newcomers have no resources and "it takes some time to get a job, it takes some time to get shelter," Social Services Minister John Sweeney says.

TROUBLESOME
More troublesome, Mr. Sweeney says, is that more welfare recipients these days are older, mostly male, heads of families. They are staying on welfare longer, a year or more in some cases.

This does not seem to indicate a chronic problem. Many of these people are training for new jobs or waiting until they find work that they can afford to take. A single wage earner cannot support a family on the minimum wage.

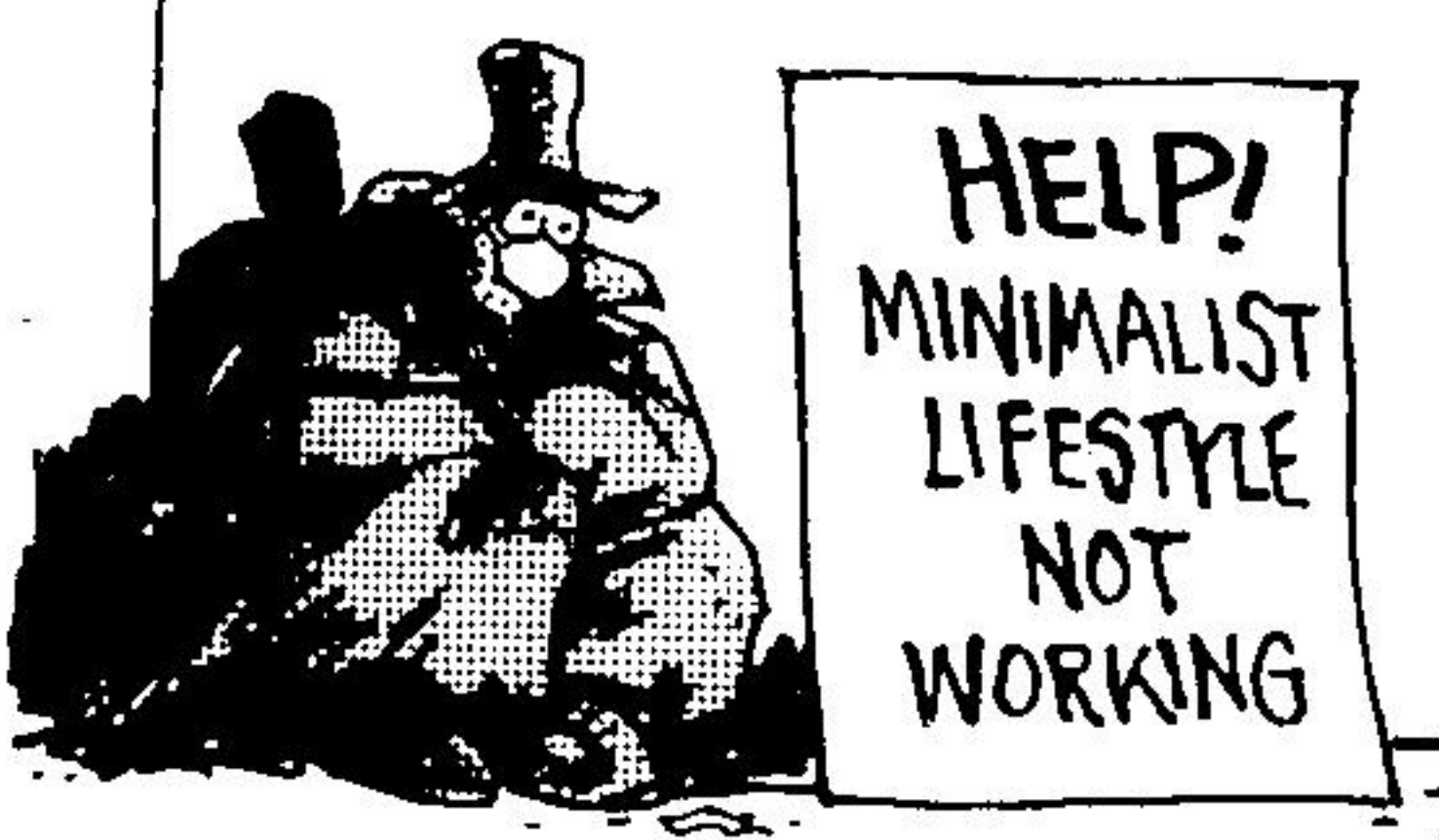
Berry's World



Jim Berry

"Oh, dear! So sorry, but the times being what they are we've given up RITUALISTIC KISSING."

Berry's World



Jim Berry
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There must be rules to debate free trade



Ottawa Report

By Stewart MacLeod

I Don't know how we should go about this, but there must be some way to establish national debating rules on free trade.

They don't have to be complicated regulations. In fact, the adoption of just one rule would help enormously. That one would prohibit any free-trade debater from imputing motives in those arguing the opposite position.

Things are getting entirely out of hand in this respect. Scarcely a day goes by without someone criticizing, insulting or warning someone on the opposite side of the free-trade fence. Just the other day, Saskatchewan Premier Grant Devine said opponents of free trade were cowards.

And he certainly didn't originate that general approach to the debate. Prime Minister Mulroney and members of his cabinet have been slinging similar accusations at free-trade opponents since the debate began in earnest a couple of months ago. The basic thrust of their argument is that it's a better, more courageous breed of Canadian who supports free trade.

Opponents are weak, cowardly, inward-looking, entirely without confidence in themselves or their country.

Canada's chief free trade negotiator, Simon Rosman, carried it one step further when he accused opponents of using the Big Lie technique as "practised in World War II by the infamous Nazi Germany."

There was no need to say that. It serves no useful purpose what soever.

If changing one's mind on free trade is a political sin, the confessional is going to be overcrowded. Who was a greater proponent of

freer trade, back a few years, than Liberal Leader John Turner? Now, he's willing to risk political death in fighting the pact the Mulroney government has negotiated with Washington.

And who, before being elected in 1984, was a greater opponent of free trade than Brian Mulroney? Prior to becoming prime minister, he repeatedly stated his opposition to a free-trade pact with the Americans. "I'll have none of it," he said during his successful 1983 leadership bid.

Now, anyone who takes that view is, according to the prime minister, "fearful and timid."

The funny thing about this approach is that, when free trade last seized the nation in 1911, it was proponents of free trade who were accused of being fearful and timid. They didn't have the gumption to go it alone, the argument went.

If it weren't such a complicated business, this name-calling and imputing of motives might be entertaining. But with so many of us totally confused about what it all means, and desperately seeking unemotional explanations, it's not the least bit helpful.

It's unnecessary, divisive and stupid, that's what it is.

It's nonsense to suggest the Mulroney government has betrayed a trust by negotiating a free-trade pact with the Americans. The federal government has every right to negotiate such a deal, and it has every right to try and convince us about its virtues.

The opposition, on the other hand, has every right to oppose it, and expose any flaws that can be found.

Lord knows there is enough material for both sides of the argument, too much for most of us.

If a premier, say, Alberta's Don Getty, sees the accord as advantageous for his province, he has every reason and right to get out there and sell the package. Accordingly, if another premier, such as Ontario's David Peterson, feels the accord would hurt his province, he's equally entitled to try and discourage it.



Weir's View

By Ian Weir

There's nothing that inspires quite so much paranoia as a potentially sinister news story which withholds all of the crucial information.

That's why I haven't been sleeping nights since reading about a speech Fidel Castro's brother Ramon gave to a group of university students in Halifax the other day.

According to Ramon, Canadians should not launch a Cuban-style revolution. In fact, he claimed, any Canadian who wants to start a revolution is "crazier than a goat".

Well, at first glance, this is sort of reassuring. Nicaragua may be trying to set fires in America's back yard, but at least the Cubans aren't encouraging Canadian goats to overthrow Brian Mulroney.

(News item: Goat-crazy Canadian revolutionaries today rejected the government's plea for peaceful negotiations. In response to the prime minister's televised appeal, the revolutionaries fired back a tersely-worded communique: "Bah.")

But when you reflect a little further on Castro's speech, you realize that a chilling question has been left unanswered. To wit: Why did Castro feel obliged to deliver this speech in the first place?

Do the Cubans know something that we don't? Have they, in fact, been approached by goat-crazy Canadians who are plotting a revolution?

And if this is really the case, then an even more chilling question looms: Who, precisely, is behind this scheme to overthrow the government?

The fact that Castro delivered his warning to university students might be a tip-off - except to anyone who is actually acquainted with a Canadian university student of the 1980s.

We're not in the radical '60s any more. In fact, it's almost impossible to conceive of a modern university student rising up against the government, unless something truly horrendous were to happen - like, say, a sharp increase in the price of optional BMW accessories.

So if it can't be the university students, who is it?

Omnisciently, federal Consumer and Corporate Affairs Minister Harvie Andre raised the spectre of a revolution just a few weeks ago when he warned of the dire consequences that might follow the Senate's refusal to approve the drug-patent legislation.

Warned Mr. Andre: "In South America they have revolutions over things like this."

At the time, this statement seemed... well... a bit silly. It's difficult to imagine outraged mobs storming the Senate chambers, proclaiming that there can be no freedom or justice for Canadians until Allan MacEachen has been charged, tried and shot.

Still, in light of Ramon Castro's comments, you start to wonder whether such a revolution could occur in reverse - in other words, whether it's the Senate that's plotting the coup.