

Halton Hills Outlook

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Their Outlook

Constitutional problems aren't all over just yet



Ottawa Report

By Stewart MacLeod
 Thomson News Service

Because the Meech Lake Accord is receiving such overwhelming political support, there is a natural - but unrealistic - tendency to think that it will solve most of our remaining constitutional problems.

Sure, there are opponents, not the least of which is former prime minister Pierre Trudeau. And a dozen or so members of the federal Liberal caucus don't like it.

But, with one or two exceptions, the entire Tory caucus of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney supports the accord, which would finally affix Quebec's signature to the Canadian Constitution. And Liberal Leader John Turner and New Democratic Party Leader Ed Broadbent certainly favor the agreement.

With the exception of New Brunswick's Frank McKenna, all premiers are stout defenders of the accord - not unexpectedly, since they all helped draft it. Mr. McKenna was not premier at the time so he can afford to be somewhat dispassionate.

He has said he will be seeking changes, but it's not clear whether he will refuse to approve the accord if these changes are not forthcoming. The view of the federal government, and most premiers, is that the whole deal will unravel if any part of it is renegotiated.

So far, the accord has been approved by Ottawa and three provincial legislatures. It still must be approved by seven other provinces, including New Brunswick.

STILL PROBLEMS

But even if, as expected, it clears these remaining hurdles, it would be a great mistake to think this is the end of constitutional arguments in Canada. In fact, it could create tensions we haven't even thought about up until now.

As things stand, it will be difficult to prevent future problems. The accord, already approved with en-

thusiasm by the Quebec legislature, couldn't really be recalled without bringing on a new crisis.

On the other hand, it's equally difficult to see how all Canadians will finally accept the accord with harmony. The main problem is that the full implications of the Meech Lake Accord are not understood by most of us. In fact, they are not even known by the experts. It's the courts - namely the Supreme Court of Canada - which will, in due course, provide us with the necessary definitions.

In the meantime, we hear all those fancy phrases about "completing the family circle" and "making Canada whole." There is often so much mutual back-patting about how the prime minister and premiers managed to reach agreement that critics become voices in the wilderness.

But, looking beyond this and even beyond the day when the accord becomes the law of the land, there will almost certainly be new tensions. Just look at the way the agreement is being sold.

DIFFERENT VERSIONS

What will cause the most trouble is the recognition of Quebec as a "distinct society", or, more particularly, that province's mandate to "promote" such a distinct society.

This has already been the most difficult clause to sell, since no one seems quite sure what it means. Since its significance is in the eye of the beholder, so to speak, it has become many things to many people.

In English Canada, generally speaking, we are told that the clause has no profound implications; that it's a mere recognition of the fact that Quebec is indeed different. And when women's groups and minority organizations worry aloud about their rights being affected, they are invariably assured there is no cause for concern.

That's outside Quebec. But if you listen to politicians in Quebec, you come away with a decidedly different impression. The constitutional authority to promote a distinct society is often portrayed as the greatest breakthrough since the invention of federal-provincial conferences.

Two's a Crowd

By BILL BUTTLE



"YES, I'M POSITIVE THAT'S NOT A DOGGY BAG!"

Cost of living rises faster than salaries



Your Business

By DIANNE MALEY
 Business Analyst
 Thomson News Service

Years ago, explaining the need for wage and price controls, then prime minister Pierre Trudeau said Canadians had a choice. We could accept a 10 per cent reduction in our standard of living voluntarily or face a much larger one later.

We chose the larger one later. Though inflation has since abated, the decline in our purchasing power that began in 1973 has continued throughout the 1980s. Given the upheavals that plague the world economy, no end is in sight.

This week, the United Nations released a gloomy forecast that said the world economy will be precariously unstable this year and may even slide into recession. In the western industrial world, workers' paycheques will shrink in real terms as growth slows and unemployment stays stubbornly high.

Curiously, the boom years from 1982 to 1987 did nothing to bolster our living standard. Wages and salaries grew by 23.2 per cent over the period, but prices rose more, by 24.8 per cent, according to Statistics Canada.

Average weekly earnings rose 4.4 per cent in October from the corresponding month in 1986. Though modest, the increase was the best since June, 1984.

HIDDEN COSTS

The price-wage discrepancy may be far worse than Statscan averages indicate. In Toronto and surrounding regions, for example, prices have been rising in leaps and bounds, particularly for housing.

A two-bedroom apartment in

Toronto rents for \$1,000 a month - if you can find one. Only one in a thousand is vacant. Yet not everyone's income has risen proportionally.

Across the country, most of us are paying more taxes than we did in 1982, yet tax increases are not included in the consumer price index, the Financial Post, a weekly business newspaper, points out.

The 1982 recession was so severe that many people are still without work. Ground lost in the past is unlikely to be made up in the foreseeable future.

To figure out how you've done in relation to the averages, the Financial Post has come up with a formula. Multiply your 1982 salary by 1.232, and compare the result with your 1987 earnings to see if you are ahead of the averages or behind them. (Your 1982 tax return will list your income for that year).

To measure your purchasing power, multiply your 1982 salary by 1.248, then compare the result with your salary.

CANADA VS. U.S.

Comparing our standard of living with that of our neighbors south of the border yields some interesting results, a Statscan study shows. In 1985, the year the study was done, Canada's standard of living was about 90 per cent of the Americans'. That's up from about 70 per cent in the 1960s.

Things for which we have to spend more of our income include household equipment and operations; booze and tobacco; and clothing and footwear. Things that are cheaper in Canada include construction, medical care and fuel and power.

So while our standard of living has declined over the past decade, the slide has been a North American, rather than a purely Canadian, phenomenon.

The decline of the American empire has been our decline, too.

Developers can play politics too

Staff Comment



By BRIAN MACLEOD

This time it was the developers' turn to baffle the councillors.

Two developers handed in last minute objections Jan. 18 about a Ballinafad subdivision which was approved in August, 1986.

The 17-home development, which will be built by Rene March, was opposed by Don Ricciuto and Ciril Zouvko.

Mr. Ricciuto has an agreement of purchase and sale to purchase building lots in the subdivision. Mr. Zouvko was represented at council Jan. 25 by his agent Al Pilutti - another prominent developer in town.

Mr. Ricciuto's lawyer, Bert Arnold, was also looking on in the audience at the meeting.

Curiously, neither of the objectors even own land in Ballinafad.

It was clear that should a prolonged debate at council take place, some interesting discussions would undoubtedly arise.

But the debate never happened. Instead, council ruled the objections were lodged against the draft approval of the subdivision and not the zoning process.

The appeal period against the subdivision expired long ago and since no mention was made of opposing the bylaw in the letters, council refused to refer the matter to the Ontario Municipal Board for a hearing.

In a tie vote (which means the motion is lost) Mr. Pilutti was denied the chance to speak to council about the objections.

The whole thing was over in five minutes.

A letter from Mr. Ricciuto's lawyer, to the Town of Halton Hills dated Jan. 25, the day of the council meeting, has some interesting information.

Mr. Arnold said Mr. Ricciuto "stands prepared at any time to withdraw his objection or have it rejected or dismissed provided Mr. Pilutti or his nominee do the same."

Mr. Ricciuto, said Mr. Arnold, only filed an objection because he wanted to "eliminate the possibility that Mr. Pilutti alone would control the timing of final approval."

That, it would seem, means that Mr. Pilutti would have company in delaying the subdivision.

The objections, by the way, were lodged on the basis of poor planning, poor engineering and encroachment of the hamlet into an agricultural area.

All three of those objections were matter-of-factly dismissed in short term by the town's Deputy Planning Director Bruce MacLean.

If the objections held no water, why put them in?

Developers, it seems, are allowed to play politics as well.

But you've got to hand it to council, they dealt with it swiftly and quietly.

The message to the developers must have been loud and clear.

We don't want to referee!

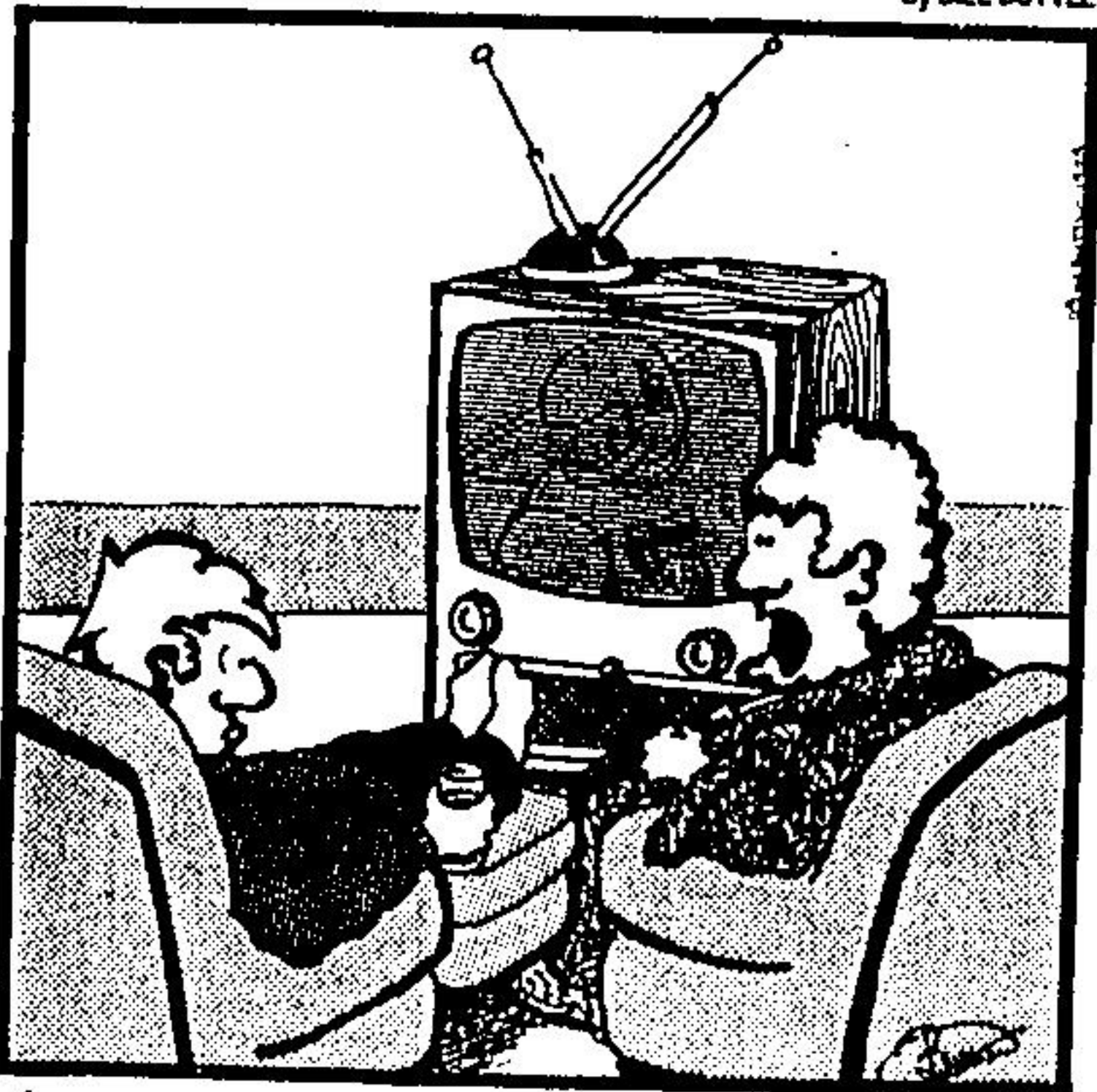
About 20 members of the 6th Pineview Girl Guides watched attentively during the Jan. 25 council meeting.

At the end of the regular business Mayor Russ Miller asked if the girls had any questions. Two probing questions came from the girls - what do you suppose they were?

"Do you have a council meeting every night?" and "Is there any special way you're seated?"

Two's a Crowd

By BILL BUTTLE



"I THOUGHT THE SUPER BOWL WOULD BE SOMETHING ABOUT COOKWARE!"