

But relative calm in Halton Hills

Management is nervous about labor union activity

By BRIAN MacLEOD
Herald Staff

Even though union activity in Halton Hills has been relatively quiet until recently, many companies are weary of the labor movement.

Statistics show that about 30 per cent of the labor force in Canada is unionized and that figure has remained constant for the past few years. But here in Halton only 11 per cent of the labor force has signed union cards.

But management is clearly getting nervous. Nobody wants to give employees a reason to form a union.

Although there is no current trend towards unions, here in Halton Hills two companies recently negotiated their first contracts. Curwood Packaging endured a six-week long strike which brought the spectre of picket line violence to Georgetown and Metroland Community Newspapers, which includes the Georgetown Independent and the Acton Free Press, went to the brink of a strike in November before the Southern Ontario Newspaper Guild settled its first contract.

Several larger employers in Halton Hills, with and without unions, don't want their names or their company's names used in the newspapers in connection with labor stories because they don't want to stir up union activity.

One company president, who wished to remain unidentified, said, "It's the approach that people take to each other," that makes the labor climate more amiable in Halton Hills.

While he was at a loss to explain why his firm's union has never gone out on strike, he felt that bargaining tool is not a popular concept in Halton Hills.

"They read the papers and they see the news and they know what's going on in Toronto and they just don't want to do it," he said of other strikebound areas.

Workers at his firm make "reasonably good wages for a community like Georgetown," he said.

Another company president, whose firm doesn't have a union, agreed to talk only if he and his company was not identified.

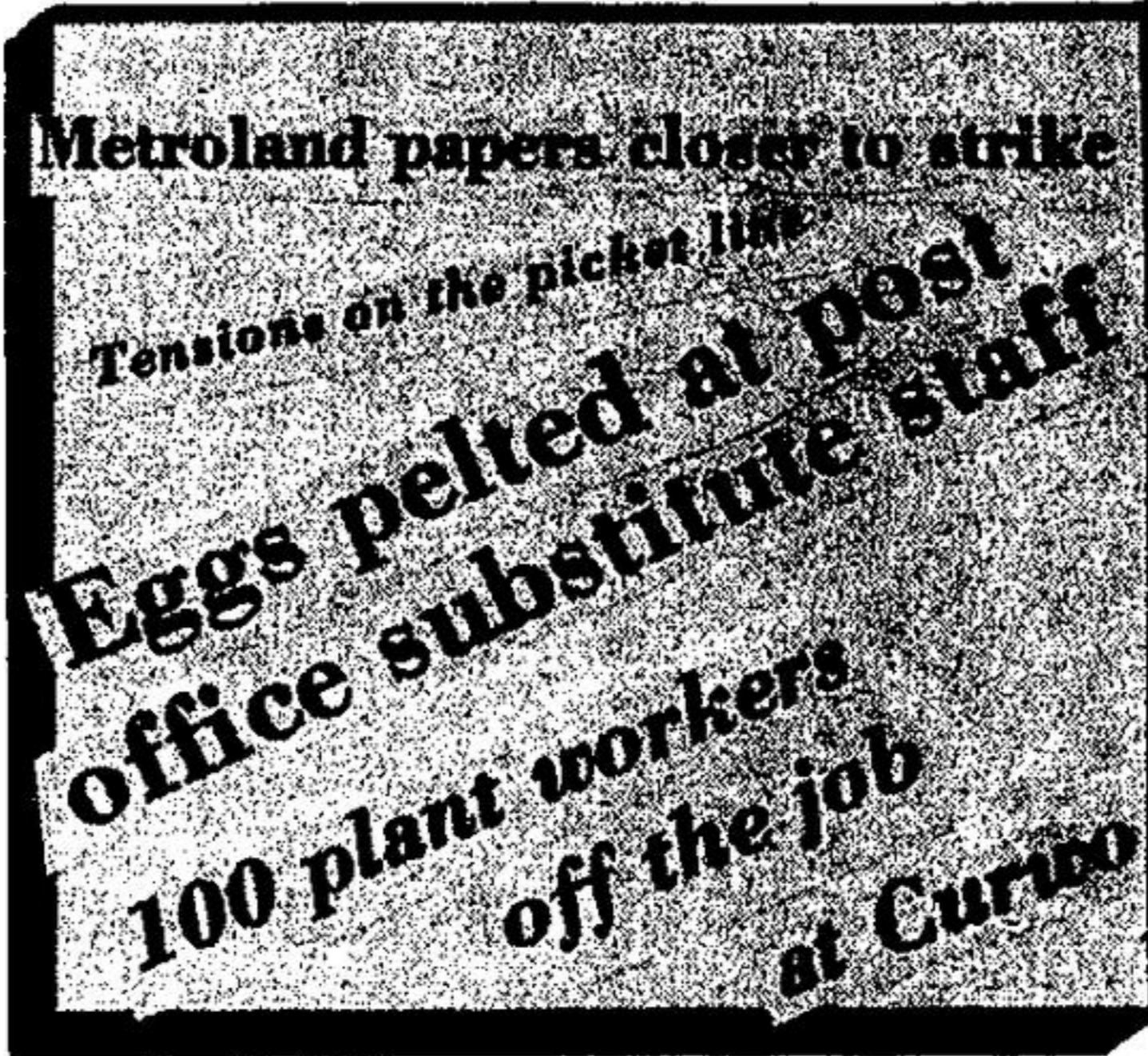
Unions are strictly a reactive thing, he said. "People only have a union once they feel they've been mistreated," he said. "We don't have any particular drive to stop them. If you don't give them a need to have (a union) they won't."

While he conceded that "wages of big unionized places tend to be higher," the trend is to pay your employees properly and don't give them a need for (a union)."

Several companies contacted claimed to have no idea why the labor climate in Halton Hills has remained relatively tame over the years. Others just didn't want to be interviewed on the subject.

But Blackbox Controls President Malcolm Black agreed with Halton's Executive Director of Business Development Brent Kearsse in one respect: unions tend to aim mainly at larger employees.

Mr. Kearsse said 50 employees is the "cutoff point." Companies with



less than 50 employees tend to be overlooked by unions, he said. About 80 per cent of Halton's businesses employ less than ten people, said Mr. Kearsse. Blackbox Controls falls into the category of less than 50 employees according to a 1985 survey of

business in Georgetown. "We're in kind of an unusual situation," said Mr. Black. "We don't have any group of people that do one (particular) thing." Mr. Black feels unions tend to concentrate in more urban centres. "Out here in Georgetown a lot of

people don't want to drive to large-scale operations," he said. Because Blackbox Controls is a small firm with a need for skilled workers, it tends to pay its workers well, he said.

Also, the work situation at his firm has been relatively stable over the years which does have an effect on labor relations, he said.

At least one other company president echoed Mr. Black's sentiment on a stable work force. Both agreed that maintaining an even work force can have a positive effect on labor relations.

Wages in Halton Hills is not perceived to be a problem by management. Another major employer, who asked to remain unidentified, said wages at his non-union plant are competitive with surrounding companies. But the only direct competition for his firm is located in the United States and wages at the Georgetown firm are higher, he said.

But unions have also played a part in maintaining good relations. By far the largest union in Halton is the Canadian Auto Workers union.

The most recent survey says the CAW comprises almost 60 per cent of the union membership in Halton. CAW Local 876 President Gerry Klatt has represented his union at

Standard Products since it was formed 30 years ago. Local 876 is currently in the negotiation process, said Mr. Klatt. The CAW at Standard Products represents 144 workers.

Wages at Standard Products are "not too bad" but benefits need to be boosted significantly, said Mr. Klatt. Local 876 has never walked out on strike, he said.

"We are not strike-happy people," Mr. Klatt thinks the CAW has had no major problems negotiating in recent years because the union has excellent leadership.

He credited CAW leader Bob White for the relative calm in Halton's largest union.

The lowest rate of pay at Standard Products is just over \$9.32 an hour with an extra \$1.35 for cost of living allowance, said Mr. Klatt.

Workers tend to be "fairly satisfied" with their wages but benefits are becoming an issue, he said.

Labor relations at Standard Products tend to be good because neither side asks for too much, he said.

Grievances filed against Standard Products by the CAW are few and that is indicative of the labor climate at the firm, he said.

Herald picture parade



Voices were raised in harmony Friday night as the Georgetown Choral Society presented an evening of song at St. George's Anglican Church. The themes varied throughout the evening, and included a segment devoted to South Pacific, which called for the members to dress for the part. (Herald photo).



The doors to Acton's new IGA store were officially opened Feb. 18. The new premises, which are located adjacent to where the former IGA business operated, offer shoppers warm and up-to-date surroundings. Seen here at the ribbon-cutting ceremony are, from left, Mike Manes, manager; Mayor Russ Miller; Reg DiCola, manager of the Bank of Nova Scotia, Acton; Donna Ledger, daughter of the original operators of the first Acton IGA; David Reed, Bank of Nova Scotia, Toronto; Marnie Manes; Kurtis McArthur, and Dave Manes, owner. (Herald photo)

Wojeck is back

Entertainment
By BOB SPENCE
Thomson News Service

The cast of Are You Lonesome Tonight? didn't really get a chance to be lonesome.

Spectators kept turning out in droves to watch the play at the Charlottetown Festival.

Now, the cast is taking to the road for a 2½ month cross-Canada tour.

The musical drama about the life of Elvis Presley sparked a controversy in Charlottetown because of the use of the famous F-word. The play, starring Leon Pownall and Ben Bass, kept playing to packed houses, though.

The road tour covers six provinces.

Remember Wojeck?
The show is back - and so is John Vernon.

CBC-TV has revived the old Wojeck series (Thursday nights). And Vernon, who starred in the series 20 years ago, has also returned to Canada. Vernon, though, is working on a new project, not shooting new scenes for the old series.

Vernon is starring in Two Men, a CBC movie that went into production Jan. 20. The movie tells the story of a Hungarian immigrant, with horrifying memories, who establishes a new life in Canada. Years later, he encounters in Toronto the man he believes was responsible for his family's execution at the Auschwitz concentration camp. The movie will be shown during the 1988-89 season.

Two movie videos about rock 'n roll stars from the 1950s have been released by RCA/Columbia Pictures Home Videos.

La Bamba (a 1987 movie hit) tells the life story of Ritchie Valens, while The Buddy Holly Story (1978) tells of Holly's short life.

The joint release is ironic. After the two young singers both became stars in the late 1950s, they died in the same plane crash in 1959.

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Do singers make great chefs?
Country and pop singer Sylvia has joined the Nashville Network as the host of Holiday Gourmet.
The six-part series of half-hour specials features celebrities preparing holiday meals. The episodes, of course, will be shown just before specific holidays, including Christmas and Easter.

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Winter returned to Halton Hills in a flurry over the weekend with several centimetres of the extremely cold variety covering Halton's rolling hills. The North Halton Golf and Country Club proved to be a popular hill once again for tobogganing enthusiasts despite the frosty wind. Some tobogganers even found that sitting up in the saddle, like this young lad, was the fastest way down the hill. (Herald photo)

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