

Halton Hills Outlook

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Their Outlook

A shot in the foot

If a governing political party appoints its own people to boards and commissions, the media likes to label it "patronage."



Queen's Park
Derek Nelson
Thomson News Service

And that's meant in a negative sense.

The result nowadays is that governing parties are increasingly masking their patronage appointments by also appointing high-profile people from other political parties.

But that approach, too, has its problems, as the Ontario Liberal government is finding out.

It is being frustrated in pursuing its own goals by some of the people it appointed - who have other ends to seek.

Take just two recent examples: Ross McClellan sits on the Social Assistance Review Board (SARB). This is where people bring appeals involving family-benefit and welfare claims.

Critics of SARB in the old Conservative days said it was too strict and too liable to reject appeals.

So the Liberals restructured the board and loaded it with activist types: McClellan, for instance, is a former NDP MPP. The board chairman is another New Democrat, former Toronto alderman Joanne Campbell.

In short, they've loaded the board with people who are much more liable to be easy about appeals rather than tough.

And that is exactly what has happened, much to the Liberal's chagrin.

Recently, a three-member SARB panel on which McClellan sat ruled on an appeal by a resident psychiatric patient seeking what amounts to pocket money for incidentals, similar to what people who live in homes for the aged receive from the province as comfort money.

Not unexpectedly, the SARB panel said the person appealing and all others in a similar boat should get \$149 a month. In total, that's millions of dollars a year.

POLICY CHANGE
The government has asked SARB to reconsider on the grounds the board has stepped beyond its jurisdiction by ordering a government change of policy for which there is no legal authority.

If the board doesn't reconsider, then the Ministry of Community and Social Services intends to appeal the decision to the courts.

None of this would have happened, of course, if the Liberals had appointed their own people to the board in sufficient numbers in the first place.

Then, the ground rules about what SARB could and couldn't do would be clear.

Example two is John Sewell, who has been making life miserable for Housing Minister Chaviva Hosek.

Sewell was appointed chairman of the Metro Toronto Housing Authority almost two years ago, but, at a hastily called weekend press conference, Hosek announced he won't be re-appointed when his term runs out in November.

On Monday, it was Sewell's activist supporters turn to rally around their man at a press conference.

The various "insider" stories about what really happened between Sewell and Hosek tend to be sympathetic to Sewell.

But whoever is in the "right" (whatever that means in these kind of circumstances), it's obvious that Sewell was proving a thorough pain-in-the-neck for the government.

Yet, the Liberals knew his reputation as a maverick and NDP fellow-traveller when they hired him.

Like the SARB appointments, Sewell is evidence of why a governing party should appoint allies rather than opponents to various boards and positions.

Calling it "patronage" detracts from the real reason a government wants its own people in positions of power.

How does a government implement its agenda if those who don't agree with it can frustrate it at every turn?

It is noticeable that while the SARB issue remains up in the air, Sewell's replacement at the housing authority is Jean Augustine, a well-known Liberal.

That way, there won't be any surprises or policy conflicts in future.

Two's a Crowd

By BILL BUTTLE



We have one listing in your price range...a Mr. Fido on Elm Street.

Good times abound but still we worry

People in Toronto have become real worriers, a legacy of the 1982 recession. When people get together here, talk soon turns to the economy. This is strange because things have never been better. The other

buy a condominium since house prices were out of sight and worried about the outlook for interest rates.

As I listened to them talking, I realized how much economics intrudes into our daily lives. Yet most people, when asked, say they know nothing about business and economics, nor do they want to.

It's just as well, I suspect. It seems the more people know, the more they worry. Forecasters have the added problem of worrying about whether their predictions will come true.



Your Business
Diane Maley
Thomson News Service

night, as I was sitting around with some friends, we had to admit we were puzzled about our own growing anxiety.

Is it something endemic to Canadians? Now, with interest rate pressures apparently easing, it seems likely that our anxiety will increase rather than diminish. After all, if rates fall, things must be much worse than we thought.

Wednesday's news that the U.S. trade deficit was lower than anticipated in the latest month sent interest rates tumbling on financial markets, the second such drop in recent weeks. However, it is by no means certain that this drop will spread to lending rates at banks and trust companies.

GOOD SIGN
If the trend toward lower rates becomes widespread, it is likely the economy will keep chugging along quite comfortably for some time. Our worries will have been for nothing.

My friends each seemed to have a different reason to be concerned. Steve wanted to open another video store, but he was having a hard time finding people who would work for \$7 an hour. Elaine was thinking about selling her travel agency because she could not attract experienced help.

Sam, who is on strike, pondered the prospect of being out of work until Christmas. Leonard wanted to

NATION OF WORRIERS

But if Canadians have a tendency to feel anxious in good times and bad, it may be because we feel that our financial well-being is beyond our control. We depend on the Americans for our economic health, or the Japanese or the Europeans. Our sense of helplessness is pervasive and growing.

The effect on the Canadian psyche is interesting. As much as we would like to be free-wheeling entrepreneurs like the Americans, we tend to hesitate. No matter how hard we work, we could be scuppered by the American deficit or the Japanese stock market.

If Brian Mulroney and the Conservatives want to transform us into a nation of entrepreneurs, they will have to do something to make it easier for small business to raise risk capital. As the Canadian Chamber of Commerce points out in a recent study, so much money is going into real estate that there is little left to finance small business.

Some form of tax incentives to make it attractive for people to invest in small businesses would help. But handouts aren't the answer. What the country needs is a stable environment that encourages risk-taking and opens the doors to growth.

The way it is now, it's easier and safer to work for someone else than to risk your life savings on a business, particularly since it has become so hard to find good help.

Taking a hike?

There were certainly some lessons to be learned following last week's five-hour discussion at town council on whether or not to purchase seven kilometres of abandoned CN railway line.



By BRIAN MACLEOD

CN offered the land to the town back in July for a mere \$5,000.

Many naturalists, and the town recreation department saw it as a "rare opportunity" to acquire a nice piece of land which they said was perfect for development of a trail for hikers, cross-country skiers and horseriding.

Landowners say their properties are invaded and vandalized by people who use the tract now. Motorized vehicles, a nuisance because of the destruction they can do to agricultural land, can be seen on the land far more often than hikers they said.

Living next to such a "beautiful" piece of land can be very disruptive, they said.

And they weren't going to stand by and watch as more and more people were invited to that small tract of land.

Councillors knew they were going to make a tough decision. It just happened in a strange way.

Four hours into the discussion Coun Betty Fisher introduced a motion to call the vote. The discussion had gone on long enough, she said. Fine enough. It had been a long time. Trouble is, the discussion had only taken the form of questions.

Councillors didn't get a chance to appeal to their colleagues to make a decision one way or the other.

They added to their own undoing when they passed the motion to call the vote.

It was only after an angry Coun. Norm Elliott spoke out in favor of a possible compromise solution that councillors rethought the issue and voted to ask CN for a possible extension of the closing date past Sept. 30 for a possible purchase of the land.

That move clearly flabbergasted landowners who stayed until midnight awaiting the decision.

And the worst part is the debate could happen again if CN grants the extension.

The lessons? One would doubt councillors would vote to cut off their own debate again, regardless of the lateness of the hour.

And abutting landowners showed what motivated citizens with a clear purpose can do.

You have to wonder how important the issue of leadership will be in the upcoming federal election.

If recent newsletters issued by the Liberals and Conservatives is any indication, it won't be important.

The "Liberal Express" newsletter issued by Pierre Klein "speaks out on free trade" yet it fails to mention leader John Turner even once. And we all know what Mr. Turner thinks of free trade.

The letter does however, refer to the free trade deal as "the Mulroney deal."

PC candidate Garth Turner also fails to mention his own leader - Prime Minister Brian Mulroney.

His newsletter does however, mention Ontario Treasurer Bob Nixon, former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, former Secretary of State Barbara McDougall, and Mississauga MP Don Blenkarn. Could be an interesting election.

SNAFU® by Bruce Beattie



"Ah... The first sign of fall: Christmas decorations!"