

the HERALD Outlook

"OUTLOOK" is published each Saturday by the HALTON HILLS HERALD, Home Newspaper of Halton Hills, A Division of Canadian Newspapers Company Limited, at 45 Guelph Street, Georgetown, Ontario L7G 3Z6.
Second Class Mail - Registered Number 0943.

877-2201

877-8822

PUBLISHER
David A. Beattie
EDITOR
Mike Turner
AD MANAGER
Dan Taylor

STAFF WRITERS
Brian MacLeod Donna Kell
SPORTS WRITER
Paul Syboda
ACCOUNTING
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CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING
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Todd Aikman

Mulroney in a squeeze

It may not be necessary for Prime Minister Brian Mulroney to fire Secretary of State Lucien Bouchard. But common sense dictates that he should move this particular minister to another, less sensitive, portfolio.

In his present job, Mr. Bouchard is responsible for federal policy on minority languages. He's also the minister who said Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa was justified in invoking the "notwithstanding clause" to continue the ban on exterior English signs.

He is obviously not the right person to be looking after minority language interests - not when these minorities include the anglophones of Quebec.

Since the defeat of several cabinet ministers in the Nov. 21 election, the prime minister has transferred portfolios to other ministers on an interim basis. Mr. Bouchard has been given responsibility for environment and there has been speculation he will continue in this post.

The important thing is to get him replaced as secretary of state - a job that was never a natural for him. As a long-time Quebec nationalist and supporter of the "yes" side in the 1980 referendum, he was bound to have difficulties in that portfolio.

MR. CLEAN

He entered the cabinet last year after serving as Canada's ambassador to France, a position given him by his close friend, Mr. Mulroney. He entered federal politics last year via a byelection and was widely billed as "Mr. Clean."

Mr. Bouchard was expected to help Canadians forget about the various scandals that had touched the cabinet in the last Parliament.

While he might well do that, his political career will not be helped by his handling of the present language dispute. He not only annoyed his parliamentary colleagues by disappearing for days after the Quebec government's action, but when he did speak, it wasn't what the majority of other ministers wanted to hear.

What he said was at odds with the comments of the prime minister, who said Mr. Bourassa's response was "unsatisfactory."

And there are some, such as Liberal MP Herb Gray, who feel this disagreement should force Mr. Bouchard out of cabinet entirely.

SNAFU® by Bruce Beattie



Ottawa

Stewart MacLeod
Thomson News Service

"We are talking about a public dispute on a very important matter," said the deputy opposition leader. "I think the principle is clear that the minister cannot remain in the cabinet."

No pun intended, but we get into a grey area here. It's true that ministers traditionally leave cabinet when they disagree with government policy. But it could be argued in this case that the disagreement arises in reaction to another government's policy.

NOT EASY

Opinions obviously differ about this, but it's certainly not as cut-and-dried as the resignations of the three anglophone ministers from the Quebec cabinet over Premier Bourassa's response to the Supreme Court decision.

That was a clear case of a disagreement over official government policy.

Liberal Robert Kaplan, a former solicitor general, says it is "unacceptable" to have a government speaking out of both sides of its mouth. But, if we had resignations every time a disagreement arose among ministers, there would have to be revolving doors into the cabinet room.

Anyway, we all know that the prime minister, who has just won another majority, is not going to turf out Lucien Bouchard without great and just cause.

Also, what the minister said is not going to hurt him in Quebec.

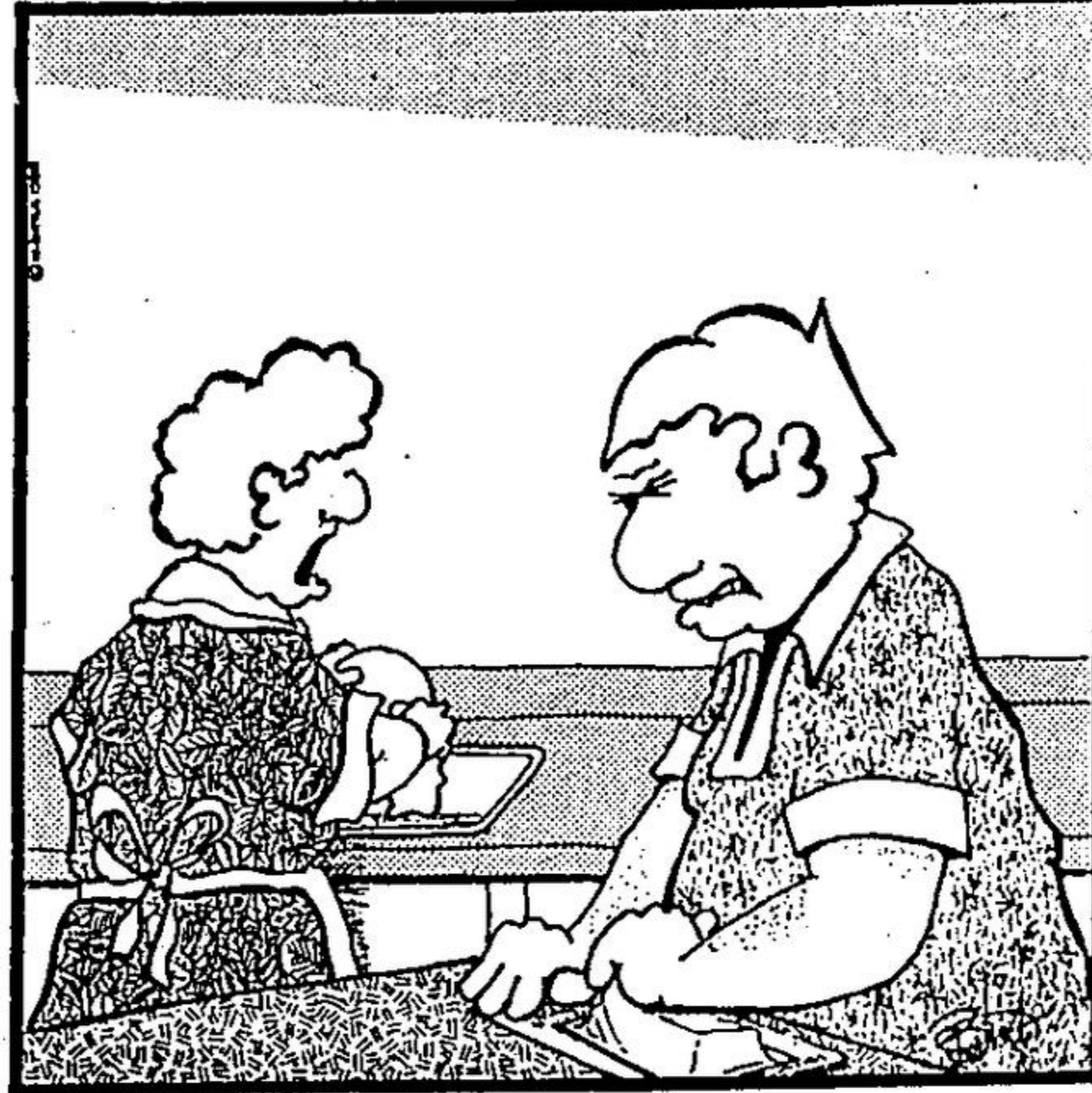
That being said, Mr. Bouchard is clearly no longer suitable material for secretary of state. It's simply unreasonable for the minister responsible for minority language rights to support another government's action in suppressing those rights.

Little wonder the anglophone community in Quebec feels so abandoned at times.

The prime minister should not wait for his forthcoming cabinet shuffle to send out the message. He should replace Mr. Bouchard pronto.

Two's a Crowd

By BILL BUTTLE



"Stop moaning! . . . If it weren't for bubble-packs you'd need some other form of physical exercise!"

Debates go public

There are those who believe it is no longer possible to have a reasoned debate in this country. People are polarized along ideological lines, mouthing empty slogans at the expense of the common good.

Think of the mud-slinging US presidential election, the embarrassing name-calling in the Canadian federal election, the passions that overwhelmed reason in the free-trade debate. Thoughtful people are worried that good government has been rendered impossible.

Good government is not something we often see. But the degree to which public debate has broken down will have real effects on the everyday lives of Canadians. Think of Quebec, where some people are resorting to violence over what language other people use on their commercial signs.

And Ontario, where the provincial government keeps raising taxes while restricting expenses in the two most important areas of a humane, civilized society: education and health care.

Where the knee-jerk reaction has been the most puzzling is in the area of unemployment. The free-trade debate sparked a furor over plant closings and job losses. This is tired rhetoric.

MORE JOBS THAN EVER

Hundreds of thousands of people have been laid off in North America over the past decade, yet the unemployment rate is the lowest it has been in 14 years. The steel industry, the auto industry - and all of smokestack America - have undergone a vast restructuring.

The service industry, too, has had its share of job-losses, particularly since the stock market crash. All this has happened with no net bad effect on the economy.

I am not suggesting that it's nothing to lose a job. People who are laid off must be given generous severance packages and help in finding other work, including effective and immediate job retraining. Older people and those in economically depressed areas need extra help.

But to suggest the economy is going to hell in a handbasket because a plant is closing or an industry is coming under increasing pressure from foreign competition is sheer



Your
Business
Diane Maley
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nonsense. The economy is dynamic, creating and destroying both wealth and jobs.

The danger of this growing tendency to react rather than to sit down and think things over is that affected people will be caught in the crossfire. In Toronto, for example, people are lining up for heart surgery, some of them dying while they wait. Meanwhile, the provincial health minister is busy fighting with doctors and hospital administrators, trying to shift the blame for postponed operations on them.

DEBATE NEEDED

We cannot leave governing to government, it seems. Yet, we will have to if we cannot discuss things reasonably among ourselves.

Every time you pick up a newspaper, you read that some poor souls are facing the loss of their jobs. At least 3,500 people in the Canadian furniture industry will lose their jobs because of the free-trade agreement, an industry report warns in a Toronto newspaper.

The furniture makers council prepared the report to bolster its case for government help in coping with the removal of the tariff on US furniture. We pay companies to stay in business; nothing new there. Elsewhere, we pay workers not to work.

When it comes to certain government entitlement programs, we pay people whether they need the money or not. Pensions and family allowance benefits are universal. We believe means tests are degrading, and perhaps they are.

But while we continue with this largesse, the quality of our education is not what one would hope for from a wealthy, modern democracy. The quality of our health care is diminishing. The political process is breaking down. And despite the best efforts of Finance Minister Michael Wilson, the national debt is running out of control.



Staff
Comment

Brian MacLeod

Gun issue still rages

"Guns don't kill people - people kill people."

It's a saying you may have seen on a bumper of a car, or heard during debates on gun control laws in Canada and in the United States.

After watching television reports of the slaughter in a California schoolyard, Tuesday, it's difficult to believe that many people still cling to the notion that possession of a gun is a right.

If California's gun control laws had a semblance of sanity to them, Patrick Purdy wouldn't have been able to purchase a powerful assault rifle for \$400, then turn it on a crowded schoolyard, killing innocent children indiscriminately.

Gun advocates are right, people kill people. But easy access to guns sure makes it a lot easier for people to kill people. I doubt if Patrick Purdy would have wandered onto that schoolyard with a hunting knife with the same purpose in mind.

There have been complaints about rising crime rates in Canada recently. Even articles in a Detroit newspaper about how "Toronto the Good" is not longer the "Good". But at least in Canada, if someone holds a grudge against a neighbor, or someone feels he's gotten the short end of the stick from society, or he just doesn't like Mondays, you can feel reasonably sure he isn't going to wander down to the nearest gun store, buy a weapon and turn it on the public indiscriminately.

All of this highlights the absurdity of allowing powerful lobby groups, such as National Rifle Association in the U.S., the power to spend \$10 million, to make sure gun control advocates, in this case, Michael Dukakis, don't get elected.

If there were ever glaring examples of man's inhumanity to man, it's how "free" countries allow such slaughters to happen time after time, in the name of political expedience.

Residents who live on Dawson and Irwin Crescents may not find it funny. Local councillors may not find it funny. But observers at council meetings over the past six or seven months might find the whole issue rather awkwardly hilarious.

The town's attempts to solve some vandalism problems on the walkway between the two streets, by lighting it, have turned the walkway into a "supernova" or an airport runway, at a cost to the taxpayers of \$10,000. And the residents are most upset.

At Monday's council meeting, councillors were attemptin to lay blame. Some said it was the engineering department's fault for not doing it right. Some said it was bad advice from consultants, but only one councillor, Al Cook, stood up and said the Town should have listened to the residents when they said they only wanted one light, instead of the three which now illuminate the walkway.

Let's hope that doesn't stick.



"Have you seen the steroids commercial with the guy doing a baton routine with barbells?"