

Editorial

Sunday shopping: time to act

A group of top executives from the national food store chains told Halton's acting Regional chairman last week that Halton's shoppers want Sunday shopping, and that they can find a work force that's eager to work on Sundays.

The group, which calls itself the coalition of grocery retailers and distributors, has produced figures which they say backs up those claims.

Halton can't simply dismiss these figures. Nor can the Region accept them on blind faith.

It's time to act, one way or the other. Simply cursing the province for handing over the responsibility on Sunday shopping won't work. Yes, the province should have tackled the issue instead of passing legislation allowing regions to give out exemptions. But MPPs will have to answer to the voters in two years.

If the coalition's figures - which were published by reputable Goldfarb consultants - are correct, then relaxing restrictions on Sunday shopping seems the logical choice.

It does seem absurd that in these days when thousands of workers are forced to work what is known as "Continental shifts" - that is, they get their weekends in the middle of the normal work week - that lawmakers disallow such a practice in the retail trade.

The coalition says large fruit markets which are allowed to open on Sundays are selling more than laws allow.

They also say their huge grocery stores are losing millions of dollars each Sunday they're closed.

And this business of roping off aisles to conform to Sunday shopping laws is ridiculous and in many cases embarrassing.

Obviously, chain store executives don't buy the argument that consumers would merely spread their dollars over seven days instead of six.

However, if Halton should freely grant exemptions for Sunday shopping, it would be unfair to simply favor grocery stores. Other retail stores would have to be granted the same choice.

The coalition's figures say shoppers and store owners favor having the option of opening Sundays.

But acting chairman Rob Forbes says people who would have to work on Sundays would not favor opening on the seventh day.

Ultimately, more than grocery store owners or executives chasing dollars, those who would have to work on Sundays should be given the most consideration.

Perhaps a compromise can be reached and Sunday openings allowed with restricted hours. That would still allow people who work Sundays to attend church.

A report currently being prepared by Halton Region should reflect the wishes of all the groups involved. The Goldfarb report consisted of 304 interviews with heads of households. Yet it's the students who would likely work on Sundays. It will take more than 304 interviews to find out the true feelings of residents in a Region with five urban areas. And the heads of households aren't the only ones who will work on Sundays. Sure, the students aren't of voting age. But Sunday shopping affects them directly. Their opinion should be represented in Halton's report.

We hope - and expect - that Halton's politicians won't dance around the issue leaving Sunday shopping up in the air once again.

NDP has split personality

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Toronto - So, Ontario New Democratic Party Leader Bob Rae is being touted again for boss of the federal party.

One report even said he'd decided to run but was pre-empted by former B.C. New Democrat premier Dave Barrett's decision to jump into the race.

Maybe, maybe not. Nothing in politics is forever. While, three months ago, Rae said believably that he wouldn't be going federally, times do change.

They especially change when a politician is bombarded by entreaties from friends and acquaintances who say that only he can play the saviour. That gets to the ego that lurks in every politician, an ego that says "of course I can do it" and without which he or she probably wouldn't be in politics in the first place.

It may not be enough to move Rae, since he is well aware he also carries truly negative baggage in that he is from Ontario and is seen as being anti-Western Canada, pro-Ottawa and pro-Quebec on national

issues. This is why the NDP establishment wants him, of course. It isn't thrilled with the explicitly populist, anti-Quebec themes Barrett emphasized upon entering the campaign.

Mind you, some people other than key New Democrats would love to see Rae leading the NDP federally. Imagine the next federal election with Rae, the quintessentially establishment Ontario, versus Quebec politicians Brian Mulroney and Jean Chretien - and no polarizing issue like free trade. Preston Manning's conservative Reform Party could take up to 40 western seats. Barrett as NDP leader would make that goal much tougher to accomplish.

Still, the NDP's frantic search for a leader is really a symptom of a much deeper party malady than simply lack of a messiah.

What is the purpose of the NDP?

Its social program has been implemented in the main, arguments nowadays revolving more around how to pay for the results than anything else.

Its economic program ("socialism") is in tatters, even the Soviets no longer believe that the state can allocate resources more efficiently than the market.

In the international sphere, its Third World worship, kneejerk anti-Americanism and blind eye to Marxist tyrannies have been adopted by most Liberals and (except for the anti-Americanism) Tories as well.

As for peculiarly Canadian issues such as Meech Lake, the NDP suffers precisely the same split personality as all other major parties.

It was fascinating to read a recent newspaper article by Rae's close advisor Robin Sears, in which Sears tried to set out an agenda for the party's future.

Ironically, all he did was regurgitate the old postscriptions on the economy, albeit in slightly different ways.

"Broad restructuring of declining sectors, including serious labor-market intervention... a national economic strategy that picks winning sectors and works with the leading players to innovate and win new markets" and so on.

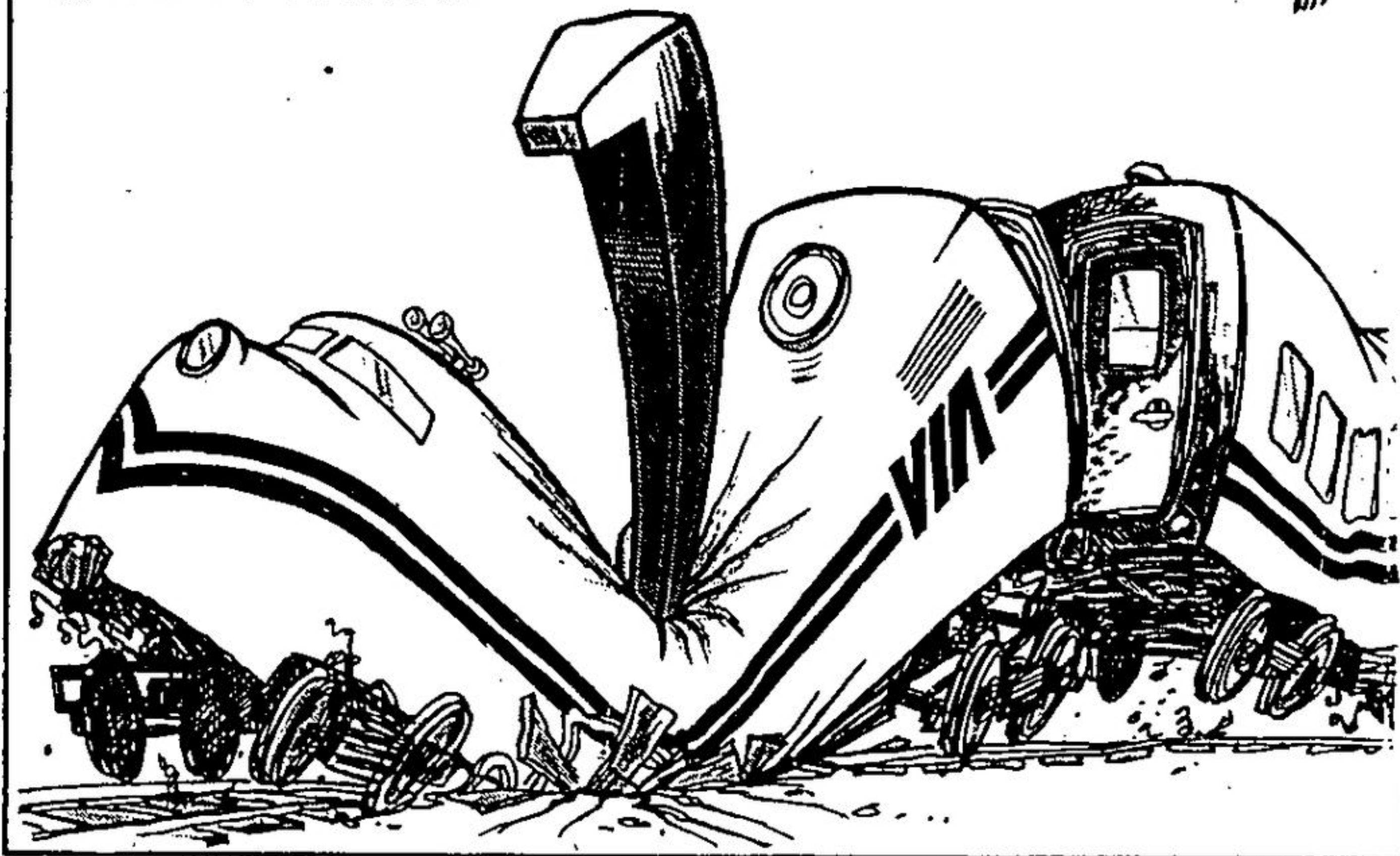
It is new words for an ancient idea, the belief that government is capable of picking winners and losers or organizing people's lives so as to produce a smoothly running economy.

Yet, even the NDP's role model, the authoritarian, elitist, homogeneous Sweden, long ago realized that only the unfair and capricious market can properly make such decisions.

What government can do well is provide infrastructure (roads, railroads, airports and so on) for market change and provide transitional funding for individuals caught by market shifts (re-training, unemployment insurance and such). Only the second interests New Democrats. Only the first is absolutely vital.

Bob Rae or whoever New Democrats pick as leader will face the NDP dilemma of having to push a dogma - that politicians and bureaucrats can make intelligent market decisions - at a time when all the evidence suggests such a belief is nonsense.

THE LAST SPIKE....



The GST and the real world

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Imagine the bureaucrat's perfect world:

The federal government introduces a nine-per-cent Goods and Services Tax (GST) as scheduled on Jan. 1, 1991.

Mr. Consumer and Ms. Wage-earner find when they do their weekly shopping that prices are rising at a pace that will lop about \$6 to \$7 from every \$100 they have to spend.

They'd really like to get that back, otherwise they'll see a decline in their living standards. That means less, or poorer quality, food. It could mean fewer clothes for their kids, or putting off that planned summer vacation to another year.

But are they concerned? Well, no. And, heaven knows, they wouldn't think of asking their bosses for more money to replace the dollars they are losing to inflation.

They are prepared to bear the burden of reduced buying power because there's that informative, new tax index that's being put out by Statistics Canada.

And, what does that index tell them?

It says inflation is not really costing them \$6 to \$7 for every \$100, but substantially less. Roughly \$2.25 to \$3 of that loss is actually due to the impact of the new GST.

"Oh well," say Mr. Consumer and Ms. Wage-earner, vaguely comforted. "That's all right, then. We won't try to get that money back."

REAL WORLD

So much for the bureaucrat's vision of the future. Let's talk for a moment about the real world.

By next fall, just before the GST is due, Statistics Canada expects to have developed a new index which will tell us how much taxes are pushing up the cost of living.

That may just seem like an interesting sidelight, but the timing

is of great significance.

StatsCan officials say the index will help Canadians gauge the impact of the new federal tax on inflation.

But voices from the Finance Department reveal another motive. They hope when the time comes for negotiating pay raises that employees will forget about the inflationary role of taxes.

Otherwise, they worry, large pay settlements could set off a new round of inflation.

The fly in the ointment is that when workers see prices rise by, say, seven per cent, they care not one whit whether half of that is due to bad weather, or higher energy costs, or taxes.

WHAT IT COSTS

The bottom line, as corporate leaders are fond of saying, is what it costs.

"The only CPI (consumer price index) that employees care about is what happens at the cash register," one far-sighted economist is quoted as saying.

In recent months, as the impact of new federal and provincial taxes worked their way through the system, the cost of living has stayed at a steady five per cent.