

## We need books

In recent months heavy issues such as waste disposal, road repairs and finishing the town's new civic centre have all been headline news. But, in the wake of the rush to jump on these issues, some less conspicuous, yet important, institutions can be forgotten.

In Halton Hills the case in point is our two libraries.

Halton Hills Library Board member Steve Foster told councillors Monday that our libraries in Georgetown and Acton are "currently below standard in all categories."

He said service to libraries users is not as good as it should be.

And chief librarian Betsy Cornwell said the town needs 16,000 new books to meet current needs and another 33,000 books by 1995 if their population projections hold true.

We should all be a little bit embarrassed.

The town pushed ahead with great zeal to get the new civic centre built at a cost of over \$6 million. But now we're told that not only will we need more money to keep our libraries up with projected population increases, but that our libraries are now "substandard."

Cultural institutions like libraries are often the hub of a community. There can be no downplaying their importance. From centuries-old legendary scholars to present-day school children they've played a critical role in education and learning.

We've watched our universities crumble through gross underfunding. We don't want that frame of mind which dominates provincial and federal politics to carry over to the municipal arena.

You can debate the merits of civic centres, roads and water pipelines from Lake Ontario at length, but a dollar spent on books is a dollar well spent. Few would debate that.

The population projections for Halton Hills - 36,300 people in Georgetown and more than 11,000 people in Acton by 2001 - are very similar to Halton Region's own projections. And if we're to meet the needs of those increasing numbers of people, we'd better get to it now.

Halton Hills councillors did some hard looking to find the money for the civic centre and we expect them to search equally hard to keep our libraries an important and well-equipped institution in town.

## Fighting on



Brian MacLeod  
Editor's Notebook

You've got to hand it to the organizers of POWER - they know how to organize a publicity campaign. For the second time in a year the citizens group hit the steps of Queen's Park, this time demonstrating against the Greater Toronto Area committee. More than 250 people from several environmental groups staged a colorful demonstration which brought them 12 inches of copy in the Globe and Mail as well as other media attention.

There are those in town who say POWER (Protect Our Water and Environmental Resources) is wielding quite a bit of influence these days - some even say too much - but they're just doing what

they were told to do last year by a successful environmentalist. Remember Lois Gibbs? The woman who fought and won the battle at the Love Canal in the United States told POWER members to make the fight against the Acton dump proposal, or any other fight for that matter, a political fight.

She said fighting such proposals entirely on scientific grounds rarely works. She gave that advice drawing on her own nightmarish experience.

And their approach seems to be working. They've succeeded in getting the town to support their proclamation against the GTA, a move the town clearly wasn't prepared to make without prompting.

After more than two years they seem to be picking up steam.

It's an oddity. Most ratepayers groups lose interest after an initial push.

The key is the environment. It's the number one issue on the minds of most Canadians today and POWER seems to be the focal point of most people's concerns in Halton Hills.

## Rae should avoid federal NDP

Derek Nelson

Queen's Park  
Thomson News Service



NDP Leader Bob Rae's decision to remain out of the federal NDP race will likely prove good for him and his family.

And for his party.

Unfortunately, it also makes things a lot tougher for those Canadians who believe the country needs a political alternative to the three old-line parties of the PCs, Liberals and NDP.

A federal election that involved a fight between an NDP led by Rae, a PC party starring Brian Mulroney, and a Liberal party hailing Jean Chretien would be perceived in western Canada (at least) as a squabble among two Quebecers and their kissing cousin from Ontario.

The western-based Reform Party would have done extremely well in such circumstances.

Now, the NDP will likely choose former B.C. premier Dave Barrett, a compelling stump politician with a deep populist streak who has already thumbed his nose at Quebec.

As federal NDP leader, he would compete for much of the same base

of support as Preston Manning, leader of the Reform Party.

Rae would have gone into the NDP leadership race as the party's establishment candidate, beholden to the bilingual vision of Canada (he is fluent in French) and backed by the labor-union oriented segments of the party.

He might have beaten the westerner, too. "I think there was a lot of support out there," Rae said of his chances.

Barrett is still remembered as the man who became premier of B.C. only to do such a bad job he lost it all in three years. Too much the buffoon, many said - and radical to boot.

Now, Rae will remain in Ontario, where he has promised to lead the NDP into the next provincial election. He didn't allow the stroking of his ego by a very efficient campaign aimed at drafting him (shades of Bill Davis and the federal Tory leadership of 1983) to overcome his common sense, although the decision was quite close.

Interestingly, the partial explanation he gave for why he isn't going to go federally is as valid for getting out of the provincial frying pan as it is for not jumping into the federal fire.

### ONLY HUMAN

"I've got three kids under eight. I just lost my brother to cancer this year. My wife's parents were killed in a car accident a few years ago. I mean, we're only human," he said.

At the end of the day "I had to make an entirely personal decision," he said.

Over the past couple of years, Rae's speeches have become more reflective and personally philosophical, with much about "love" and the human condition. He leaves the impression that once he has done his duty - one last try in Ontario under more favorable conditions than in the 1987 provincial election where he had to watch Liberal David Peterson practically walk on water on his way to victory - he's off to do something more useful.

As Peterson still points out (and because he's been there he knows it is true), there is probably no worse or tougher job - "it's a terrible job" - in this province than leader of the opposition at Queen's Park. No one is ignored more by the Ontario media - and public - than the person in that post (except maybe the leader of the third party in the legislature).

It takes enormous time away from one's family, often for little obvious reward. Federally, it would have been even worse, and this when his children are at an age when he wants to be around as much as possible. That's why his saying 'no' is good for him and his family.

Out of loyalty, and perhaps curiosity to see whether he can defeat Peterson in a more even contest than last time, he'll fight the next provincial election. But no one should be surprised if he then leaves the political game entirely.

If he were viewing life from an academic setting instead of traipsing the back roads of Ontario in pursuit of the elusive goal of electoral victory, he'd at least be home for supper every night.



## Why a Via royal commission?

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The most bizarre aspect of the government's frontal assault on Via Rail was the announcement of a royal commission to produce a plan for the next century's passenger transport system.

One suspects it to be a last-minute sop thrown out by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in an attempt to cool down anger over the Via cuts.

Indeed, it was reported that Transport Minister Benoit Bouchard told Tory caucus colleagues before his announcement that the commission would "help sell the cuts to constituents." We'll see.

The royal commission certainly seems to have been a rush job. Bouchard's prepared press statement makes no reference to it and he just tacked it on the end of his opening remarks. The news release from the prime minister's office was not included in the transport department's kit.

One imagines a healthy brigade of departmental staff working well into the wee hours to throw a few jargonistic phrases together in time. Translation. Printing. Lots of overtime pay. You, the taxpayer, get the bill, of course.

It's most peculiar. Here you have a government in power for just over five years. Via Rail service has been an issue throughout that time and years previous, for that matter. There are scads of public and secret documents comparing this mode of transportation to that.

Moreover, Bouchard has said half of Via will be slashed by cabinet order, without hearings by the National Transportation Agency. Only perseverance on the part of the Commons transport committee, including some Tory rebels, ensures the public is heard at all.

Suddenly, after all that, a royal commission - which no doubt will hear those same opinions Bouchard preferred to ignore - is deemed necessary.

Let's look at some information the commission will likely study, and which is already available from the load of paper released Wednesday by transport and Via.

One point that won't escape the notice of commissioners is that virtually every other industrial country but Canada is stepping up its investment in rail passenger service.

France has spent about \$6 billion on its "trains a grande vitesse" and \$2 billion on conventional-speed service. In the next decade, Italy will invest \$16 billion on high-speed rail. West Germany is already into a \$14.8 billion program to end in 1996.

Spain is pumping in \$21.5 billion. British Rail has invested \$6.3 billion and expects to be profitable in two years. Amtrak, the American rail service, has received investments of \$3 billion and is coping far better than Via. Amtrak's operating cost recovery is 69 per cent compared with 30 per cent for Via.

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