

the HERALD

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Debate is needed

Halton Hills councillors don't seem to be too interested in debating the French-language issue that so many other municipalities have tackled.

But that doesn't mean it's a non-issue as many councillors are saying.

A survey of Halton Hills politicians shows that they don't feel that they need to debate the issue.

Many say it is a provincial issue and the media is sensationalising the issue by giving it such a high profile.

While those councillors who say the debate over Bill 8 is a provincial issue may have a point, that debate has obviously spilled over into the municipal arena and some municipalities, which are directly affected by the provisions of the bill, have chosen to act. We agree that these acts aren't motivated by bigotry, but rather by frustration.

However, if our country is to survive as one entity that frustration has to be reined in. Allowing it to manifest itself with "English-only" votes is extremely dangerous.

Coun. Joe Hewitt says the town doesn't deal with some political issues that should actually be addressed. We agree.

There comes a time when an issue stimulates such public interest and debate that the inevitable question is asked: can that happen here?

Some people have contacted the mayor, others have penned letters to local newspapers, but there is no doubt that many people in Halton Hills wonder how the town views the French-language issue. They are wondering if our local politicians will jump on the "English-only" bandwagon, or if they'll declare Halton Hills a bilingual town.

Politicians are elected to provide leadership. And simply dismissing the French-language debate as a provincial issue - an issue which has obviously expanded beyond legislative boundaries - is hardly leadership.

While no councillor talked about it over the council table the issue is simmering. People need to be told what their councillors think. Silence is no answer.

Some councillors said the media is blowing the issue out of proportion. One councillor, when originally contacted about the story, said he wouldn't talk to a Herald reporter unless he was given a guarantee that we print a quote saying the paper is sensationalising the issue. Given no such guarantee, the councillor spoke anyway.

But it wasn't the media who forced 43 municipalities to jump into the fray. Sure, the French-language issue has been around for hundreds of years and it will likely be around for several hundred more years. But debate is healthy. It's needed.

We also acknowledge the claim that councillors already have a lot on their plates - roads, budgets, landfill sites - they're all big, important issues locally.

But when cultural issues such as language rights arise, it's important that the people know where their leaders stand. An open debate around the council table would be healthy and it would allow people to get opinions out in the open. The town doesn't have to take an outright stand in either direction. But even a declaration that it isn't going to join the anti-Bill 8 movement would be a sign that citizens of Halton Hills can understand.

Is the media actually sensationalising the issue?

No. While it's paying a lot of attention to the issue, there's a good reason. People need to know as much as possible about an issue such as this as quickly as possible. If their municipality decides to act, they deserve to be informed. And it's the media's job to provide the information.

If our town politicians decided to debate the French-language issue on a Monday night with no prior notice to the residents, it would hardly be fair. Residents deserve to have their say if they want to speak. And the only way they can stand on their soapboxes - or at a delegation's podium in front of their councillors - is if they know what's going on.

And that's why the media must do its job well.

Municipal politicians should worry

Derek Nelson

Queen's Park
Thomson News Service



In Quebec, the official language of all municipalities is French. There are no exceptions allowed under Bill 101.

In towns where 50 per cent or more of the population is English-speaking, the municipality is permitted to also deal with those residents in their own tongue.

However, should the percentage drop below 50, then the language police ensure that the privilege of receiving English-language services is revoked. This happened in Rossmere last year when the anglophone population declined to 49 per cent.

Thus it is a little hard to take criticism from Quebec cabinet ministers about Sault Ste. Marie, a 95-per-cent English-speaking Ontario town, declaring it will provide its services in English only.

Sault mayor Joseph Fratesi is absolutely correct to worry about Ontario Premier David Peterson and his government imposing French-language requirements upon the municipality.

It's true that Bill 8, the French-Language Services Act (which

could be more accurately called the Bilingualizing Ontario Act), exempts municipalities from the requirement to provide French services.

PRINCIPLES

But that's not because of any objection by the Liberals to the principle of such services.

Because they are, in their own words, "committed to advancing French-language rights" (which, in essence, means jobs, power and money for francophones), the Liberals are quite capable of forcing municipalities to provide French.

The only thing that stopped them putting it into Bill 8 was fear. They didn't want to repeat the Manitoba experience of the early 1980s when the then-NDP government's attempt to impose bilingualism on municipalities created a massive anglophone backlash that eventually defeated the legislation. Every municipality, including those with francophone majorities, voted no, by at least a three-to-one margin.

It isn't that Ontario hasn't considered making municipalities bilingual, either.

In the summer of 1988, the government released the report of "task force on municipal services in French." That was an interesting document, which suggested that, in municipalities where francophones constitute a "significant part" of the population, "the implementation of municipal programs and services becomes a norm for the administration..."

There's even a hint of how the municipalities can be coerced into

providing French.

"Once a municipality has chosen to provide a service financed by the provincial government, what authority does the province have to impose conditions and standards on this service?"

"Can the language criteria be established; that is, criteria governing the way in which the merchandise will be delivered, since language is an accessory to the providing of service?"

END RUN

In short, can the province do an end run around its own policy that municipalities be excluded by insisting that everything provincially funded, but municipally run, be bilingual?

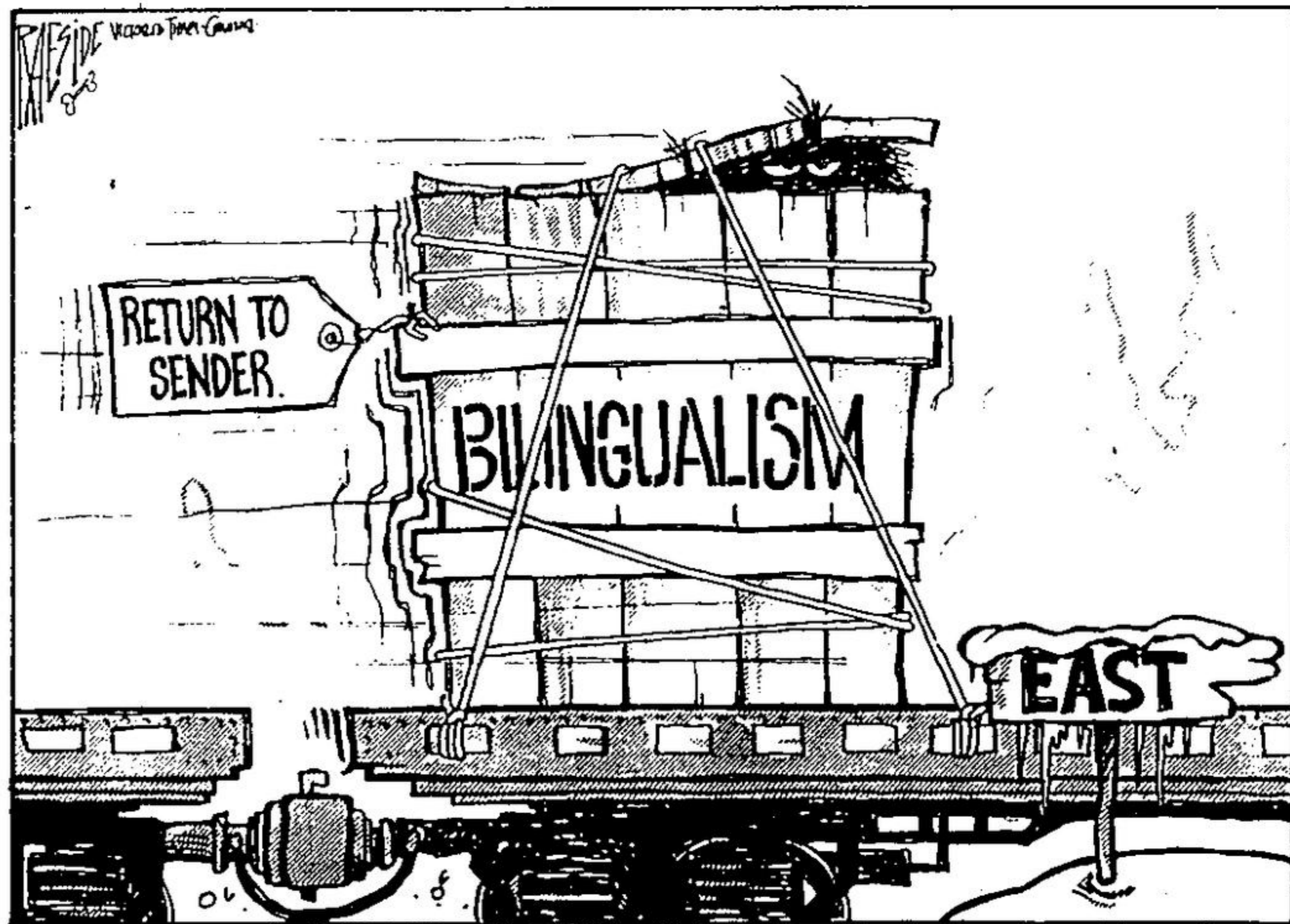
The task force calls for a study of the province's powers in that regard, the clear implication being that Queen's Park should force the issue in line with the task force's belief that municipalities have a "duty to pursue such (francophone) services as an objective."

After all, the province is already interfering at the local level in everything from children's aid societies to hospitals and colleges in terms of attempting to convert many of them to French-only or bilingual.

And it inevitably means jobs.

Even advertisements for truck drivers (garbage pick-up) at a place like Laurentian University include a note that bilingualism is "an asset." The 90 per cent of Ontarians who don't speak French are out of luck.

Municipal politicians are wise to be worried.



Feds are seeking scapegoats

Vic Parsons

Ottawa Bureau
Thomson News Service



When times get tough, the search for scapegoats begins.

That's why it's intriguing to watch the scurrying about of federal officials as they seek out vulnerable targets while the economy slip-slides away.

We've seen seven straight years of economic growth, but the national debt continues to soar. Ottawa honchos would prefer that you folks out there not make too much of that.

High interest rates have produced an artificially high dollar, dampened the economy and been the major factor in the unanticipated growth of this year's

federal deficit. The Bank of Canada would like you to forget that.

Instead, say the \$100,000-a-year fat cats who run federal fiscal and monetary policy, let's make sure all those \$25,000-a-year working people out there don't start asking for too much.

So, lately we've been hearing warnings about excessive wage demands. John Crow, the central bank's governor, says if workers ask for too much, there can be no relaxation of interest rates.

Finance Minister Michael Wilson, who once promised the proposed goods and services tax would be "revenue neutral," now suggests workers will be punished if they try to make sure of that by negotiating pay hikes that make up any losses.

INFLATION THREAT

In its latest quarterly review, the Finance Department says "prospects for further improvements in inflation are threatened by an acceleration in labor costs."

A closer look at the pay that Canadian workers are making, however, tells another story. The

government's own numbers detract from the arguments of the Crow-Wilson clique.

In November, average weekly earnings, including overtime, were \$496.58, Statistics Canada reports. Over 52 weeks, that works out to just short of \$26,000 annually. Hardly a bonanza for the average worker!

Indeed, the Senate's estimated poverty line for 1989 for a family of four is \$26,950. Clearly, an average family of that size needs two incomes to make ends meet.

In goods-producing industries, earnings averaged \$611.71, close to \$32,000 a year. But hourly paid employees worked 38.9 hours weekly at an average rate of \$14.75. That works out to \$29,836.

And what of the service sector, that element of the economy that is producing most new jobs? Average weekly earnings of \$457.51 work out to \$23,800 a year. Moreover, hourly-paid service employees earned an average \$10.90 an hour and worked merely 28.1 hours a week for a total of \$15,927.

MANY PART-TIMERS

It needs to be said that many of

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