

## Question period

We're watching with interest as councillors in Orangeville debate the merits of having an open question period at their meetings.

The idea is to provide a 10-minute session at each council meeting for the general public to question their representatives about anything and everything.

Sounds good.

In the proposed format in Orangeville according to the Orangeville Banner, councillors would field questions from the public after delegations.

The question period would be scheduled for council meetings only; they would not be held in general committee meetings.

Orangeville councillors do have some concerns about the idea. They fear the possibility of losing control of the meetings during emotional question periods. They are also worried that too many questions would remain unanswered because councillors would be unprepared for the questions. One councillor said citizens with questions should talk to councillors during a recess or on weekends.

But sometimes residents feel better about the process when they get to make their point to council. True, they could ask to appear before councillors as delegations, but many people with just a few questions can feel intimidated by such presentations.

Here in Halton Hills, we've often watched as confused audience members scratched their heads asking "what just happened?" after councillors have made a decision on a topic without explaining the results to the audience. People who are unfamiliar with wordings of motions and the process can easily be confused at such meetings.

In many cases the public has turned to the press table to find out what decision councillors made just a few seconds earlier.

An open question period, under tight control by the chairperson of the meeting, would give the public a chance to ask the entire council, with staff members present, about their concerns. And it might provide better information about those concerns to all the councillors who will eventually make the decision.

## Marriage happy

Brian MacLeod  
Editor's Notebook



In Ontario our license plates say "Yours to Discover." Well, it seems a lot of people have been doing a lot of discovering in this province of ours if statistics on marriages released recently by Statistics Canada are to be believed.

There were 8.3 marriages for every 1,000 people in Ontario in 1988, the last year for which statistics are available. I guess that means 16.6 people out of every 1,000 got married. (One has to wonder if they're destined to have 2.3 kids each).

The closest province to us is British Columbia with 8.2 marriages per 1,000 people followed by Alberta at 8.0.

Manitoba's marriage rate in 1988 was 7.3 per 1,000 people while Quebec has the lowest marriage rate among the Canadian, pro-

vinces with just 5.0 people tying the knot per 1,000.

There were 78,533 marriages in Ontario in 1988, up from 76,201 the previous year.

And the number of divorced people remarrying has risen substantially in the past 30 years. Divorced people made up 21 per cent of the people who tied the knot in 1988 compared to just 3.9 per cent in 1960.

It's encouraging to see that journalism seems to be attracting so many would-be writers to universities these days.

According to the Ontario Universities Application Centre, applications to liberal arts, specifically journalism has skyrocketed in recent years.

The centre reports that in the last 10 years applications to journalism courses have increased by almost 263 per cent.

There were 2,080 applications to journalism programs in 1990.

It seems the lure of the typewriter's keys is just too much to ignore.

While journalism can be an extremely rewarding and satisfying career - a word to some of those expectant journalists - you'll work long hours, generally for less pay than you'll make in other fields and you'll have to develop a thick hide. And you'll like it.

## Pay equity bill cost \$50 million

Derek Nelson

Queen's Park  
Thomson News  
Service



The self-congratulations you hear over the pay equity deal between the province and its unions masks a looming problem.

What happens once pay equity moves out of easy-to-handle job situations such as the civil service and graduates to the small office or factory in the private sector?

Pay equity, of course, is one of our modern ideological fantasies, the idea that certain jobs are paid less because they are traditionally considered "women's work." To solve this "discrimination," pay equity requires comparing those

"female" jobs with certain "male" jobs within the same "job class." (And if there are no male jobs for comparison? Then there are no special pay increases.) This comparison, supposedly, can be done scientifically and objectively, as though there were some artificial standard against which all jobs can be measured.

The provincial settlement indicates how ridiculous this artificial restructuring of "women's wages" can be. About one in four of the unionized staff who'll benefit are men. As for the management people who'll benefit, it's clear a majority are men.

The real point of the agreement, which took two years to negotiate, was caught by one participant: "There were very, very few jobs that received no increase."

### THE PRICE

For the taxpayer - and that's who picks up the tab - the price is \$50 million to start, escalating annually. It amounts to 2.5 per cent of payroll.

But it is the implications for other organizations that really

create the worry.

After all, governments by definition are massive bureaucratic structures where every employee is pigeon-holed from the day he or she joins. It is relatively easy to play games with the salary structure.

Worse, governments do not worry about being competitive. They know there is an endless source of revenue - available through taxes.

Even large (500 or more employees) private sector firms - which do have to worry about losing money - tend to formal structures when it comes to wages.

And it is those two categories that are covered by the first stage of the pay equity legislation that passed in 1987.

All public service employers, about 6,500 in number, and 700 private sector concerns are involved. Technically, they were all supposed to have met a Jan. 1, 1990 deadline for posting their pay equity plans, although many - like the government itself - were and are late.

## CAREER CHANGES



## Our economy defies the odds

Vic Parsons

Ottawa Bureau  
Thomson News  
Service



Like the bumblebee, the Canadian economy continues to defy the odds.

You'll recall that the bumblebee, according to experts, is aerodynamically unsuited for flight. Its rotund body and relatively small wings suggest a creature that should be crawling with the creeping Charlie instead of buzzing about your clover patch.

Experts have been saying similar things about the economy of late. We are already in recession, some economists have been declaring for months. "The accepted definition of a recession is two consecutive three-month periods in which the economy contracts."

But the numbers just don't bear out the theory that recession is already here.

Last week, Statistics Canada released its estimates of economic growth for the final three months of 1989, and the full year. Instead of a shrinking economy, production of goods and services, as measured by the gross domestic product, rose 0.5 per cent in the October-December period.

For the whole year, the economy grew 2.9 per cent, very close to the

Finance Department estimate of three per cent made in last April's budget.

On Monday, there was more positive news. StatsCan's composite leading indicator, which is made up of 10 items that together suggest economic trends, rose in December for the fourth consecutive month.

Six of the components, namely house spending, furniture and appliance sales, sales of other durable goods, stock prices, employment and the United States composite index, were up. Two components fell and two others were the same as in November.

One of the most significant of these is the U.S. index. "This increase, together with higher employment in January," StatsCan said, "allayed somewhat the concerns about a recession in the United States."

Coming on top of recent remarks by Alan Greenspan, chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve, that the chance of a recession south of the border is now below 50 per cent, there is reason to voice a brief cheer.

Greenspan is the American (and a kinder, gentler) equivalent of our John Crow, governor of the Bank of Canada. He predicted that U.S. growth in the first three months of 1990 will be "slow but positive."

Much of Canada's production is intimately tied to developments in the U.S. About a quarter of our economy depends on international trade, and about 70 per cent of that trade is with the Americans.

Our export trade performance has been pretty sluggish of late. Our surplus in trade of goods last year was a mere \$4.7 billion, the most dismal level since the mid-

1970s. Moreover, our current account deficit - which includes both goods and non-merchandise transactions such as travel spending, investment payments and other services - hit a record \$19.7 billion.

### EXPORTS REDUCED

Part of the huge erosion in our trade balance was due to high interest rates. These pushed up the value of Canada's dollar and made our products more costly and less attractive to foreign customers.

But exports to the U.S. also fell because the Americans were on the verge of recession themselves and stopped buying our goods. If the likelihood of the collapse recedes south of the border, it can't help but be good news for us.

Meanwhile, at home, consumers continued to spend freely at the end of last year, with the expenditure rate rising about 5.2 per cent after inflation. House sales in the West rose sharply, car sales rebounded as a result of manufacturers' rebates after months of sluggishness, and sales of services were up sharply, perhaps in anticipation of the coming goods and services tax.

There was "continued sprightliness" in business investment, especially in capital spending on plant and equipment, which rebounded after a drop in the July-September quarter of 1989.

The skunk at the garden party continues to be interest rates. Crow is not overly pleased to see all this activity. The spending and investment will contribute to inflation, he maintains.

So the buoyancy of the economy will likely mean a hard line on interest rates for a while yet.

It makes you wonder if central bankers believe in bumblebees.