

Opinion

Condom dispensers in high schools a sensible move

Opponents of condom dispensers in public high schools, as a means of promoting safe sex among teenagers, argue the dispensers only encourage sexual activity among young people.

However, statistics show a number of high school students across Ontario, including Halton, engage in sexual activity, condom machines or no condom machines in their schools.

According to a Halton Regional Health Department report, approximately half of all students across the province are sexually active by the time they complete high school. Although the health department doesn't provide statistics for high schools in Halton, there is no reason to believe they would be considerably less than anywhere else in the province.

Indeed I interviewed several Grade 11 and 12 Georgetown District High School students on the subject of sex education in October 1989 and the students suggested 80 to 90 per cent of that school's student population will have engaged in sexual activity by the end of Grade 12 or 13.

Granted, there may be some false bravado in these percentages, but not as much as to eliminate the fact that high school students will engage in sexual activity whether or not condom machines are in their schools.

Georgetown and Acton high school principals Bryn Davies and Ozzie Caldarelli suggest there should be no correlation between condom machines in the high schools and increased sexual activity among students if the



Ben's
Banter
by
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dispensers are to be introduced in the secondary education system.

"We have to ask ourselves, are we encouraging or condoning early sexual activity or are we just helping prevent dangers in something that is happening anyway," Mr. Caldarelli was quoted as saying in an article on the issue in last Wednesday's edi-

tion of the Herald.

Both principals were contacted on the subject of condom machines in high schools because the Regional Health department and the public board of education is now studying the feasibility of condom dispensers in Halton's high schools.

When Mr. Caldarelli and Mr. Davies ask themselves the above question I'm confident they will realize there is little, if any connection, between condom dispenser machines and sexual activity among teenagers.

But before jumping on the condom dispenser machine bandwagon people have to ask themselves if the dispensers are the best way of distribution. For me the answer is unclear.

Students I talked to in October 1989 suggested that through the

school nurse would be a better way of distributing condoms. The dispensers would more than likely be vandalized suggested a few of the students. As well, students could have any questions answered about safe sex if the condoms were made available through the school nurse.

Both suggestions are very valid. The one suggestion that isn't, however, is to have dispensers outlawed in high schools. Those inclined won't refrain from sex if there are no dispensers in their high schools but they may refrain from safe sex if they are discouraged from obtaining sexual protection.

As is pointed out in the Regional health department report, many students are too embarrassed to purchase condoms at a drug store.

Peace movements need new approach to be heard

By STEWART MacLEOD
Ottawa Bureau

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OTTAWA - There are so many peace and disarmament groups operating in Canada, one doesn't know where to begin directing suggestions. But we'd like to propose that one - or several acting together - bring their cause off the street and into the conference chamber.

Peace is a wonderful cause. It's just that its proponents usually go about it in fragmentary and unconstructive ways. Many of the individual organizations have been discredited, bringing down the influence and credibility of the entire movement. Some people still think in terms of draft-dodgers, wandering flower children and left-over hippies.

It's probably fair to say that, so far as Canada's involvement in the gulf war is considered, the various peace organizations have had absolutely no influence. In fact, their efforts to date may even have been counter-productive.

That protest by several peace groups at the External Affairs Department here in Ottawa certainly didn't help the cause.

There has to be a better method of spreading a message than merely preventing people from going to work.

The protests on Parliament Hill, so far, have been even less effective, especially after some protesters attacked a placard-carrying man supporting Canadian troops in the gulf. And the incident in front of the United States embassy, when a masked protestor burned and stomped on an American flag, accomplished even less.

SEEM NEGATIVE

There are many parliamentarians who continue to view "peaceniks" essentially as anti-Americans in search of new causes. The fact that the vast majority don't fall into this category is beside the point. The point is, the peace movement, rightly or wrongly, does have an image problem.

What has given the movement a certain advantage over elected politicians so far is the fact that its spokespersons don't have to answer questions, let alone propose alternatives. Generally speaking, the thrust has been in the form of protest, usually of the peaceful variety. There's no dif-

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ficulty in organizing a march, or a sit-in, and writing posters about "U.S. Imperialism," "American aggression," and the like.

Nowadays, it's "Bring our troops home," "End the war in the gulf," and "Peacekeeping, not war-mongering."

Those who accuse the protesters of being anti-American point to the fact that, since the Aug. 2 invasion of Kuwait, not one placard has been paraded in front of the Iraqi embassy.

As for bringing Canadian troops home from the gulf, there have been no serious proposals advanced about how this should

be done. Obviously, at this stage, there would be some complications if the Mulroney government were to suddenly announce that "we've changed our mind about fighting and want to go home."

IDEAS NEEDED

The pre-fighting protests made more sense, but even then there was a significant shortage of positive and practical ideas of how Canada should act. Now that the battle is raging, there are even fewer.

The government is not being influenced by protesters who simply advocate peace and denounce war. Virtually everyone of sound mind feels the same way.

But few people of sound mind think the present problem could be solved by the coalition troops simply laying down arms and declaring that peace is preferable to war. Nor would the pullout of Canadians have any practical effect.

Those who advocate that Canada's role could be enhanced as a "peacekeeper" by now pulling out of the conflict will have to make a more convincing case than merely proclaiming the belief. And, if they hope to get anyone in government to pay at-

tention, they'll have to find a more effective way to present the case - and indoors.

Why shouldn't the peace movement have a full-scale conference, responsibly organized, with an agenda for serious discussion? There could be presentations from credible spokespersons, along with serious discussions on all the implications. It could be a positive initiative, not anti-government, not anti-anyone.

Government representatives would have a difficult time refusing invitations and, if the event were properly organized, they should even welcome the opportunity to justify their actions. It would be a far more attractive proposition than shouting at protesters through a megaphone - or being shouted at.

But it would be easier to raise money for this than for another chartered bus for placard-carrying demonstrators. Do more good, too.

Have you ever wondered why, when virtually everyone prefers peace to war, the proponents of peace don't even seem to enjoy social respectability? Obviously, a new approach is called for.

North American economy is on shaky ground

By DIANNE MALEY
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If the war is short... I have heard this phrase a lot lately - from politicians, economists, stock market forecasters. If the Persian Gulf war is short, the North American economy will rebound. Oil prices will fall and the stock market will soar. Uncertainty will be swept aside, confidence will return and the good times will roll.

Well, folks, the war is not likely to be short. Saddam Hussein is holed up in a bomb-proof bunker 20 metres underground, Jane's Defence Weekly reports. The report was carried in The Globe and Mail. Saddam's air force, too, is safe beneath the ground. How the American-led coalition can dislodge Saddam and his planes quickly is difficult to see.

Financial markets acknowledged the problem on Tuesday; stock prices slumped and oil and gold moved higher.

Canada's finance minister, the U.S. Treasury secretary and countless forecasters have said what will happen if the war is prolonged: the North American economy will slide even deeper into recession, budget deficits will soar and interest rates may rise rather than fall.

ALL ROSES

Finance ministers and central bank governors of the Group of

Seven industrial countries tried to gloss over this grim prospect when they met in New York early in the week. The G7 comprises Canada, the United States, Japan, Germany, Britain, France and Italy.

In a joint release, they predicted lower interest rates and an economic rebound later this year. They based their hopeful forecast on a belief that is shared by other optimists: that the true cause of the swift U.S. downturn last fall was the loss of confidence caused by looming war. Once uncertainty is swept aside, they reason, confidence will be restored and consumers will begin spending again.

"It looks as though things (in the Persian Gulf) are going according to plan," U.S. Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady told reporters on Monday. "I expect that to release a significant energy into the economy." Well, maybe.

More likely, a military surprise will tip North America into economic chaps overnight, triggering financial panic. If this were to happen, the United States would suffer more than Canada because of its shaky banking system. Sound apocalyptic? It would not be the end of the world. Some sectors would flourish.

WHAT HAPPENED?

If this fearsome forecast comes to pass, we will wonder why it happened. War would be partly to

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blame.

The obvious cause of the war was Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. But some say the real cause is oil. Looking back a few years, the true cause would seem to be Saddam Hussein's desire to dominate the region; he threatened Israel and it threatened him.

But to some thinkers, the truest cause of the war was anti-semitism. If the Germans and others had not tried to wipe out the Jews, or if North Americans had accepted more Jewish refugees, the state of Israel would not be there, surrounded by people who want to destroy it.

Yet war alone will not bring the North American economy to its knees. It had already stumbled before hostilities broke out. Ironic, isn't it? While we were applauding the collapse of the Soviet economy, our own was crumbling beneath our feet.

They say the Soviet system was

brought down by inherent flaws. I wonder what they would say if

the North American recession were to become a depression?

Berry's World



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"Say, didn't you use to be my friendly banker?"