

Editorial

The Halton Hills

HERALD

Home Newspaper of Halton Hills - Established 1866

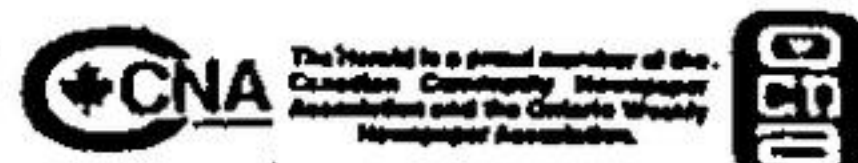
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Slam-dunked by CBC

Welcome to the club, Georgetown, and indeed, all of Halton Hills.

Now you know what it feels like to be slam-dunked by the media. And we certainly were slam-dunked by the CBC last Tuesday in the first instalment of its 10-part documentary series on protest groups in Ontario communities.

I feel very much a part of our community and I thought the CBC report was extremely negative in every sense of the word.

It was noted in the report there were at least 17 groups in Halton Hills actively involved in making their concerns public about issues that impacted on their lives.

What the CBC showed, for the most part, however, were the more outspoken elements in some of these groups whose anger at perceived inaction for their cause led to temper tantrums.

One wonders as well, whether these supposed angry citizens were not just playing up to the camera.

In the same vein, the CBC only covered one Town of Halton Hills council meeting and this reporter was told by an informed source that the television network had been contacted and urged to attend the council meeting because "the fur was going to fly." Talk about a setup.

According to Halton Hills Herald senior reporter, Ben Dummett, who covers council meetings, on average, only 15-20 members of the public attend regular council meetings and again, on average, only two delegations directly address council with their concerns, at the regular weekly council meetings.

So much for rampant rebellion. The CBC also portrayed town council and Halton Hills Mayor, Russ Miller, in an unfair and negative fashion. The council and indeed the mayor, have been heeding citizens concerns as far as this reporter is concerned. A person just has to read the stories that come out of council meetings to verify this fact.

On a more personal level, I feel that I was used by the CBC.

Much like the youngster who befriends a bedraggled-looking stray dog only to have the mangy mutt turn on him.

Two weeks ago I was contacted by Bob Weiers, Field Producer for the CBC, who said that he had been reading copies of the Herald, which had been forwarded to him, and that he was very impressed by our local coverage of events and issues.

He asked for my impressions of our community, in general, and our homegrown 'protest groups' in particular.

Being the naive sort that I am, I waxed enthusiastically about our community but suggested that rather than 'protest groups', these organizations be viewed as activist groups who care about their community and that for the most part, the people involved had taken the time to get to know

the system and were working from within the system to initiate desired changes.

Mr. Weiers asked if I would be willing to go before the camera to express my opinion and I agreed.

The CBC showed up here a week ago last Thursday and I spent a good half-hour going over recent editions of the Herald with the interviewer, Havard Gould, pointing out just what an active community we had with residents willing to get involved for the good of the community as a whole.

I pointed out how active our service clubs were; how the Georgetown Legion recently donated \$75,000 to Georgetown and District Memorial Hospital; how we had a very active seniors association; how the community supported so many charities, etc., etc.

My point being, that we had a thriving community that cared, with people willing to roll up their sleeves to make their community a better place in which to live.

Then we got down to the televised interview and somehow the situation changed.

One of the questions Havard Gould asked was whether I would consider our 'protest groups' to be comprised of radicals. I recall answering along the lines that if he was attempting to compare our organizations to the protest groups of the '60's, I didn't think so. There might be a few '60's hippies still involved, but for the most part, I said, these groups were working within the system and making politicians and bureaucrats become more accountable for their actions - or inactions.

I also said that with our tough economic times, people were becoming more concerned about where their money was being spent and demanding answers.

My interview with Havard Gould continued along these lines, with me attempting to put a positive slant on the stands local residents were taking and Gould attempting to put his (or CBC's) own slant on things.

Given the tone of the CBC report on our community, I'm not surprised that my interview didn't air. Not 'radical' enough, I suppose. It likely wouldn't fit in with the obviously preconceived story idea that the CBC was going to run with.

This runs against all the tenets of basic, honest journalism. You go where the story takes you, you don't make the story follow you.

Granted, there are leads you follow and if an issue is present within the story, this is the angle you follow.

However, you don't write the story with a bias, you let the story write itself.

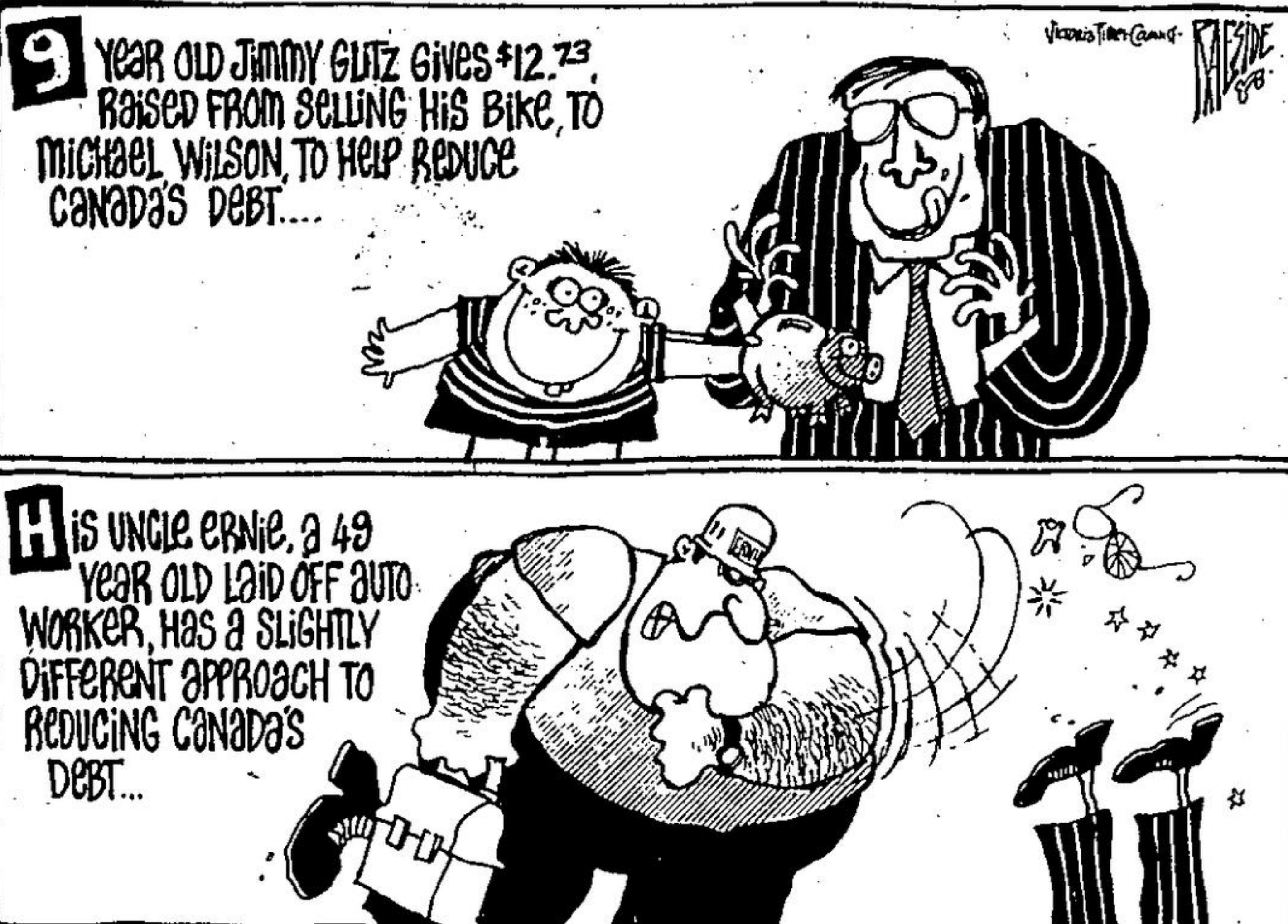
I don't feel the CBC followed proper journalistic standards.

But who am I? In the eyes of the CBC, probably just the Managing Editor of a medium-sized community newspaper who can't see the forest for the trees.

Wrong again Durango.

To all the guys and girls at CBC, there is this parrot I know

As I see it, anyway.



The wicked old media

And so the wicked old media is under fire again.

You already know this, of course. You've heard all about it in the wicked old media.

The most recent and spirited attack comes from beleaguered B.C. Premier Bill Vander Zalm, who maintains that his current problems stem from the fact that journalists - being a cabal of left-wingers - are waging an organized campaign to discredit him.

Well, I haven't actually been a working newspaper reporter for more than a decade. And some of my old editors were never sure that "working reporter" was the operative term in the first place.

But something needs to be said about this. And since this is my column, I'm the guy who gets to say it.

So let me start by confessing that Mr. Vander Zalm - like numerous centre-right politicians before him - is utterly correct in stating that newspaper reporters are a bunch of flaming leftists.

This is always true - except when a centre-left government is in power, in which case newspaper reporters suddenly become a bunch of rock-ribbed right-wingers. Just ask the NDP.

No one has ever managed to explain this remarkable phenomenon, but apparently it exists. Reporters lead lives of agonizing confusion, veering wildly between adoring Karl Marx and revering the Sheriff of Nottingham.

I came across a classic example of this ideological bewilderment in my own reporting days, when a terrible controversy erupted over the newsroom's coffee machine.

Weir's
World
by
Ian Weir
Thomson News
Service



This enterprise was overseen by the City Editor, a devout fiscal conservative who paid for the rental and the coffee out of his own pocket and then charged 25 cents a cup to cover operating expenses.

Unfortunately, he made the bad mistake of relying on the honor system. Each morning, the money-til was full of little notes saying "I'll pay you the 75 cents next week," or "Dear Mark, we're going to the pub, so I borrowed 10 bucks."

He eventually went bankrupt, and retreated into a profound sulk while the rest of us tried to figure out who to blame.

Most of us concluded that the collapse of the coffee corporation reflected Mark's woeful shortcomings as a businessman. A few wondered whether this was actually a sign that the capitalist system was collapsing, in which case we might consider establishing The People's Coffee Co-operative instead.

Eventually, we just gave up and snuck coffee from the machine in the advertising department.

In any case, let's accept the basic premise that Canada's

journalists constitute - depending on the day, and the party in power - either a socialists horde or a right-wing brigade. But this still leaves Mr. Vander Zalm's contention that there is an organized campaign to discredit him.

I've been thinking back on all the reporters I worked with, trying to identify those who might be able to organize a province-wide media conspiracy. So far, I can't think of anyone who'd have been able to organize an Easter Egg hunt.

Granted, media conspiracy theories presume that the organizational work is done by publishers. And indeed, publishers are good organizers.

But in my years as a reporter, I never had a publisher try to tell me what to write. No publisher ever asked to read my copy before it went to press - and a couple of them didn't even seem to read it afterward.

I think it just depressed them. By and large, they preferred to avoid being reminded that they'd hired me in the first place.

As such, I'd like to offer some reassurance to Mr. Vander Zalm.

Dear Sir: Try not to worry about organized media conspiracies. In my experience, most reporters consider themselves well-organized if they remember to keep their house key and their car key on the same ring.

And try not to think of reporters as a fanatical cell trying to pave the way to Revolution, either.

Just don't sell them coffee on the honor system.

Write us a letter!

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All letters must be signed. Please include your address and telephone number for verification.

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