

**OTTAWA REPORT**

**Stormy session is predicted for Commons**

I'm back in Ottawa, and the House of Commons is sitting again - for what could be a stormy, noisy and important session.

There aren't too many elected people in this country right now who don't know that Canadian society is sitting on the edge of a crisis. People are tired of being held hostage by striking public sector workers - no mail, late airplanes, no grain shipments, no mass transit, slow borders and ugly picket-line violence.

People are also tired of the endless talks about the Constitution and the future of the country. We're moving into the final phases of the national unity debate - with that sword of a

possible Quebec referendum hanging over our heads. The voices of separatism are growing louder; and so are those of the people who think we'd be better off without Quebec.

Most of us just want secure jobs, a stable economy, steady house prices, fair taxes and a decent shot of some day making it. But instead, Canadians are being dragged into debates they didn't ask for - between Canada Post and the union, between the government and its workers, between separatists and federalists.

Fed up? You have every right to be. But being fed up right now isn't enough. It won't solve the strikes, keep the country from



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falling apart or create jobs. And that's where the government has to come in. As a Member of Parliament,

I'm going to be asked to vote on a lot of major items over the coming months. When I do, I should be reflecting the majority opinion in the riding of Halton-Peel. I hope you can help me do that, by sending me your comments on the following subjects:

- **Public Service strike:** The government this week introduced legislation which would force the civil servants back to work. It extends their contract for two years, giving them job security. But wages are frozen in the first year, and raised by 3 per cent in the second year. The average union wage is \$41,000. My personal feeling is to vote in favour. The economy can't stand to take a long strike. Besides, nobody was laying off civil servants during the recession.

- **Canada Post:** The corporation and the union are back at the bargaining table. But if mediation fails, the union's made it clear that the mails will stop again. If that happens, back-to-work legislation will likely be brought before Parliament. I'll support that, too. Delivering the mail is an essential service. If Canada Post can't avoid a strike, it should give up its monopoly.

- **National Unity:** The Cabinet is still trying to come up with a package of changes which reflect some kind of consensus. They have a lot to consider - the defeat of Meech Lake; the Spicer Commission; the committee report on changing the Constitution; aboriginal demands; and the entrenched position of the separatists.

When the proposals are done, a Senate-Commons committee will take them on the road for five

months of public hearings. Then Parliament will try again to find some formula which keeps all the regions of Canada happy, and the country united. The fact this has taken so long shows the task is not easy.

Let's be honest about it - this is going to take some compromise from everybody. The western provinces will probably insist that there be an elected Senate which gives a few million people there the same power as many millions more who live in Ontario. Quebec is probably going to insist on some special powers to protect its language and culture. The East will demand a greater share of the economic pie. And the rest of us might want a greater emphasis on Canadian unity, and less of diverse influences like multiculturalism and official national bilingualism.

- **The economy:** Within a few weeks the government will table a comprehensive plan for what we all want - prosperity. It will likely include new incentives for research and development; educational standards; North American free trade; and the elimination of trade barriers between provinces.

If all of this works, then Canada has a chance. If we keep on fighting each other - government against government, workers against management, French against English - then forget it. As I write this, by the way, several thousand civil servants are outside, on Parliament Hill, chanting for my resignation and that of every other Tory.

They'll go home disappointed. We have too much work yet to do.

**QUEEN'S PARK REPORT**

**Auto insurance discussed**

During the first week of September I spent four days at Caucus meetings in Honey Harbour where my colleagues and I wrestled with several important decisions. I told you back in May that we expected to introduce a public auto insurance system in the fall but the grim reality of current economic conditions has forced us to reconsider our plan. The decision was a painful one but, unfortunately, public auto insurance will not be the only casualty of the worst recession since World War II. Our government will have to make severe cuts in spending with the result that other programs may fall by the wayside.

With the auto insurance question our government was faced with a difficult choice: to spend \$1.4 billion and put 13,500 people out of work - 5,600 of them permanently - or to keep them employed and set the stage for economic renewal. In a healthy economy many of those displaced under a public plan would have been able to find other jobs and more money would have been available for job retraining. But in an economy that has been suffering the effects of a recession we did not want to create unnecessary hardships nor put peoples' lives on hold by delaying the introduction of public auto insurance.

Our choices here were more difficult than our west because our province accounts for a larger proportion of the auto insurance industry and most Canadian head offices are located in Ontario. When the western provinces brought in public auto insurance under NDP governments they were taking over small branch plant operations. Very few jobs were lost. The new public corporations had to set up new head offices and hired those workers who had been dislocated. Ontario public auto insurance would have taken away a large proportion of many Canadian insurers' business causing large job losses here in Ontario at a time when the economy could not absorb the workers.

So, after a lengthy deliberation, we decided to make a major change in our strategic direction and chose instead to reform the present system. Through legisla-



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tion, regulation and negotiation with the insurance industry, we will work toward an auto insurance system which is more affordable, accessible and fair. Key reforms in the short term will address many of your concerns. The changes will include legislative amendments to allow more people the right to sue for pain and suffering; improving and indexing accident benefits; and removing caps on rehabilitation costs.

We also believe that insurance companies can afford to reduce average annual premiums by 4 to 7 per cent (\$40 to \$60 for the average driver). And we are inviting them to participate in a working group whose goal will be to ensure accessibility to affordable insurance.

During the longer term, we will reform the system by introducing a universal classification system; designing a new system to replace the Facility Association as insurer for last resort; and looking at one-stop shopping for insurance and license plates. Helping drivers through safety programs will go a long way toward reducing the carnage on our roadways and lowering insurance costs. We will also work with the insurance industry to create a joint highway safety agency. Largely funded by the industry, the agency's goal will be to achieve the kind of success we have seen in those provinces which have public auto insurance. Our reforms will make the insurance system better and will respond more effectively to drivers' needs. The alternative was to put thousands of people out of work in an economy devastated by the recession and that was not a realistic option.

In other news, you may have heard that Anne Swarbrick, MPP

for Scarborough West, has resigned as minister responsible for women's issues. She told Bob Rae that she needed to focus all her energies on her treatment and recovery and did not want to remain as minister without being able to devote her full attention to the job. The Premier noted that she will continue to play a key role in the caucus because of her experience in cabinet and her commitment to women's issues. He has asked Education Minister Marion Boyd to take over Anne's duties.

If you have any comments on the insurance decision or on other issues, please call my Milton office at 878-1729 Tuesdays through Fridays.



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**Special guest speaker at P.O.W.E.R. meeting**

In the fall of 1980 a high miscarriage rate caused citizens of Stouville to conduct a health survey showing a pregnancy failure rate two times the national average. That and an unusually high rate of other illnesses pushed citizens to work to close the dump.

Debbie Mitchell of Stouville will tell Halton Hills about the Stouville fight of P.O.W.E.R.'s General Meeting, Wednesday, September 25th, 8 p.m. at Georgetown District High School. Everyone welcome. For more information call Barbara Halsall at 873-0344.



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