

## EDITORIAL

With Hartley Coles



# Give Boards power

We're only on the threshold of the school year but already storm signals suggest it could be contentious.

Parents may be breathing a sigh of relief that the youngsters are back at school but teachers have been on edge since before they reached the classroom. It started when Education Minister John Snobelen indicated the ministry would be reviewing Bill 100, which since 1975, has been the bargaining contract between Ontario teachers and boards of education.

The minister has said the government may take over the collective bargaining and end the teachers' right to strike. Mr. Snobelen is quoted as saying he prefers a system of negotiation where job action isn't used as one of the "clubs."

Talk about waving a red flag in front of a bull. The reaction was swift and just as tough. Teachers, through their federations, interpreted the ministry's threats as a declaration of war on them, just as 242 collective agreements were ready to expire August 31.

If Snobelen has his way with collective bargaining, the federation spokespeople say the entire province could be shut down by a strike rather than just one area where an individual board negotiates. "We'd have a much larger club in our hands," declares the executive vice-president of the Ontario Public School Boards Assoc.

But what if strikes are declared illegal? A moot question. Would teachers strike illegally if they are provoked enough?

Leon Paroian, a labor lawyer from Windsor, has been hired by the ministry to conduct the review of Bill 100. You may remember him as the counsel for the Interested Citizens' Group which opposed passage of those 500 kilo-volt hydro lines through Halton Hills. He has yet to determine whether it is legal to take the right to strike away from Ontario teachers.

If that isn't enough fuel to feed the fire, Mr. Snobelen has also criticized Ontario teachers' salaries as being highest in the country, 24 per cent higher than the other provinces' averages. His pitch to control collective bargaining is seen by teachers as an attempt to cut back those high salaries, axe more jobs and curtail preparation time. Since the ministry's action dovetails neatly with the \$400 million the province is cutting out of the \$12.5 billion school board budget, it can't be far wrong to assume teachers' assumptions are correct.

Before we all go off half-cocked about costs and salaries being too much and overly generous respectively, let's recall that much of what boards of education have done in the past has been mandated by the province. During good economic times there was little protest. Times now are tough. Governments have conceded the educational establishment they created is bloated. But they want to blame it on the school boards.

Snobelen's decision to throw down the gauntlet on the threshold of the school year certainly won't contribute to the smooth running of classrooms. Yet his proposals are not new. Quebec and British Columbia already have centralized collective bargaining for teachers. A report by former education minister John Sweeney, issued in April of this year, recommended Ontario do the same and eliminate half the province's school boards to boot.

Since about 65 per cent of our municipal taxes go to support education in Halton, we have a vested interest in what the Ministry is attempting. We know that about 80 per cent of the Halton boards' budgets are eaten up by salaries for staff and teachers. It should be pointed out here, too, that most teachers have not had a raise in pay for four years, except for increments and pay equity provisions.

Have local boards failed us by giving up more than they should and should the government step in to rectify the situation? We elected our trustees and they, on the whole, have done a good job, considering they had to obey government mandates on education.

We have no doubt there is fat in education that must be trimmed. If the efforts of previous governments are any indication, however, it would be far better left to the school boards to do the cutting.

## Same time last year ...

Acton mom **Bev Bailie** revives her crusade to get free bus service for young students ... The **Legion Ladies' Auxiliary** celebrates its 50th anniversary ... Acton cyclist **Tim Hadfield** finishes 15th at the Canadian Nationals ... Acton High starts up a **Girls' Midget basketball** team for the first time in 20 years.



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## Your LETTERS

### Reader defends title

To the Editor,

I am writing in response to Karen Wetmore's editorial about the Miss Acton Fall Fair pageant. As chair of the Miss Acton Committee, I was surprised to read all her conclusions about the pageant when she had contacted neither myself nor anyone else on the committee, and would like to answer some of her concerns regarding the pageant.

In dealing with the idea of tradition, it is true that it is a strong word and evokes strong emotions. What I don't understand is why that is a bad thing. I agree that change is good, but point out that not every change is for the better. If this writer knew anything about the format of the pageant, she would know that over the past eight years, it has gone through significant changes, but then she never bothered to find that out. I resent being accused of not being able to or wanting to change, especially by someone who has not done me the courtesy of speaking to me.

In answer to her query as to the thoughts of potential contestants at being called Miss Acton, I would like to let her know that the committee *did*, in fact, speak to several young women about the return to the traditional name, and they supported it, wondering why the change was made in the first place. As well, numerous businesses were happy to see that traditions do not always have to die out in the name of progress.

I would question the writer's dislike of the word "Miss." Is there a reason that anyone should be offended by this term? I was not aware that it was a put-down, or immediately stripped anyone of any chance of receiving respect. Perhaps someone should tell teachers that the use of this word will result in their losing the respect of their students.

Changing the "Miss" to "Ms" would seem to solve the problem. In answer to that let me ask her if she would insist that all women use "Ms," or if it only applies to single women.

The statement made regarding young women today being mature, forward-thinkers is very true, however the writer suggests that those of us who are happy to have been Miss Acton are immature and living in the past. I have had the pleasure of meeting or speaking with 20 of the past 33 winners, and I would like to assure the writer that none of these women has been subjected to an inferior role in life due to the fact that they were Miss Acton. And most of us can pump our own gas as well, although I don't see why that is the mark of a "modern" woman.

As to the concern that the pageant be opened up to males and females, obviously the writer does not read her own newspaper, as I explained the committee's position on that point to one of her colleagues not one week ago. Just to reiterate, the committee believes that the pageant offers young women a forum to develop their public-speaking skills and confidence in a secure environment. I would like to point out that all the contestants that enter this pageant are already strong public-speakers and possess more confidence than a lot of people that I know. The pageant and the year as Miss Acton are a great experience, one that, in this case, is offered to young women only.

The suggestion that two pageants could be run could only come from someone who has never been involved with a huge volunteer organization like the Acton Agricultural Society. Every single person who helps to put on the fair is a volunteer, involving themselves because they believe that it is a worthwhile cause. If the writer thinks there should be another pageant for males, by all means come out to an Agricultural Society meeting and I would be happy to get her started in organizing it.

The fact that Karen Wetmore has  
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