

"Peace and stability plan" may lead to unrest

By JENNIFER ENRIGHT

A group representing teachers in Halton region is concerned that the province's new so-called "peace and stability plan" for teachers will undermine the local autonomy of teachers unions and could create unrest.

Casey Kalvaitis, president of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF), Halton local, says at the moment his union is staying away from monetary issues. But he noted that OSSTF is concerned that the province is "not going to give anybody room to bargain." He believes the provincial government is dictating what will happen at the local level when it comes to bargaining.

The contract for teachers unions expired on August 31 of this year, but the old contract still remains in effect unless there is a strike.

On December 7, the Ontario Liberal government announced its "peace and stability plan" which outlines legislation to create contracts for teachers. Under the plan, as stipulated by Education Minister Gerrard Kennedy, the government will offer teachers a 2 per cent annual pay hike. And there will also be the option of signing four-year contracts that pay 2.5 per cent and 3 per cent in the final two years.

The education minister has stated publicly that any board that goes over the salary guidelines will need to indicate how they're paying for the larger salary increases.

Mr. Kalvaitis believes that what the province is seeking with this plan is cost certainty, but under the government's terms, not terms dictated by teachers. "The 2 per cent, 2 per cent, followed by 2.5 per cent and 3 per cent pay hikes gives them numbers that will allow them to feel comfortable in how much they are spending on education."

However, Richard Brock, the unit president for elementary teachers with the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA), says that Bill 160 effectively "killed collective bargaining as we know it." Prior

to Bill 160, boards could obtain funding for salaries through the mill rate. But he noted this is no longer possible, and that funding for salaries now comes strictly from the province. Bill 160 was passed in December of 1997, and as part of that Bill the government was also given control over preparation times as well as class sizes, two areas formerly controlled by local boards.

BILL 160 EFFECTIVELY "KILLED COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AS WE KNOW IT."

Mr. Brock says the current "peace and stability plan" is clearly a "step towards provincial bargaining." And he said the plan is intended to "eliminate teacher unrest." But he didn't have a problem with the plan itself, as long as the province ensures that there is wage equity when it comes to teachers' annual salaries. He explained that the highest rate for teachers is \$76,000 per year, with some boards having annual salaries that are lower than that, including his board. What he would like to see are pay hikes based on \$76,000 for all teachers across the province. "The only place where they dropped the ball is levelling the playing field."

Teachers unions in Halton will be negotiating with their boards in the beginning of

2005.

Maureen Weinberger, president of the Halton local for the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO), said

ETFO will be bringing up the subject of more preparation time during talks with the Halton District School Board (HDSB) in the New Year. Approximately 137 minutes of preparation time are funded by the province. But her organization is seeking 200 minutes that are fully funded. At the moment, the teachers she represents are averaging 150 minutes of preparation time over a five-day week.

Both the HDSB and the Halton Catholic District School Board (HCDSB) were unable to comment on negotiations with teachers. Talks should be completed sometime in the early part of 2005.

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Burlington Mayor sings for his supper

PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY DAVID RATHBONE

He may be known to many as the mayor of Burlington, but for some people Mayor Rob Maclsaac is also known as a member of a local band called Slow Monday. Mayor Maclsaac, the lead vocalist, has been with the group for over a year. Recently, he and his fellow band members performed at Gennum, a company in Burlington. During the Mayor's Gala charity event, Gennum bid to have the band perform for them at the company's annual Christmas party. Slow Monday plays a lot of different types of music as well as music from the '70s. One of the songs they're known for is I'm a Believer, a tune made popular by the Monkees.



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