



COMMENT

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Tories dropped the ball

Teaching unions in Ontario got just about everything they could have reasonably hoped for out of the two-week long strike. It was astutely handled, for the most part, by the teacher groups, and poorly handled by the provincial government.

The teaching unions succeeded in throwing the focus of debate from management of the nuts and bolts of the education system. Instead they pointed to a sinister government scheme to gain enormous and unaccountable power through Bill 160.

The government, for its part, failed to communicate what is at the core of its agenda — reforming the education system to make it more accountable and successful. Premier Mike Harris fell victim to a better public relations campaign and machine.

As well, in the end, perhaps Mr. Harris is a tad misguided for advancing legislation that would give any education minister sweeping new powers without many, in fact any, substantive checks and balances.

While this may look good from the corridors of power, it is an illusory and temporary gain. It fosters mistrust among people who fear they will be robbed of democratic input.

On a purely practical level, one should not set in legislative stone tools one would not like to yield to a political foe.

The Tories will not always be in office. What if one of the spendthrift governments Ontario has endured in the past had access to the powers Mr. Harris proposes for the education minister? Could such a government not use them just as arbitrarily as some fear the Tories may?

What this whole debate was supposed to be about, and what it is really about, is accountability for and management of the educational system in Ontario to the post-secondary level.

The provincial government contends that in the past such management has been sorely lacking. We would venture to say most people would agree with that, or would have until the issue became so muddled up and intertwined with something else.

Let's put it simply: In the past big teacher unions negotiated with little school boards and got what they wanted more often than not. Under the provincial plan, big unions will negotiate with the big provincial government — all to the good.

The same restructuring that private industry faced in the early 1990s needs to occur, in some meaningful sense anyway, within the educational system.

It still will, but it is taking an enormous toll on the government, one the Tories would not have been looking at if they had managed their affairs more effectively, and less arrogantly.

Rob Kelly

He faces changing times

Congratulations to Mayor Gord Krantz, who has won yet another term at the expense of a tough opponent, Colin Best, in what has been Mr. Krantz' most serious challenge since becoming mayor.

The next three years will likely be full of change in Milton as the provincial government restructures the political landscape.

It is to be hoped Mr. Krantz' long experience in local government will serve him well as Ontario, and Milton change. As usual, the mayor handled his campaign with diplomacy and tact. Mr. Best did as well.



OUR READERS WRITE

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

Bill 160 is too undemocratic

Dear Editor:

(The following letter was sent to North Halton MPP Ted Chudleigh and a copy was filed with The Champion.)

After watching your leader's robot-like, state of the union address on the current education crisis in Ontario, I could not help but be amazed at just how dishonest a seemingly ever growing number of our politicians are becoming. We as Canadians have unfortunately come to accept that politicians will, on occasion, massage the truth. However, when the premier of our province appears on TV and outright lies to all Ontarians I begin to despair.

Harris claims that he cares about our children. Yet, in the last two years he has cut day care, eliminated JK, reduced welfare payments to mothers and systematically endeavored to destroy a hospital system where our children are both born and cared for. The \$40 per day he offered is a disgusting attempt to purchase votes. This amount would convert to an annual salary of \$222,000 for a teacher with 30 kids in the class.

How Mr. Harris could sit there, in his finely upholstered chair, and tell us that he would not take any dollars out of education when he himself must have approved Veronica Lacey's performance contract, which states that she must cut \$667 million out of this year's budget and a further \$300 million out of next year's, astounds me. How many of your constituents are aware that they no longer have control of where Halton's tax dollars are spent, that a car-

painter could be employed to teach in a woodworking shop or that a mechanic could have enough qualifications to teach an auto mechanics class? Are your constituents aware that most sections of Bill 160 end with the phrase "final and conclusive and not open to question in any court"? Excuse me! Is that very phrase not somewhat undemocratic, but indicative of our present provincial government?

According to Mr. Harris our students are performing poorly when we compare them internationally. How does the Conservative government of this province account for the fact that we have the highest secondary school graduation rate in Canada, and our province leads the nation in college and university enrollment.

Harris does not mention that in international testing we finished ahead of Sweden, Germany, New Zealand, United States and Norway despite the fact that in 60 per cent of the homes of the students writing the test English is not the mother tongue. That's not to mention that upon investigation into the test results, it was found that some of the countries were selecting the students that were allowed to take these tests.

I firmly believe that we in Ontario have an educational system that we can be proud of and it is my sincere hope that we can repair the damage the Conservative government is currently inflicting on the system in the next election.

Dave and Margie Moore

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Pud

by Steve Nease

