

Last-minute Mohawk protest doesn't seem to bother Harris

By **KAREN SMITH**
The Champion

As the struggle over Bill 160 came down to the wire, Halton teachers took advantage of the chance to send their message directly to Mike Harris.

The premier, who was at Mohawk Raceway Tuesday night for an annual party fundraiser, faced about 150 protesters just two days before the controversial education reform legislation was expected to pass.

Teachers calling for the Conservatives to kill the bill crowded around entrances to the Guelph Line harness racing track, but were prohibited by police from delaying vehicles.

"We're here to let Mike know we haven't quit and we're not going to get out of his face," said Ron Caldwell, president of the Halton Elementary Teachers' Association.

Halton Regional Police, expecting a major protest, were on hand in droves to keep the peace and protect government officials at the Fifth Annual Evening at the Races with Mike Harris.

No problems

Approximately 20 officers were assigned to secure the scene, said Det. Sgt. Ron Welsh, who called the protest orderly.

"There was some shouting, but no problems of any consequence," he said.

Police met with picket captains to set the rules before the arrival of about 100 Conservatives, including cabinet ministers, and members of the public attending the races.

"Our purpose here is to ensure the safety of everyone and the safety of property," said Sgt. Frank Phillips, who worked a command post set up at the scene. "We don't want anybody getting hurt."

The protesters taunted party members over Bill 160 as they walked toward the main doors, and inside told



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— MIKE HARRIS

them to "try not to choke" on their \$300 a plate dinner.

But North Halton MPP Ted Chudleigh, who attended the gala, said demonstrators were well-behaved.

"They're the nicest protesters I've ever seen. They say what they have to say, but they're polite about it."

Mr. Caldwell said some people entering the building acted rudely by responding to protesters' comments with foul language and telling them to "get a life" and "go home."

Bill 160 not the focus

Inside, Mr. Harris mentioned little about the bill in his speech to party supporters at a reception before the meal.

Instead he focused on what he sees as the party's accomplishments and credited his government for bringing Ontario "from the brink of bankruptcy to a powerhouse."

"We're making the changes that you asked us to make — less government, lower taxes, a balanced budget. Everybody wants to get there, but very few are willing to do what's needed to get there."

"Hardworking, law-abiding taxpaying citizens — that's who all these policies are designed for."

Mr. Harris congratulated party members for their "courage" in resisting "special interest groups that attacked us."

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