

# Deaf schools need a language change, says forum

By LISA TALLYN

American Sign Language should be the language of instruction for the deaf in Ontario, and there should be more deaf administrators and teachers working in schools for the deaf.

That was the overwhelming sentiment of the more than 20 speakers who attended a public meeting at the Ernest C. Drury School for the Deaf Tuesday night.

The speakers included parents of deaf children, former deaf E.C. Drury students, association representatives, teachers and administrators. The meeting was chaired by two members of the provincial government appointed external team for the Deaf Education Review.

Over the past few weeks, the team has been visiting centres across the province, meeting with

teachers, administrators and students in provincial schools for the deaf and hosting public meetings. Questionnaires have been handed to deaf students and their parents. Students have been tested for English language comprehension.

The results of the review will be compiled in a report next week and presented to the Ministry of Education internal team by July.

At Tuesday's meeting former students of E.C. Drury and other provincial schools for the deaf told the audience -- most in attendance were hearing impaired -- they managed to get an education despite the method of instruction used in the classroom.

Gary Malkowski, a former E.C. Drury student currently employed with the Ontario Association for the Deaf, described how frustrated

he felt as a child attending the school.

He said he learned very little while in school, because he could never really understand what was going on. He was taught using the oral method, which is based on lip reading and residual hearing.

Mr. Malkowski was profoundly deaf, and had little or no residual hearing, but was still required to wear headphones which amplified his teacher's voice. When he attended school the children were chastized for using American Sign Language (A.S.L.)

Mr. Malkowski graduated from E.C. Drury and attended Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. He says he managed to get into the school even though he had only a Grade 5 English reading level.

Other former students told

similar stories.

Dennis Morrice of the Canadian Hearing Society outlined several recommendations for change in the deaf education system.

"We just about see every deaf graduate in Ontario eventually," said Mr. Morrice. "We see the products of the education system. I have found that education is the largest barrier to equality for the deaf in society. Things have to be done differently."

Mr. Morrice outlined four key points. He said schools for the deaf must continue to be available.

He called for an increase in the number of deaf role models, teachers and administrators, for the students.

He said schools for the deaf should be more accountable and suggested introduction of a trustee system or advisory council, comprised of hearing impaired people.

"There must be better parent training and pre-school education available. The early years are the most important."

Several recommendations were made, but the hearing impaired members of the audience were most concerned with the introduction of A.S.L. into the schools.

Paul Bartu, superintendent of E.C. Drury School for the Deaf, says that was the key issue raised in meetings between current students of the school and members of the external team held earlier this week.

"That was their number one concern," said Mr. Bartu.

The current language of instruction used at E.C. Drury is Signed English, a code or signing system used to represent English words. That method has been used at the school since 1975.

Prior to the introduction of that method Visible English, based on finger spelling was used. When the school opened, an Aural program was in place which relied on auditory and verbal skills. Lately, an Oral method of instruction was introduced which centred around lip reading.

Although Signed English is the

official language of instruction, Mr. Bartu says E.C. Drury offers a total communication system. Students can use any method they choose to enhance their ability to learn and understand.

"American Sign Language is completely different from Signed English. It has been the language of the deaf for years. The syntax, pragmatics and vocabulary of the language is unique."

Mr. Bartu says although it is not an official policy, teachers at E.C. Drury with A.S.L. ability are encouraged to use it in the classroom.

"We want them to use whatever they can to get through to the students," said Mr. Bartu.

Despite all the different instruction methods used at the school, Mr. Bartu says the average Grade 12 graduate from E.C. Drury reads English at a Grade 5 to Grade 7 level. He agrees that is disappointing, but is not convinced the introduction of A.S.L. would change those statistics.

"The deaf community says that if we went to A.S.L. they would stand a better chance of learning English. It sounds good in theory, but I'm not certain of the results," said Mr. Bartu.

There are currently 236 students enrolled at E.C. Drury School for the Deaf. That number has dropped from 600 in the 1970s. Of the 71 members of the school's teaching staff, only seven are hearing impaired.

Mr. Bartu says that over the years the education system for the deaf has improved, as has public awareness of their situation.

"We are getting the deaf children much earlier than we used to. We have a pre-school program now."

But he says that by the time deaf children reach the age of five, they are three to four years behind their hearing counterparts in language development.

"By five years old hearing children have a vocabulary of 6,000 words and English grammar skills. Deaf children have little grammar skills and a vocabulary of approximately 500 words."

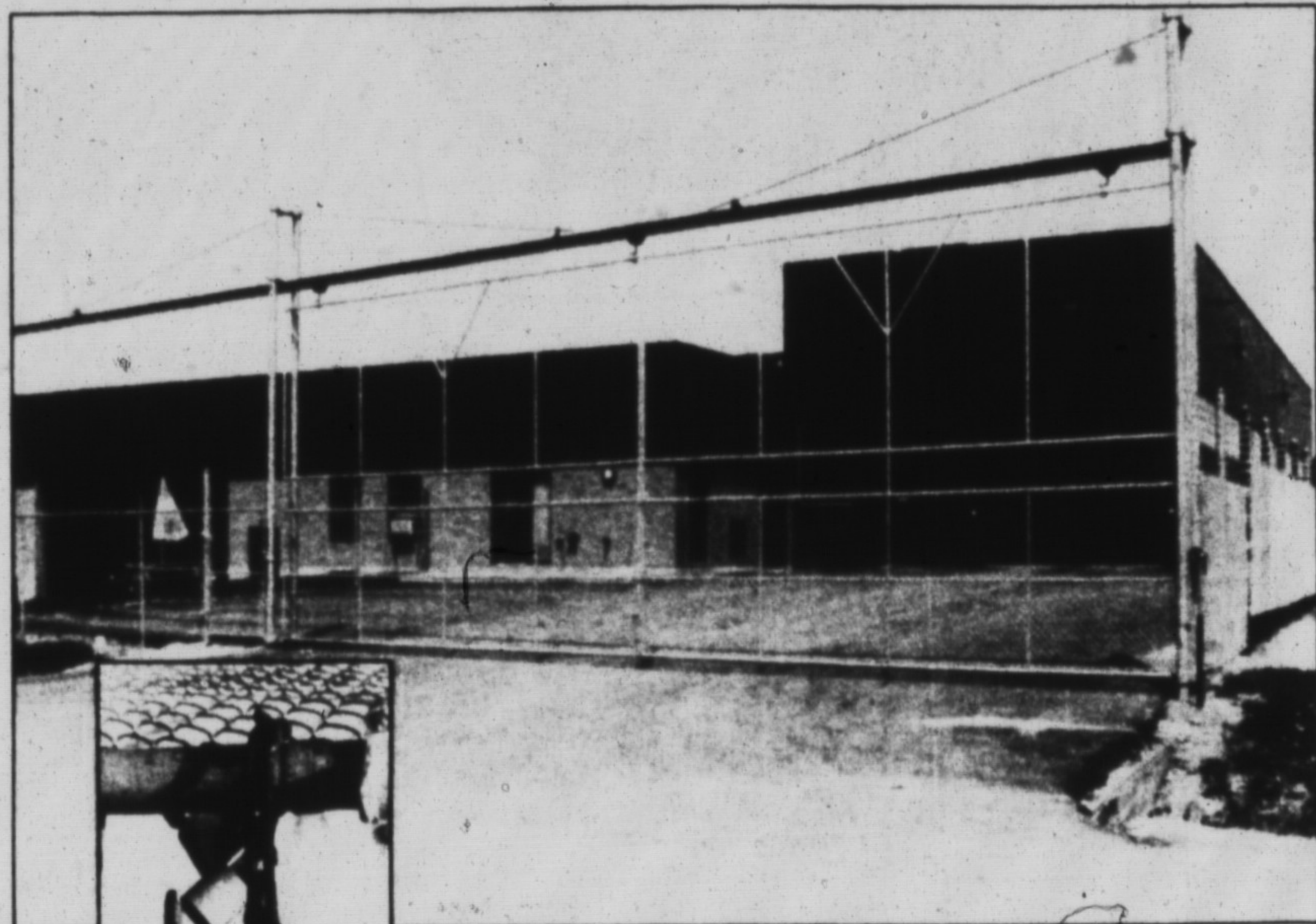


Photo by JOHN WARREN

The doors at Aimco Solrec, on Morobel Drive, have been locked since American customs agents found some PCBs in 50,000 litres of fuel one of its trucks was carry across the border on Sunday. The company has been told to keep the material on its premises until further notice from the Ministry of the Environment.

## PCB-laced fuel to stay on site . . .

from COMPANY on page 1 on technical advice I don't have yet."

Regional councillor Bill Johnson, on the other hand, said the storage facility "is a hell of a good idea."

Mr. Johnson is the only elected official who has actually toured the plant. He did so Tuesday morning. "If the plant was shut down, this crap, where would it go?"

The fact that MOE has suggested PCBs could safely be stored there means "it must be a damn good plant," Mr. Johnson added. "I'd sooner have them (PCBs) in a self-contained, secure area."

Mr. Johnson does not advocate storing PCBs from anywhere else at Aimco Solrec, but he said current safeguards mean handling of the waste already on-site will be as safe as possible.

Floors and drains at the plant slope inward to a containment tank, he said, and there is a holding tank underneath weigh scales on which tankers park.

Although much of Aimco Solrec's trouble stems from not being licenced to handle PCBs, the company's primary business has been converting used inks, solvents and oils to clean fuels.

"This is an MOE-approved waste-processing site," Mr. Adcock said, noting that adequate spill containment procedures are in place and from that standpoint the plant is "environmentally safe."

The PCBs will ultimately be stored in drums within cargo container boxes. The boxes will have trays on the bottom to collect any spills. They will be locked, away from any combustible materials and behind fences, he added.

The site will be reserved for PCBs

already found at Aimco Solrec, Mr. Adcock noted. "I can unequivocally say they will not be in the business of receiving PCBs. It isn't going to be a commercial storage site."

Since MOE closed the plant, skeleton crew operations which Mr. Adcock characterized as "maintenance work," have continued. The MOE officer could not give a date when waste-processing work would resume, but added it was "probably fair" to say Aimco Solrec would re-open. The company "will be instituting a monitoring program which will allow them to screen materials."

Meanwhile, the investigation into

the source of the 50,000 litres of PCB-ridden fuel continues. There are "other companies" being questioned, Mr. Adcock said, although he declined elaboration.

Aimco Solrec officials maintain they had no knowledge the tanker fuel was contaminated.

The tanker's PCB concentration was double the acceptable limit and a drum found at the plant contained more than three times the legal concentration, MOE investigations have revealed.

The company faces six charges relating to blending, transporting, possessing and failing to identify PCBs.

## Seniors can get a free lift to Wintario Draw next week

Senior citizens who want to attend next Thursday evening's Wintario Draw and who need a ride don't have to miss the event.

The Champion and Thrifty Car Rental will provide a shuttle service to and from the Ontario Agricultural Museum on Thursday June 1. The free service is being offered on a first-come, first-served basis as there are only 30 spaces available on the shuttle buses.

Seniors needing a ride should contact The Champion at 878-2341 and leave their name, address and telephone number. Those who call will be contacted in regard to when they will be picked up.

The program begins at 6:45 p.m. and doors open at 6:15. Entertainment will be provided by a variety of local groups and individuals before the Wintario Draw is held. The live television show runs from 8:30 to 9 p.m. at the Gambrel Barn on the museum grounds.

Those who want to be part of the live television audience may purchase tickets at the following locations: Leisure Services Department, town hall; Chamber of Commerce Information Centre, Steeles Avenue and Martin Street; Lotto Kiosk, Milton Mall; Information Milton, Optimist Centre; The Canadian Champion office, 191 Main St.; Delacourts, Main and Martin streets; Knight's Men's Store, 202 Main St. and the Ontario Agricultural Museum's reception desk, Tremaine Road.

Tickets cost \$3 and will include one free Wintario draw ticket. Proceeds from ticket sales will benefit North Halton Recreation Programs for handicapped adults.

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