

COMMENT

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Chief's got our vote

While we think it was high time someone publicly took Halton Regional Police chief James Harding to task for his confrontational and arrogant tendencies, we can't agree with Halton Hills regional councillor Pam Johnston that he should be removed from office.

Chief Harding has done much to improve the Halton force, and put it (and himself) in the forefront of the fight against racism and domestic violence.

Chief Harding's problem is twofold. First, he's inflexible, aloof and pushy. Second, the system within which he works fosters that attitude because it doesn't demand enough accountability of him.

Councillor Johnston was correct in her assessment of chief Harding's tendency toward bullying tactics, which she first publicly expressed when the chief said that if Halton doesn't spend \$6.5 million to improve police radio systems, there could be dire safety consequences.

But she went well beyond that point the following week, saying that the man no longer deserved his office. That's a long leap. She provided only what we consider to be thin substantiation for such an alarming statement.

While the councillor appears to have committed an error in judgement, it is the rather predictable fallout of chief Harding's annoying behaviour. But being annoying is a far cry from being incompetent or uncommitted. Chief Harding is neither of those things.

The problem plaguing chief Harding is similar to one which has dogged many who wield too much power in a given theatre of operations. He has few checks and balances to curb his excesses. That is more a fault of the system that has grown up around him than a result of his own actions.

The chief, much to the consternation of regional elected officials, is not as accountable for his actions or dispositions as said politicians are. The chief is largely only answerable to the area police services board, or police commission. That five-person body is made up of two regional councillors and three appointed members. It is the only real political hurdle chief Harding, or just about any police chief in Ontario, must face.

Politicians in general resent it. They resent being unable to truly control police expenditures, and it has led to confrontation in Halton. They resent knowing that municipalities have only one route of appeal if they deem police budgets excessive, to a provincial board that they see as consistently skewed in favour of the police stance.

We have a certain empathy for the position within which chief Harding finds himself. Policing is a tough job, and it's extremely easy to fall into the 'if only' trap. 'If only' we had this, the police brass reason, we could have stopped that. If only we had enough money to hire those new cops, buy those new radios, send those people on that training course, this or that may not have happened.

The trouble is there will never be enough. There never is.

The time has come for the power structure of policing to change in Ontario. As a matter of fact, the provincial government, after much lobbying from the municipalities, has agreed to study that very thing. The thrust of policing today is to become more community oriented, and that means more community accountability as well. Policing must come clearly under the control of elected officials.

As for chief Harding's unfortunate tendencies to irritate elected officials, he should work on becoming more understanding and less impatient. We believe he is a dedicated and able officer, but he's far from a bridge-builder in the political arena. When he retires, and not before, it will be time to consider a different type of leader. Until then, we appreciate his efforts and character, if not his character flaws.

LOOKING BACK



Bike-a-thon

Pedal power earned 550 dollars toward the purchase of tents for playground campouts in August 1970. These bike-a-thon contestants were the first to leave the starting line at the Milton plaza for the 31 mile ride.

PAGES OF THE PAST

One Year Ago

From the May 22, 1991 issue

□ A showdown was anticipated between pro and anti-abortion factions at the annual meeting of the Milton District Hospital board of directors in June. Already, both sides had prepared for what could be a bitter battle over control of hospital policy. Usually only 40 to 50 people purchase memberships giving them rights to vote for hospital directors, but "hundreds" would be eligible to cast ballots in the June 19 election, hospital administrator Brian Brady said.

□ An 82-year-old resident of Halton Centennial Manor was found at Highway 25 and Britannia Road — an hour after he wandered from the Ontario Street home for the aged. A motorist called Halton Regional Police when the man, who suffers from Alzheimer's Disease, collapsed at the intersection. Police said the senior citizen climbed the fence at the manor and made his way down Ontario Street before falling to the ground. He was not injured.

□ The Milton OPP had their hands full with the Highway 401 trucker blockade which backed up traffic for hours last week. Police took action against the truckers by charging them with offences ranging from unnecessary slow driving to careless driving. As many as 1,300 trucks participated in the tax protest, but the Victoria Day weekend was left blockade free.

20 Years Ago

From the May 24, 1972 issue

□ It was announced Milton's post office, which oc-

cupied a place of prominence on the corner of Main and Martin streets since 1916, may not be there much longer. Halton MP Rud Whiting said a feasibility study was being undertaken on improvement of postal accommodation in Milton and there was a chance a new \$300,000 post office would be built in 1973.

□ Making the public more aware of police problems is the principle behind the Milton Police Department's new program allowing the public to ride with officers on patrol. "We're hoping members of the public who go out with an officer on patrol duty will see how police are quite often caught in the middle," said Police Chief Ray Andress.

□ A seven-year-old boy was injured when the bicycle he was riding was involved in a collision with a car on Mill Street. Anthony Oldenhof of Toronto was taken to Milton District Hospital for treatment and released. The driver of the car was G. Bradford Clements of RR 2, Milton. The Oldenhofs were visiting relatives on Mill Street, the scene of the accident. Damage to the bicycle was \$15. There was no damage to the Clements' car.

50 Years Ago

From the May 21, 1942 issue

□ The housing problem in Milton was growing worse. Folks were occupying former stores where available as dwellings.

□ A kangaroo was loose in Georgetown. Believed to be the first of its type to be roaming these parts, it is thought it may be the same animal that jumped from a train at St. Lambert, Quebec last Tuesday, the pet of some Australian airmen.

PUD

BY STEVE NEASE

