



COMMENT

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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The sum of fears

On Friday this newspaper received a poorly crafted and unsubstantiated screed criticizing the educational reporting which has appeared within over the last several months.

It was a form letter, with a blank space at the bottom for the so inspired to ink their signatures. In essence, it stated that the educational coverage was "biased, erroneous, inflammatory and exaggerated."

Further, according to this mysterious petition, objectionable articles are "demoralizing" and "offensive" to teachers. On top of that, it was revealed that teachers are facing "increasingly difficult conditions" and "significant personal hardship."

Soon they may not even "be guaranteed" a lunch period which, one can only hope, they would use to recuperate from the aforementioned psychological torment, given their precarious emotional states.

Upon further and generally haphazard investigation by your humble servant, whose interviewing skills are now as rusty as his golf swing, it came to light that the cranky missive was penned by unidentified insiders at the Halton Elementary Teachers Association, the union representing those employees.

It turned out not to be a diabolically hatched sub-plot in a larger conspiracy to bully and influence the media, although that probably would have been more fun from a journalistic standpoint. Instead, to hear teacher spokeswoman Erica Andrews tell it — and she was for the most part forthcoming — it was left on a table during a regular meeting of union diehards (our term) so they could pick it up and pass it around at their schools, if they so desired.

This, Ms Andrews indicated, was in response to repeated complaints from the Milton teaching fraternity that they are getting picked on.

When pressed, both Ms Andrews and a local school principal, who was also open and polite about the whole thing, said it really wasn't biased reporting at all that they took issue with, but the opinions expressed by columnists from time to time, and perhaps even in the editorials.

Thus we have, from both the union which concocted the protest note and someone who signed it, what seems to be an admission that the news pieces in the paper are fair and accurate but they don't like some of the opinions, some of the time. Neither do I, when it comes to letters to the editor and columns, but part of the exercise of freedom of speech is affording people leeway to say what they want, as long as it is within the confines of fair comment.

If it moves outside that purview steps have to be taken.

For example, columnist Pat Kelly, a friend of Rusty Golf Swing, was fired a few weeks ago, because of an improperly researched comment he made in a column about Halton Board of Education director Bob Williams. This was no fun for old Rusty, and probably not much for Pat either. So you can perhaps see, Ms Andrews and friends, that we are striving to protect the integrity of the process here.

A few quick notes, in closing.

Since January, there have been 34 local educational stories in this paper, and 38 more through sister newspaper chain syndication. There have been 22 photos. There have been 13 columns or editorials dealing with education, not counting what appears in today's paper.

A good many of these are stories of accomplishment within the school system, and most photos are of fundraisers or awards.

In a review of some of the columns and editorials which have been published, your agent has been hard put to find anything beyond fair comment, and little that has been challenged as such.

Last week a similar form letter, from the secondary school teaching union, was sent to two south Halton newspapers, the Oakville Beaver and the Burlington Post. It reportedly indicated that the union would not circulate some flyers through those papers due to philosophical differences over editorial coverage. This sparked some barbed editorial responses, in effect well thought out nose-thumbing.

It's a tough time in education, no question, as an even tougher era looms. With that threat, people yield to all sorts of fears and prejudices. What we are seeing at present is not unionism's finest hour for Halton's teachers. And maybe, since times have been so challenging for so long now, we are all too sorely tempted by those same prejudices, those same fears.

Rob Kelly

Looking Back



Dishing out hot dogs was a chore for this crew at the Hornby Garden Party in July, 1969. Many of the 4,000 people who attended headed for the food booth where Dave McLeody, Dawn Jubb, Darlene Leslie, Elva Howden and Art Brooks were in charge.

Pages of the Past

One Year Ago

From the June 7, 1995 issue

- Ernest C. Drury School for the Deaf teachers and students celebrated American Sign Language (ASL) Literature Week. The week highlighting ASL literature represented one of the most exciting events for deaf students.

- OPP Pipes and Drums Major Fred Alderman piped in Grace Anglican Church members who were celebrating the church's 100th anniversary. A group of dignitaries paraded through downtown to the church. Many arrived in period costume to celebrate the anniversary.

- Officials at the Ministry of Natural Resources said there was little people could do about the coyote problem. The ministry suggested taking common sense precautions and getting accustomed to the creatures.

20 Years Ago

From the June 9, 1976 issue

- The second annual president's workshop for the Canadian Family Campers Federation was held at Milton Campgrounds. The group represented campers from all across the country. The federation did a lot of work setting camping standards and working on con-

servation projects.

- A wine and cheese party was held at the curling club lounge by the executive and staff of Milton Co-Operative Nursery School to wind up the school year.

- The continued saga of the fence between Halton Centennial Manor and a neighboring development surfaced again at Milton council's meeting, and although a solution seemed imminent, it had yet to be settled. When the neighboring development built the manor, the developer, town and regional councils were anxious to see the problem finally resolved.

50 Years Ago

From the June 6, 1946 issue

- The 31st annual meeting of Section 2 of Toronto Presbyterial was held in Knox Church, Milton with Mrs. W. McClure of Brampton and Mrs. Edgar Robertson of Milton in charge.

- Ladies' Night of Milton Canadian Club had a program that was unique and of particular interest to the ladies and men, too. The speaker was Mr. W.C. Kenney of Toronto and the subject was "Frozen Foods, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow." There were movies in color on the same subject.

- The joint meeting of Milton Junior Farmers and Junior Institute was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. C. Ford. It was well attended.

Pud

by Steve Nease

