

# No quick fix in Halton school board labour talks

By KIM ARNOTT  
Special to The Champion

Negotiations between the Halton Board of Education and many of its employee groups are underway, but no one is expecting any quick deals.

While contracts with most of the groups expired at the end of August, the negotiations are still in their initial stages, said Trustee Debbie Marklew, vice-chair of the board's salary committee.

"We've been meeting regularly with the groups," said Ms Marklew, who doesn't expect any deals will be reached before Christmas.

In addition to negotiating with the approximately 2,600 elementary and secondary teachers, the board is also trying to reach agreements with instructional assistants, office personnel,

support staff and the union representing school speech pathologists and social workers.

During last spring's budget process, trustees agreed to seek \$6 million in wage and benefit concessions from the board's various union groups. It was a fact the union groups were aware of when they sat down at the negotiating table, said Ms Marklew.

"Everybody knew that we were going to come knocking for money," she said. "There was no surprise in that."

At public meetings across the region over the last few months, director of education Bob Williams and other board administrators have been predicting a \$24 million budget shortfall for next year. And with over 80 per cent of the board's \$272 million budget spent on salaries and benefits, it's inevitable that budget cuts will be felt by employees.

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**BOARD NEGOTIATOR DEBBIE MARKLEW**

But Ms Marklew remains upbeat about the tone of the negotiations.

"I feel very positive going through this process that we're all in this together," she said. "I'm getting the impression that everyone wants to negotiate."

The provincial government, which has floated such ideas as abolishing school boards and removing teachers' rights to strike recently, isn't making it any easier to strike a deal, however.

"I think teachers' negotiations are going to be

very slow and very painful, with not knowing what's coming down from the province," added Ms Marklew.

Kathleen Carroll, president of the Halton district Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF), agrees.

"The provincial cutbacks and all these provincial announcements have certainly created a climate of uncertainty," she said.

But Ms Carroll is also confident a deal can be reached with the board, given enough time.

"I'm optimistic," she said. "We've always been able to come to an agreement in the past."

A representative from the board's elementary teacher union would only say that negotiations are ongoing.

Until new deals have been negotiated with the various employee groups, the old contracts remain in effect.

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## Workfare is almost on the go

By BRAD REAUME  
The Champion

Pieces in the workfare puzzle are falling into place, according to reports presented at Halton Region's health and social services committee last week.

Halton has committed to the new program and is seeking an additional \$1 million from the provincial government, according to regional commissioner of social services Bonnie Ewart.

Final details are being worked out with the province and are expected to be announced within a few weeks.

Burlington Mayor Walter Milkewich used the discussion as an opportunity to take another shot at workfare.

"It misses the basic point about society and economy. Unemployment exists largely because of a structural change in the economy due to a new industrial revolution," he said. "Unfortunately the job experience offered in Ontario Works (workfare) is in the old economy. It is not related to the new economy and where the jobs are going to be."

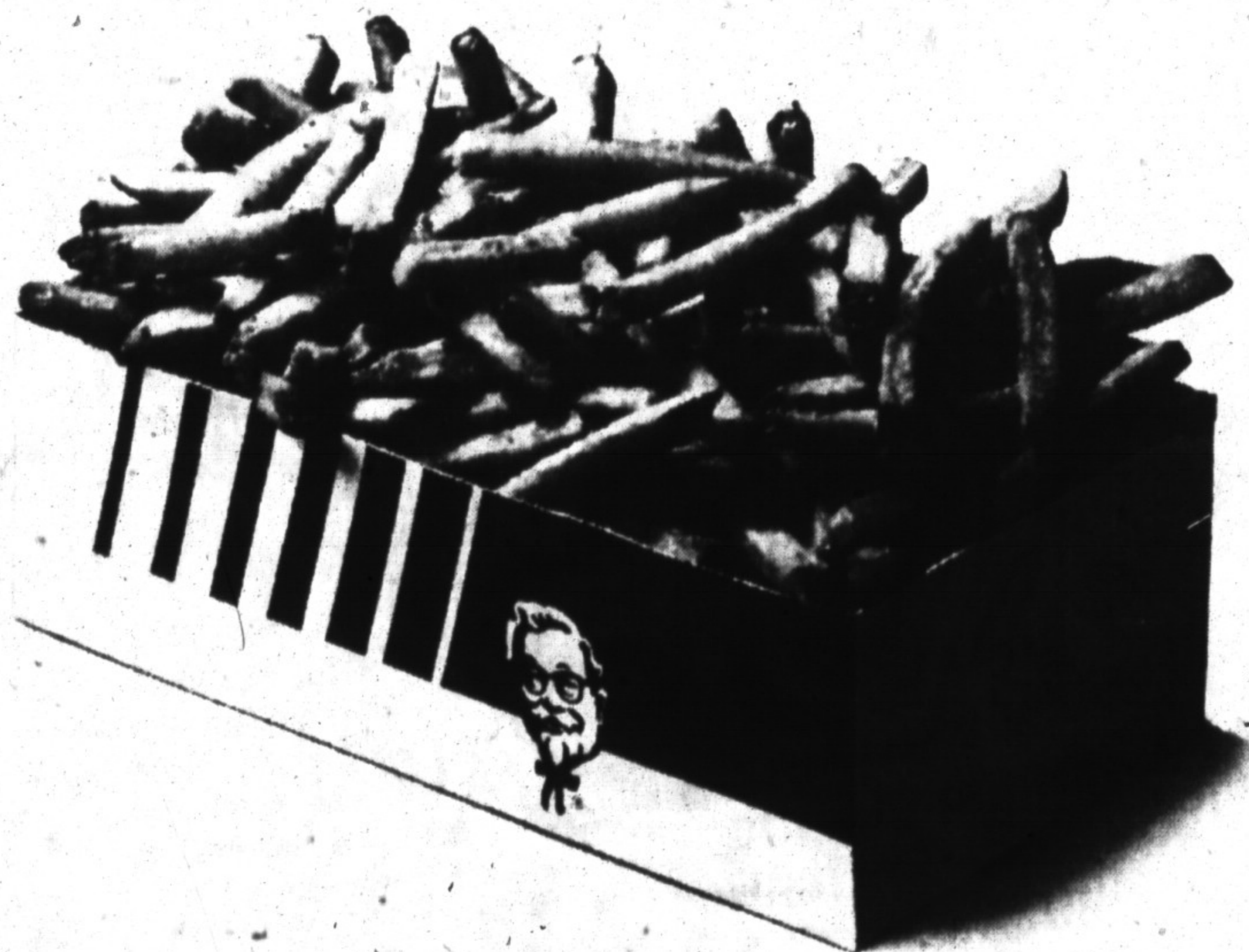
However Burlington Councillor Jack Dennison said the economy still provides most jobs in traditional sectors of commerce.

Milton Councillor Colin Best suggested most of the positions available to workfare participants will be in the school system. Janet Menard, Halton's director of income and employment services, said school rep-

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