

# Letters

## Alarmed by school board

Dear editor: I have submitted the following to Trustee Joy Horton for presentation to the York County Board of Education:

The oath we take in our courts is to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. These few simple words express the earnest spirit and hope of truly civilized man: express the very heart and intent of the democratic process; and surely the intent of any meaningful educational process.

If, for example, in our considerations, we examined but one side of a coin, or of persons but the outside appearance, we would lack the full knowledge required to determine the whole truth about them.

I am aware (of course) that the world is not a big Boy Scouts' camp, that even rural little Aurora is not a Girl Guides' tea party.

Nevertheless, I find it a matter for alarm — and more than alarm, for investigation, for change — that the minutes of the meetings (secret or otherwise) of the York County Board of Education and its trustees are prepared and published as they now are.

As I understand, the executive assistant to Director Sam Chapman takes shorthand notes of the board meetings, and also operates a tape recorder.

Over the next few days she then drafts these records and presents them to Mr. Chapman. He edits them, copies are made, and mailed to the trustees.

I understand also copies of the minutes of open meetings are available to the public on request.

Questions of error, or omission, may be raised at the next meeting of the board two weeks later.

The decision, then, of what shall be in the record and what shall not, is entirely at the discretion of one person.

And I understand there are many omissions from the recorded minutes. In other words, they are not the whole truth.

Perhaps the result is analogous to the effect of much modern food processing, which presents us with bright little packages from the contents of which much of the fundamental nourishment, flavor, and goodness has been removed.

It seems to me the whole editing procedure is most undesirable.

Quite apart from the possibility of accidental error or omission, any person, no matter how well-intentioned, has self interest, individual interest, correlative to his or her position, power, and professional intent.

As one might quote, from innumerable examples, it is so easy to change the whole complexion of any report by omissions alone.

The same may be said of the use — and misuse — of punctuation, where, by the omission or addition of just one comma, for instance, the opposite of what was intended can appear to have been said.

For further example I refer you to the question of the board executive salaries discussed last October, over which there appears to be considerable doubt and disagreement.

The availability of full and complete minutes — available to all, including the press, and the public who will be required to pay — would clarify the whole matter.

Where are they? In this incident alone, neither Mr. Chapman nor any of his executive assistants could be considered as suitable and impartial editors of the pertinent minutes.

As to the right of trustees to raise questions of error or omission from the minutes at subsequent meetings, this sounds fairer than it is.

With the lapse of time, the inevitable lapses of memory; with the ever-present pressures of the

meeting of the moment; with the procedural devices and rules, the attitude — perhaps impatience — of the chairman, it is easy to see that the average trustee might throw up his hands, park his tongue, put his trust in God and Mr. Chapman.

News, minutes of meetings, in fact almost any written matter, may easily be edited to become an instrument of manipulation; easily slanted to produce a desirable, or hoped for, public reaction — sometimes approval, sometimes somnolence.

In reference to the board's handling of the news, I saw when reading

its official news release of Feb. 26 that it had omitted a great deal of what was said at the meeting reported.

It was propaganda, slanted to persuade the public how both harmful and more or less impossible it would be to cut the education budget.

It was designed to support the various and inexcusable prevarications of the board, which so far, and only under considerable pressure, has come up with budget cuts which are insignificant — more like gentle sandpapering.

The York board's function, I take it, is to shape and direct the educational process in Ontario — and thus the young lives and characters in its care.

It thus bears a great responsibility, apart from the monetary one.

There is the responsibility to devise courses of study which are full and impartial, so that true knowledge, without assumption or bias of any kind, may be achieved.

There should be provision of an environment for learning — by good example, choice of subjects and their comprehensive treatment — which encourages the student to believe in, to support the open, democratic system in which we profess to live.

This open, democratic system is what we boast of in comparing ourselves with countries under Communism, under dictatorship.

I submit to you any student who considers the manner in which the board now conducts its business — with its often secret sessions, its method of recording their substance — can hardly have confidence, cannot in these his most impressive years, have confidence in it, its integrity, and thus in our society.

For the manner, in essence, is undemocratic; and the record, the minutes, are often incomplete, and therefore false.

There are other ways of keeping the record.

Hansard, I believe, is a complete and true record of parliamentary debate.

Regardless of the price of paper, I feel it in the best interest of the public, of the hope for truth, for true democracy, that a complete record be made. Big Brother has no place here.

Failing the Hansard method, alternating committees — minute committees — of say three trustees might be made responsible for the final text of the minutes.

If we assume the 20 trustees of the York county board are elected: to take an all-round view of the educational process in which is involved consideration of its direction and character, all relative to the public purse and the other demands and considerations which fall upon it; if we assume the 20 are not elected merely to further and ratify with little question the decisions and expenditures of the board's executive, then objection must be made to the present undemocratic procedures of secrecy, of slanting the news and the minutes.

Two slight incidents in this century, both in my vivid and living experience, come to mind: World War 1 and World War 2.

Part of the heart of these wars was the spirit and professed intent, as the popular saying went, to 'make the world safe for democracy'. In these struggles, millions of men of the West died.

The Canadian soldier poet of World War 1, John McCrae, concluded his world-famous poem 'In Flanders Field' thus:

'If ye break faith with us who die

'We shall not sleep, though poppies grow 'In Flanders fields.'

I ask you: Are they sleeping?

I request that you bring the considerations which I have raised before the York County Board of Education at an early date.

SID BRITTON,  
84 Hillview Rd.,  
Aurora, Ont.

## Misunderstanding on Maple petition

Dear Editor:

Last week, a letter written by Steven Ball of Maple with regard to the Family Leisure Centre, contained a paragraph relating to the signing of a petition by school children.

Mr. Ball was using information given to him by myself regarding a petition circulated by other children, not teachers, at one of the Maple schools.

Mr. Ball used this information and I understand has received a few embarrassing calls as a result of this letter.

I would hasten to point out however, that a petition was circulated at a school in Maple and I am sure school officials and parents alike, would certainly have moved to curtail such action had they known a petition was being circulated.

I know there was no intent to misrepresent any facts in this regard. Thank you for the opportunity to correct any misunderstanding.

W. DAVID TRUMAN,  
7241 Jane St. N.,  
Concord, Ont.

## Thanks for cartoon

Dear Editor:

Congratulations on this week's cartoon on your Editorial page.

It's a poignant expression of the rights of the unborn.

Thank you and the cartoonist. Hopefully some people will receive the gift of life through this cartoon.

(MRS.) CATHERINE ZIMMERMAN,  
Box 538,  
Oak Ridges, Ont.

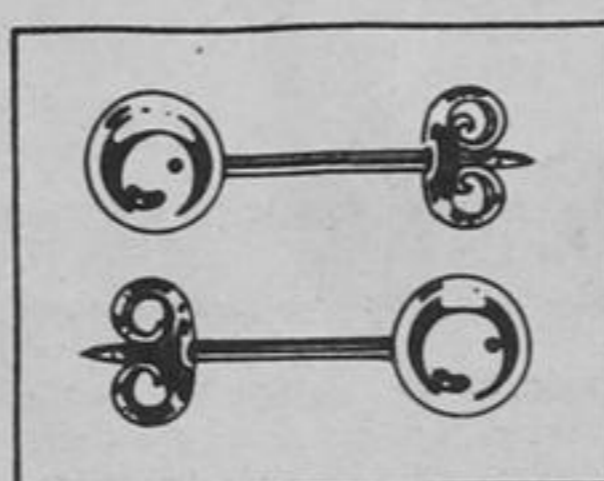


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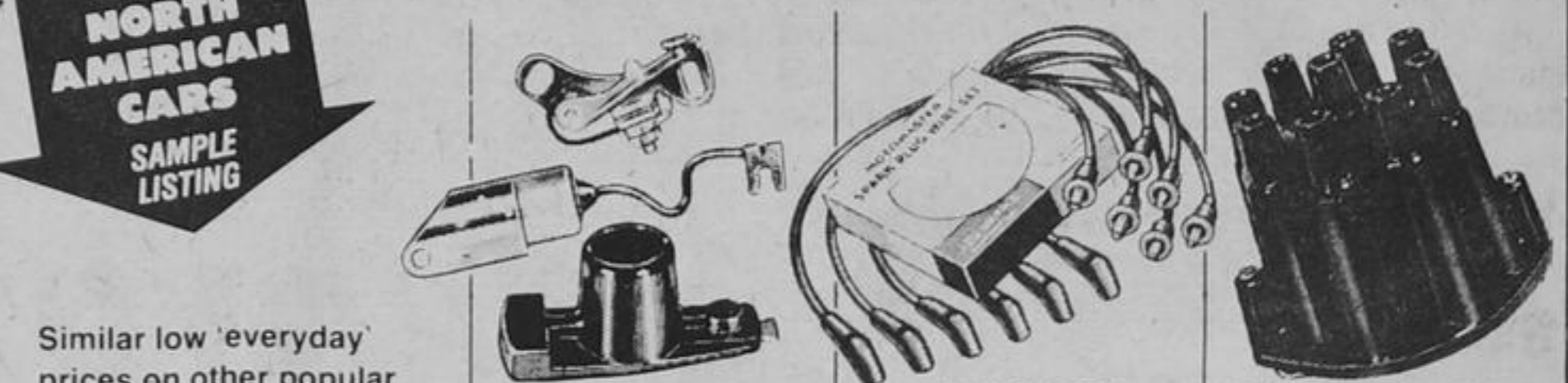
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