

THE "OPEN HOUSE" FORUM

-reprinted from Marathon Mercury

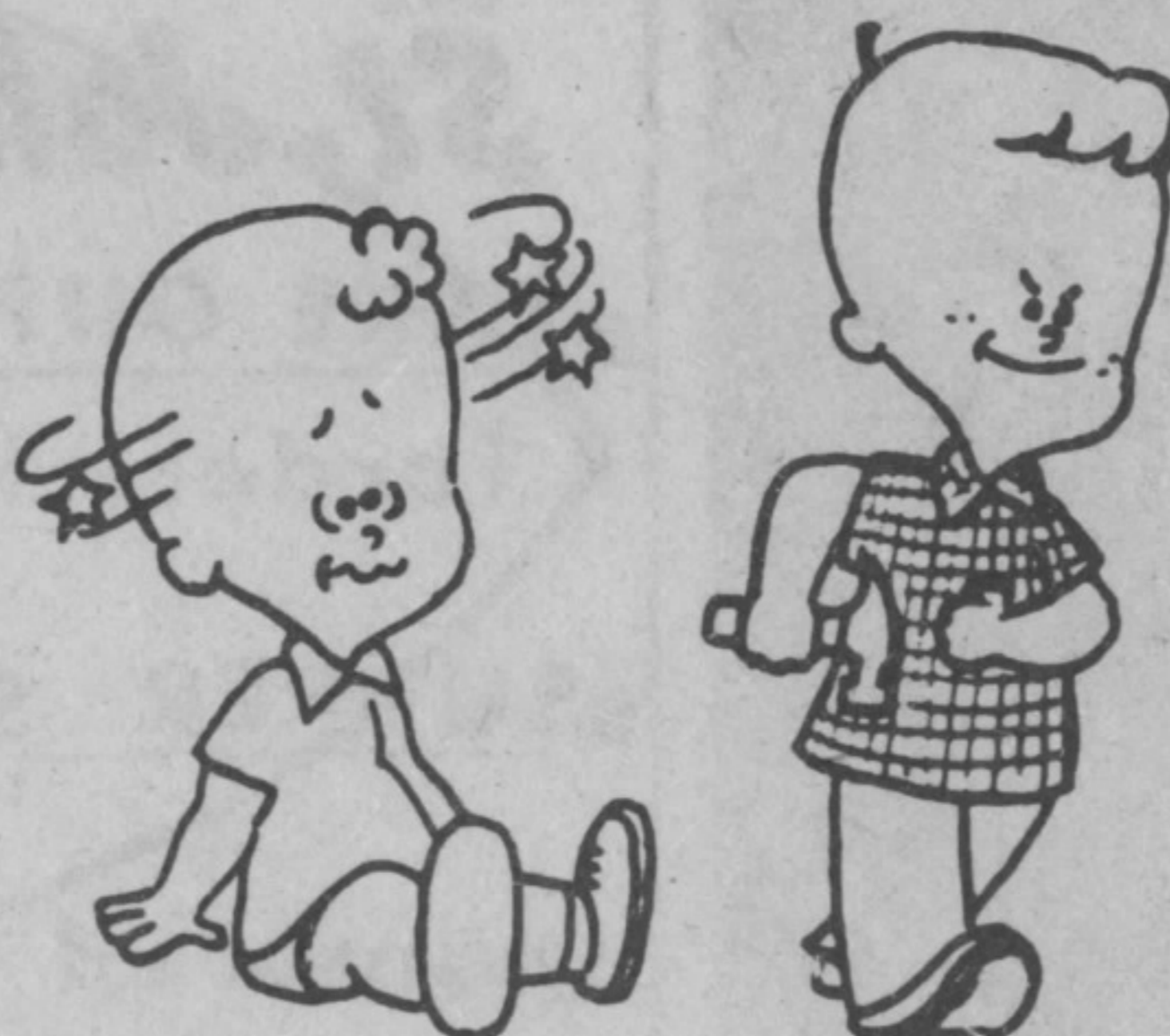
Speaking on behalf of American Can of Canada Ltd., Claude E. Steeves, Mill Manager, clarified the position of the company in the operation of municipal government. "It is the policy of the Company" he said "to assist to the best of its ability, whatever form of municipal government Marathon is governed by." He went on to say, in answering a question from the audience, that American Can will not take steps in changing the present municipal administration, unless it is clearly indicated by the feelings of Marathon's residents, that a change is warranted.

The meeting, one of a weekly forum on social questions, was held in St. John's United Church Hall on Sunday, March 17. It was attended by well over a hundred interested Marathonians, who came out to hear both sides of the topic, labelled the "Open Town" Question. Guests who appeared on the panel were Lloyd D. Irwin, Chairman of the Improvement District of Marathon; Harry Coe and V.T. Thompson of Terrace Bay, both well versed in the operation of that town's elected council; Vice-President and Mill Manager Claude E. Steeves; and Dr. Fred McNally, Rector of St. John's United Church, who acted as moderator.

Speaking in favour of elected councils, Mr. Thompson outlined some of the advantages of Improvement Districts, such as continuity of administration and programs, systematic development of appointees, and listed as disadvantages the fact that appointees are not responsible to the residents of the community, and are susceptible to loss of drive and desire. He termed a government by election as democratic, and in tune with public thinking, in which he was echoed by Harry Coe. Mr. Coe added that self government is good for the people, and that an elected council serves as a sounding board of the taxpayers' opinions.

Mr. Irwin retaliated with some disapproval of the general terminology, "Open Town". He stated that Marathon would welcome any industry which would like to locate in Marathon with open arms. "The difficulty lies" Mr. Irwin said, "in attracting industry, in the face of the distance from any large market" "Some people are of the opinion" Mr. Irwin said that "an Improvement District is not a legal form of government a thought which is highly erroneous." Defending the Marathon system of government, Mr. Irwin said that one board alone makes up the budget, and administration of civic departments, rather than a number of boards, all after the same tax dollar. This results in a more stable, and economic handling of public funds. He further mentioned the obvious lack of response by the people of Marathon in the recent letters to the editor which appeared in the Mercury, a

BILL'S BOYS



by Bill Thomas

fact which indicates that Marathon is quite happy with the present administration. Some of the accomplishments of the Board were cited, including the retirint of debentures.

Speaking as an individual, Mr. Steeves said that after 21 years in a municipality, the people of Marathon have a responsibility to govern themselves. He went on to say, that a change in government could quite possibly result in an increase of financial burden on the taxpayer, at least for a limited time.

The panelists from Terrace Bay said that there was no obvious change in Tax structures, when the town decided to govern itself, and that an improvement district, being a puppet of the provincial government, finds it more difficult in obtaining action at the provincial level. Mr. Irwin calmly showed an example, where Terrace Bay fared no better. Mr. Irwin also revealed, to the surprise of everyone, that under the new education set-up, the taxpayers in Marathon are responsible for about 62% of the net education costs in the district, including Terrace Bay, even though Marathon has all debentures of its own. This was cited as an example of democratic government, the setting up of a district education system without the consultation of the municipalities by Ontario.

Several examples of good Council and taxpayer relations were aired by the representatives from Terrace Bay, among them, a change for the better in the interest the people of the neighbouring town take in their community, the high percentage of voters at elections, and the ready availability of qualified persons to run for office.

It was pointed out, that in the event Marathon wants an elected council, a good representation should be made to the board, which would be followed by the appropriate steps in the formation of self government. The opinion prevailed that the best way to find out what Marathonians want, would be to hold some sort of referendum or plebiscite, so that the question may be settled one way or another, for the time being at least.

Rev. F. McNally is to be commended on the job he performed as moderator, and in staging this informative forum.

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CARD OF THANKS - I would like to express my thanks to all who sent cards and were so kind to me since my injury. Special thanks to Norman Lemieux.

Mrs. E. Lawson

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The best proof that appearances are deceiving is that the dollar bill looks exactly the same as it did 15 years ago.