

## Opinion

# Forum took hard look at our economic future



**NORTHERN  
INSIGHTS**

by Larry Sanders



On Wednesday, Nov. 27 in Thunder Bay, a seminar sponsored by the Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce and the Economic Development Corporation was held at the Valhalla Inn.

The speakers were a "who's who" of economic development, industrial adjustment and retraining in the region: the EDC, Mainstream, the Adjustment Committee from the Abitibi-Price Thunder Bay Division mill, Confederation College, Lakehead University, Canada Employment and Immigration, and the Canadian Labour Congress. Mainstream is a national firm with a contract from Abitibi-Price to assist employees laid off by the mothballing of Abitibi's Thunder Bay Division and by cutbacks in its other operations.

I should disclose to you that I am more than a passive observer of this event — I was one of the organizers. The process of organizing the Forum, titled "Dealing with Deindustrialization", was almost as instructive as the event itself. Everyone seems to recognize that the region is going through an all-pervasive economic upheaval. Speaker after speaker said this recession seems to be much deeper and more damaging than the one 10 years ago. We are ending up with fewer manufacturing and primary industry jobs — jobs that we have no hope of getting back once this recession ends.

### EDC reluctant to admit problem

But despite this realization, the various players in economic development were reluctant to talk honestly about what was wrong, and what needs to be done. In fact, the EDC would not even admit we have a problem.

Dick Charbonneau, the General Manager of the EDC, refused to accept the "deindustrialization" title of the forum as accurate. "Let us think," he said, "in terms of reindustrialization."

Organizing the Forum was instructive because the EDC has resisted stating the region's economic position in anything but optimistic terms. The Community Futures people told us they had been trying for more than a year to organize a Forum and had not succeeded, because of resistance from the EDC. The Community Futures people are struggling to find a distinctive role, as is another economic development program, the Thunder Bay Ventures. Both are seen as upstarts by the EDC. Community Futures drafted a vision statement earlier this year that began "we are in an economic crisis . . ." The EDC refused to accept that wording, delaying the adoption of the vision statement.

The only reason the Forum happened at all was that Mainstream, the principle sponsor, insisted on it, and sought everyone's participation. That nearly 200 people turned out speaks loudly about the need for such an airing of our economic laundry. The "turf wars" were not healed, just over-ridden.

Bob Rosehart, President of Lakehead University, pointed out how Kapuskasing had complained loudly and effectively when it was threatened with losing its mill. "Thunder Bay," said Rosehart, "took the loss of Abitibi-Price lying down. I wonder if things would have been different if this city had complained effectively, like Kapuskasing did." He went on to point out that the Abitibi mill has a highly competitive "wood basket" (the sum total of all costs of mill production) and should have been able to survive.

### "Reaganomics" hasn't worked in Canada

Labour turnout at the Forum was impressive. Grainhandlers, steelworkers, and representatives of the teachers, construction and public sector unions. Their spokesman at the Forum was Kevin Hayes, senior economist from the Canadian Labour Congress in Ottawa. Hayes pointed how a decade of trying to make "Reaganomics" work in Canada has led to massive unemployment and serious structural weaknesses in the national economy. "We are now," said Hayes, "in a very similar position in the 1990s as we were in the 1920s, just before the Great Depression. The only thing stopping the market from taking a big crash like 1929 are our well-developed social safety nets."

Jim Foulds, chairman of the Abitibi-Price Adjustment Committee, agreed: "How would stores stay in business, if the unemployed did not have Unemployment Insurance cheques? How would hospitals and clinics pay their staff, if there wasn't medicare?"

Hayes argued that we should aim toward the "high-road" (high wages, high skill levels) of economic development, since the "low-road" (low wages, low cost) method of trying to increase productivity has failed us.

Despite the differences, I believe the Forum was a starting point for building new partnerships. We now have to wait for our new City Council, elected on a platform of economic renewal, to define their agenda. Other municipal councils taking office in northwestern Ontario will have to do the same.

## Principal's perspective

### Principal says he had to be more than just an administrator

This will probably be my last article as principal of LSHS. I would like to distill the essence of my views on the role of the principal, and review my year.

There are two major kinds of principals. One is purely an administrator, the other is the educator. The principal who functions as an efficient administrator takes care of the day to day details of running the school — scheduling classes and teachers, preparing the budget, getting required supplies, completing reports on time, planning meetings and generally keeping people happy by minimizing the demands on them.

To the principal who is primarily an educator, the day to day administrative details are important. However, the larger educational issues take on a far greater importance — such as the wholeness and integrity of the educational programme, the wholesomeness of the learning environment, the central needs of students, the concerns of parents and the community, anticipating the future and leading the school towards it. In other words, the principal-educator has a vision of present needs and future trends and effectively plans for them.

The fundamental questions such a principal asks are: What are we doing to motivate and encourage the students who are entrusted to our care for four or five years? How can they best be prepared not only to shape their own future, but the future of the world which will be theirs? Fundamentally, what is education — is it merely marks and credits, or is it something far more intrinsic? These can be disturbing questions to those of settled ways.

As principal, I want to know what students need, what parents require the school to do, what the community expects of the educational system. So I formed the Student Advisory Committee, and initiated the Community Advisory Committee. I also insisted on some of the fundamental requirements of the educational system, as demanded by the Education Act and School Board policies. These are essentially non-negotiable items, not only because the law and the Board require principals to have them in place, but also because the educational imperatives of the students in our care demand that they be in place.

Change tends to make some people unhappy or resentful. Especially when it is made by someone new to the system. Xenophobia (fear of strangers) is a natural human trait. So they lash out at the change-maker rather than examine the nature and value of the change proposed. Change can be adventure, exhilarating, to the open-minded.

A sense of adventure, a willingness to face new challenges, a passionate idealism — these were the feelings that impelled me to accept this job. Like Omar Khayyam, I set out years ago with the visionary zeal "to grasp this sorry scheme of things entire . . . to shatter it to bits and remould it nearer to the heart's desire." The years have not dulled the edge of my zeal.

This school has a fine and capable staff — teachers, secretaries and custodians. My hope was that I would share my vision with them and together we would lead our students into that brave new world that awaits them. My desire as principal will always be to make it possible for dedicated teachers to do what they do best — strive imaginatively and tirelessly to mould the minds and personalities of our students.

Michael Fullan, a renowned educator, emphasizes what every school principal must do: be creative, take risks, challenge the status quo, fight mediocrity in the educational system. These are things worth fighting for, he argues, and it is the duty of school boards to encourage and support principals who are willing to take risks, to challenge the unchallenged, even to make mistakes in the process.

I came into this system with a vision, willing to take risks and venture into the unknown, surmounting the status quo. But reality is the message that seems to be going out to all principals as pure cliché: don't make waves. It is safer to be an administrator than an educator. The tragedy of vision meeting reality.

I heard it too late. But then, even if I had heard it earlier, my educational conscience would not have allowed me to act differently. For I believe that what is best for my students is all that matters. Students. The ultimate purpose. The be-all and end-all of education. Nothing else matters. Nothing.

Balan Menon,

Principal, Lake Superior High School

### Letter to the editor: no more car editorials please

Dear editor,

For the last three weeks you have filled your "editorials" with weekly accounts of your cars. Here's a newsflash for you. Almost every family owns a vehicle. These vehicles come in all shapes, colours and sizes. Do you think that the people of the community purchase The News just to catch up on the continuing saga of the "editor's cars of many colours"?

Newspaper editorials should be informative, educational and even amusing. No offense intended, but I haven't found your editorials, so far, to be any of the above. I feel there are enough community interest items happening in our area to write about besides your car.

This letter is just expressing my opinion, but I have heard several voices on this issue. Also, could you please NOT let us know in the next "editorial" what car you have NOW. Thank you.

Yours truly,

Alison Collins, Schreiber