

Opinion/Letters

Municipalities left out of Constitutional debate



NORTHERN
INSIGHTS

by Larry Sanders



Two years ago, Thunder Bay-Atikokan MP Iain Angus suggested to the Thunder Bay District Municipal League that municipalities reconsider their status under the constitution.

Angus suggested, in the days before the death of the Meech Lake Accord, that the level of government "closest to the people" should have some kind of official recognition other than what they have now, which is as "creatures of the provinces"—that is, strictly controlled by provincial legislation.

The only municipal politician I know of took up that idea was David Hamilton. At the time, he was just starting his two-year term as President of the Thunder Bay District Municipal League.

Hamilton said then that he was going to ask the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) for background legal information, and then call a series of public forums to debate the issue.

Hamilton's term as President of the League is now over, as he handed the gavel over to a new President, Reg Hopkin of Longlac, at last week's annual League meeting.

Under Hamilton's presidency, there were no forums called on the status of municipalities, nor did Hamilton release any background legal information from AMO, if indeed he ever got any.

In the two years since Angus first raised the idea, the Meech Lake Accord has died in Newfoundland and Manitoba, and the Spicer Commission has come and gone.

Constitutional recognition

Five weekends of "Renewal of Canada" conferences have been held, along with uncountable local constitutional forums convened by MP'S and interest groups. At the federal level, the Beaudoin-Dobbie has been released, with its proposed revisions to Ottawa's constitutional package.

Through all of this, the idea of making municipalities constitutional has not been raised. The constitution was not even on the agenda of the otherwise forward-looking League annual meeting last week, which discussed issues such as aboriginal self-government, the future of the forest industry, rural policing, and community-based economic development.

Those discussions were interesting as background, but the municipalities will remain out of their "league" to really do anything about those issues other than passing resolutions, unless their constitutional status is transformed.

I asked Angus and Hamilton about all this after the recent League meeting. Angus told me "The Beaudoin-Dobbie report does not in any way make any reference to municipalities and I don't know that any of the provincial premiers have been pushing the point, nor do I have the sense that the Canadian Federation of Municipalities have even been raising the matter.

I regret that, because I still think that, whether it's this (constitutional) round or another round, that we've got to decide once and for all, are municipalities the offsprings of provinces or do they have their own status in law with their own division of powers, so they know what they're in charge of, and nobody else can superimpose new programs on them without paying for them."

Awkward situation

Angus added that he thought it was now too late to put municipalities' status into this "Canada" round of constitutional reforms. He used words similar to a recent Globe and Mail editorial: "The constitutional wagon is already groaning under the weight of various items for reform."

Hamilton's most important comment about this came just as I was turning off my tape recorder: "Thanks for reminding me." In other words, the subject has been overlooked.

Hamilton did say he will try to get municipal status into *this* round of constitutional reform by raising it in August, at the AMO convention: "I believe AMO, which is the provincial association where representatives of 800 municipalities gather this year in August, is an appropriate place to put our program on the table.

It is something I think we have to review, where especially in Northern Ontario in our isolated communities, decisions for the north can be made in the north. We haven't taken advantage of the opportunities in the constitutional debate, but we have to."

Hamilton admitted putting the issue on the agenda in *this* round of consti-

continued on page 8

Letters to the editor

Restoring Town Hall not feasible

I would like to address some of the concerns the citizens of Schreiber have concerning the Town Hall. The building has deteriorated to the point that it would not be feasible to do anything other than demolish it. The building costs the township \$25,000 a year to maintain and houses only the library. The library can be accommodated in the back of the medical centre, where the ambulance shed used to be. Of course, this would be temporary.

We are planning to build a new medical/dental centre, if the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines approves the funding for the project. When the new medical/dental centre is built, the library would then take over the whole building, making the medical centre the new home of the library.

The Town Hall would be demolished and planted with grass and flower beds to make a mini park downtown until the township could afford to build a new town office, something that is greatly needed.

The recreation centre must be addressed immediately because of the condition of the centre's roofs and the condition of the trailers that were built when the arena was constructed.

I can assure everyone that Schreiber Council is working hard to try and solve these problems. We have had some movement on collecting back taxes, which have been reduced to a total of \$362,000 from \$450,000 in the last three months. I feel they will continue to come down in the near future. And it is not Council's intention to tear down all of the old buildings in Schreiber. If an old building is useful, and it's feasible to keep using it, we will do so.

Sincerely,
Bob Krause,

Reeve, Township of Schreiber

Dance has parent 'disgruntled'

I would like to thank the Ski Club for the terrible job they did on the Youth Dance which was held on March 13. I attended this dance with my three year old child and several friends. It was because of this dance I chose not to participate in any other carnival activities.

There were children there of all ages. Newborn to at least twelve years. The older children were unruly and disrespectful toward the younger children as well as the adults. I was standing with my child and few younger children, when a boy of a least ten years of age came running by elbowing everyone so they would get out of his way (what happened to excuse me please?).

Not paying attention to what he was doing, he just about hit me. I am several months pregnant and he was fortunate enough that I grabbed his elbow just as he was about to connect with my stomach.

I did give him a warning about his behaviour. Had I have not been standing there, the group of children I was watching over would of been hurt. Where were the chaperones of this dance or this boy's parents?

This was only one boy and one incident. Any adult that was there would have observed such behaviour from several children.

I overheard several Ski Club Members commenting on what a huge success this dance was. Yes, there was a huge turn out and a lot of money was probably made, but what about the children that were there to dance and enjoy themselves only to be hurt because of a disorganized dance?

After about an hour of watching the older children literally stampede the dance floor, I decided to take my children out of the zoo. In the entry way, I witnessed three boys with tears in their eyes. One had a cold cloth over his left eye, one had a bleeding nose, and the third had no visible injuries.

Again who was supervising this dance? I found the older kids were not dancing but running and shoving their way across the dance floor with total disrespect for anyone they came in contact with.

What would have happened had there been a fire? The kids were so wound up as it was, a fire would have only made the situation worse.

I also noticed several adults smoking when "No smoking" signs were clearly posted. If adults can't obey the rules why should the kids, right?

My other complaint is this: I did not have a carnival button and was required to pay the two dollar cover charge—which was fine by me. But the people who had already paid two dollars for a button were also required to pay an extra dollar to get in. In my opinion these people should have been admitted free.

One final comment to the Ski Club Committee. In the future may I make these suggestions when planning an event of this nature:

1. Have two separate dances
 - (a) 0 - gr. 2, 5:30-7:00
 - (b) gr. 3 - 5, 7:00-9:00
2. Have these dances on separate nights (if possible)
3. Limit the number of children (for safety reasons)
4. Get a bigger place and
5. Plan a little better

A disgruntled parent from Terrace Bay.
G. Smith
Terrace Bay