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Undercurrents of trouble

The atmosphere at last week's Essex all-candidates' debate was surprisingly polite and restrained. With the Amherstburg police on patrol at the back door of the McGregor Knights of Columbus Hall, and members of the public scrutinizing candidates at the front of the room, forced decorum prevailed.

Beneath the semblance of civility, however, was the undercurrent of a tension that has existed throughout this campaign, especially in the mayoral race. The current bickering, said mayoral candidate Larry Snively early in the evening, is the result

of forced amalgamation.

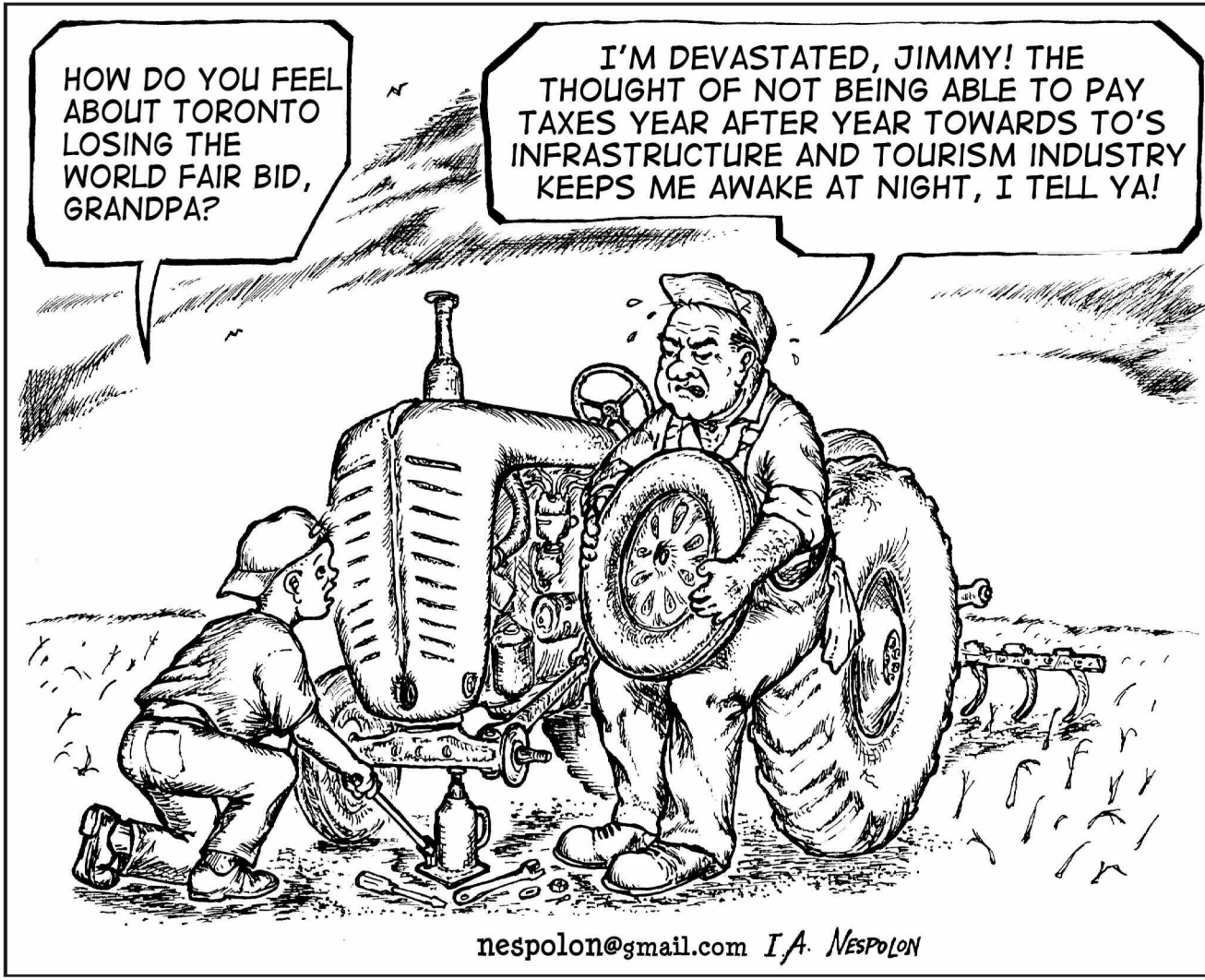
Teamwork, said incumbent mayor Ron McDermott, has been the chief characteristic of the current council.

Who has it right? One candidate implies we're at odds with each other and raises the ugly issue of "north-south" tensions. The other candidate maintains that there's cooperation and progress being made. If your knowledge of Essex politics doesn't stretch back beyond three years, you may be in need of a municipal politics primer. It consists of three points:

- Amalgamation of Essex, Harrow, Colchester North and Colchester South took effect over six years ago.
- Post-amalgamation, there were many difficulties. Assets had to be sold, services converged, taxes aligned and pressing problems solved. It was a difficult time made more difficult by council personalities who were intent on protecting their own turf and preserving the "north-south" divide. Most of them lost their seats in the 2003 election. Some are hoping to return on Nov. 13.
- Talk of the "north-south" issue ended shortly after the current council took office.

The "north-south" issue is not a tangible thing on its own. It's a product of the human imagination. And, unfortunately, as long as people believe it exists, it will never die. The current council had made great strides in obliterating "north-south" animosity. It is sad that we find ourselves, once again, speaking of it as if the last three years of beneficial leadership had never occurred.

If you live in Essex, ask yourself which campaign platform appeals to you most – "Divide and Conquer" or "Cooperate and Progress"? And then vote accordingly. We all have the power in this election to make a difference. Make your voice heard and make your vote count!



History repeats. In the early eighties Alberta had so many people who had emigrated from Ontario, there was a bar near the Palliser Hotel in Calgary where former Ontarians used to meet. Now its happening all over again 25 years later.

Until recently, the losses in Ontario's traditionally strong, manufacturing sector, have been mitigated to some extent by gains in the service sector. That is, if you consider trading high paying industrial jobs for minimum wage positions a good deal. In the last year, Ontario has lost a net of about 21,000 people to other provinces. At the turn of the century, the situation was reversed and other provinces were sending people here.

Alberta's resource industry literally can't find enough people. Historically, high oil and gas prices have made many new ven-



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tures economically possible, for instance at the tar sands.

Here manufacturing is plagued by a high Canadian dollar, the cost of energy (one person's feast is another's famine) and global competition. We all read about troubles at large multinationals, but the spin-off for their suppliers doesn't often make the front pages.

Here in Essex, the list of manufacturing concerns almost begins and ends with Atlas Tube in Harrow. Atlas recently merged with the John Maneely Company, owned by financial

powerhouse The Carlyle Group, to obtain efficiencies of scale and ward off challenges from low-wage jurisdictions like China. Both Maneely and family-owned Atlas make tubing for the construction industry.

In the automotive industry, the Japanese auto industry is still around, but now they and the Big Three are looking over their shoulders at competition from Korea, and more ominously, China. Chinese vehicles will be on display at the North American International Auto Show in January at Cobo Hall.

The solution? Our highly trained workforce, continued labour management cooperation and improving research and development efforts should be enough to turn things around again. The Bank of Canada could help by creating a weaker Canadian dollar. We can't all go to Alberta.



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