

# Comment & Opinions

Thursday, July 31, 1997  
Vol. 109, No. 44

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EDITORIAL

## Government, unions to battle over Bill 136

Is the government of Ontario going too far with Bill 136 — The Public Sector Transition Stability Act?

While many certainly applaud the government's move to curb the power of unions, Mike Harris and company are setting themselves up for a heck of a fight on this issue.

However, judging by what happened at Queen's Park during the OPSEU strike last year, there's certainly no love lost between this government and members of organized labor.

Predictably, union leaders are talking tough. They are promising mass protests and strikes to protest the legislation. Whether this strategy will be successful remains to be seen, but the Days of Action didn't slow Mike Harris and company one step.

More confrontation on this issue will probably only harden the government's resolve. However, the point the government may be missing is that union membership in Ontario crosses a broad spectrum. It runs from seamstresses to steelworkers, teachers to police officers, includes firefighters and even doctors.

The problem here is so typical of the overkill to which this government is prone. It constantly goes after flies with baseball bats.

Just as the previous NDP government's changes to the labor laws went too far in favor of the unions, this latest bill goes too far in restricting the rights of unions.



## Computers should not replace real learning

Every time I hear education bureaucrats ranting about the need for more computers in the classroom, cold shivers creep up my spine, like tiny spiders with icy legs. As many a Luddite has declared, technology can light up a screen, but not a mind.

Before plunging into this murky microchip miasma, educators should be taking a hard look at the so-called benefits of a wired classroom, with pupils wide open.

"We must beware of those who imagine that gadgets alone can produce enlightening, civilizing results; they are putting the technological horse before the moral and intellectual cart," warned Edward Duggan, president of the U.S. Public Broadcasting System, during his recent address at the Couchiching Conference in Geneva Park.

Duggan was also sharply critical of what he called the "foolish utopianism" of computer pushers, and lambasted the information superhighway as nothing more than a "Tower of Babel" that dumbs us down instead of smartening us up.

One of his recommendations was that we "end this obsession with data and information and aspire once again to judgment, intelligence and wisdom."

We should all heed Duggan's words.

Sadly, too many parents sanction this mad rush toward classroom automation. Transforming unsuspecting youth into piddling information serfs and internet junkies seems to be the latest



### Viewpoint

Tarn Elbert

yuppie obsession.

Computer shops are awash with anxious moms and dads, clambering to bring home the latest techno marvels; faster, bigger, smarter — just like they want their kids to be.

My parents used to tell me that eating copious amounts of spinach, like Popeye did, would get the same results. Now we know that these bitter green leaves contain a compound which actually inhibits the body's absorption of nutrients like iron.

Most parents have nothing but good intentions for their offspring.

Those wiring up their kids believe they are giving them a leg up in the ultra-competitive, information-is-king workplace of the future.

Their children, they reason, will have the edge — a head start on a prosperous future.

Logic follows, then, that we should be putting razor-sharp surgical scalpels in the hands of excitable, 12-year-olds, in the hope that they will grow up to be better surgeons. ("Johnny, where's Spot?")

Fact is, computers are becoming as easy to operate as a dimmer switch. The next generation of PCs won't even come with

keyboards — what with voice command and the "smart mouse" — relegating most of the computer "skills" youngsters learn today to the burgeoning circular file, a tragic waste of our precious education dollars.

Moreover, despite the hype we silently endure, most jobs in the 21st century will require but a rudimentary knowledge of computers. We'll still need well-paid skilled workers like electricians, plumbers, mechanics and all manner of service people.

Our kids can't all be computer programmers and the like.

Are we raising a whole generation of computer smart alics with tainted expectations?

Rude awakening, here we come.

Let's not forget that computer geeks like billionaire marketing maverick Bill Gates didn't know a micro chip from a banana chip when he was growing up, and that — already — it takes but a few hours of able instruction to make the average youth computer competent.

Most telling, however, is that hooking children up to information portals today will not prove advantageous in their futures — everyone will have instant access to the same knowledge base.

The qualities that will give your child "an edge" are all of those which cannot be taught by brains-in-a-box, or by teachers consigned to being high-priced baby-sitters in automated classrooms.

As Duggan advises, only by

aspiring "once again to judgment, intelligence and wisdom," can we nurture a generation of critical minds, sparked by compassion, not facts and figures.

This is the real challenge for parents and educators. Computers must never be allowed to rule the classroom.

Lastly, those of us who have been ball-and-chained to computer posts since the Commodore 64 days point with taut middle fingers to the myriad of physical ailments associated with these techno-age Grim Reapers — tense necks and shoulders which no amount of Ben Gay can alleviate, chronic back pain, severe eye strain, carpal tunnel, etc...

Then there's the radiation factor.

I remember when pregnant women were issued protective lead aprons while working with computers.

Despite assurances from manufacturers that nuke levels have been significantly reduced, no amount of radiation exposure is truly safe.

Yet, most people work with their noses inches from their equipment, for hours on end. Cancer, anyone?

Do we want our kids, most of whom have yet to learn that a computer is a tool not a toy (rude awakening #2), whining like spoiled brats about their aching wrists and backs while glowing like lightbulbs long before they hang diplomas on their walls?

That's rude awakening #3.

## STOUFFVILLE TRIBUNE

A Metroland Community Newspaper

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