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EDITORIAL

Strike by teachers would be a mistake

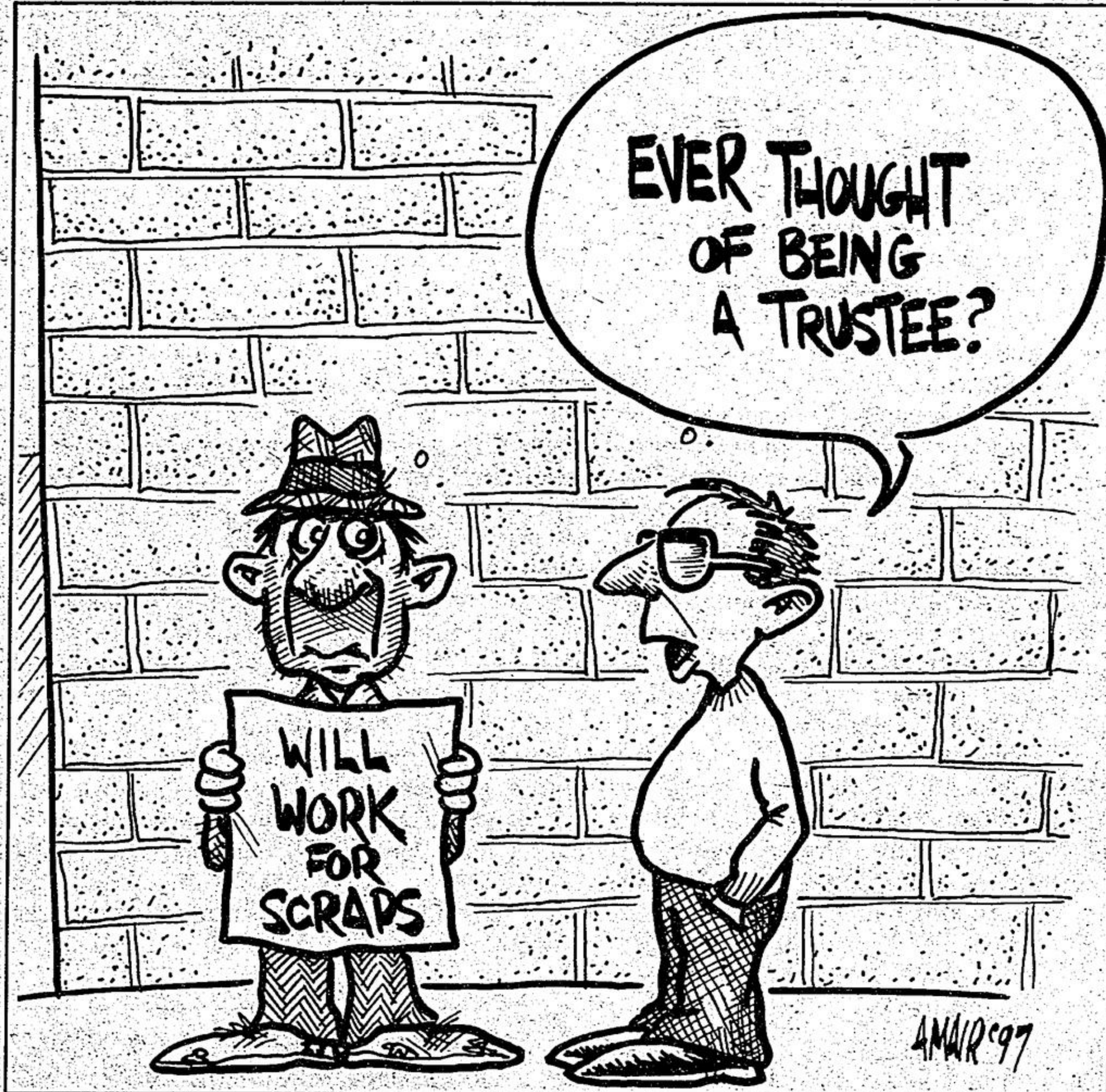
Teachers need to think twice about going on strike this week. An illegal strike by Ontario's 126,000 teachers will not help them in their battle of wits with the provincial government. More likely it will play right into the hands of the government as it tries to force through its controversial education reform package, Bill 160.

If the teachers go out, the public perception will be (rightly or wrongly) that they are the bad guys in this dispute. Many angry parents won't look beyond the strike to the drastic implications of the bill. Parents will feel their children are being held as ransom in the teachers' battle with the province.

This will be especially true since talks were ongoing Monday between the teacher union leaders and newly-appointed Minister of Education Dave Johnson. He was at least sounding conciliatory about teacher preparation time, one of the key issues of Bill 160 which is upsetting teachers.

He seemed prepared to meet teachers and discuss their concerns, while public hearings began this week on the proposed educational reforms inherent in the bill. As long as there is communication between the two sides, teachers should stay in the classrooms.

Granted, teachers are very concerned about some of the extreme measures in Bill 160, in particular the matter of control over education being shifted to the provincial cabinet. That concern is echoed in sympathy and support from many students and their parents. But to go on an illegal strike and throw parents' lives into chaos and confuse and upset innocent students is a bad move. It will only invite an angry backlash from their real supporters.



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Beware: the animals are taking over

*Blessed are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth*
Matthew 5:3

A lot of thoroughly scientific people would subscribe to that Biblical quote. Most of them would add that 'the meek' will turn out to have six legs, a shiny brown carapace and a penchant for living behind stoves and under refrigerators.

Cockroaches: Scientists figure if anything can survive flood, plague, drought and/or nuclear Armageddon, it will be the cockroach.

Maybe so, but a lot of other animal species appear to be making a bid for the planetary driver's seat. In Ireland, authorities are confronting the problem of 'urban horses' — herds of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of semi-wild horses that roam the suburbs of Dublin at will. In Moscow it's 'basement mosquitoes' that are giving residents a massive collective migraine.

Apparently these mosquitoes breed in the watery sub-basements of Moscow's grim and badly-built high-rises, emerging each spring in ravenous clouds.

"They don't hibernate in the winter" says a Russian spokesman, "and unlike normal mosquitoes, they lay eggs without ever having fed on blood...we're witnessing the advent of practically a whole new insect."

And then there's The Fighting Muskrat of the Netherlands.

I am not making this up.

Back in 1906, a Dutch count visiting North America fell in love with that lovable little rodent, the muskrat. On a whim, he bought a half a dozen of them and had them transported back to Europe.

There were a couple or three things the Count obviously didn't know about his new pets. Number one: each female muskrat can produce as many as 50 offspring a year.

Number two: in the Netherlands, the muskrat has no natural enemies.

Number three: next to making little muskrats, muskrats most like digging labyrinthine subterranean tunnels. Dutch officials estimate that a single adult is capable of excavating approximately 13



Basic Black
Arthur Black

wheelbarrows of earth per year.

When the only thing that stands between your country and the North Atlantic, you can understand why the Dutch are a tad nervous about their muskrat population. Last year they

trapped and killed 326,893 critters, without even making a dent in the muskrat population. Last month, officials in The Hague authorized the hiring of another 500 trappers, even though, as one trapper puts it "This is a war we cannot win."

Ah, but that's on the other side of the ocean, right? Nothing to worry about here in Canada. Wrong. The animals are on the move here too.

Have you visited a park lately? Canada Geese have taken over. Ravens are stealing groceries out of the back of pick-ups from Whitehorse to Flin Flon. The biggest and sassiest raccoons I've ever

seen live not in the bush, but in the back alleys of downtown Toronto. You have to watch your step when you go for a walk after sunset by English Bay in downtown Vancouver.

That's when the skunks come out. They practically eat from your hand.

This morning I nearly got mugged by a crow. He was dropping clams on my driveway. Missed me by six inches. Coincidence? Maybe. But I'm digging out my hard hat just in case.

By the way, you know what to do if an amorous pit bull starts humping your leg don't you? Fake an orgasm.

Old homestead full of cranium flaws



Kate's Corner
Kate Gilderdale

An article in the Globe and Mail on the topic of design flaws provided inspiration for this week's column.

Turnstiles positioned to inflict maximum discomfort on the tenderest body part of a non-female person were among examples cited.

I would like to add Type A vacuum bags, which always end up sporting a couple of major-league holes during my futile attempts to achieve the unachievable i.e. lock the collar of bag firmly onto the receptacle designed (I think not) to accommodate it.

This results in the machine's failure to adhere to the basic principle behind the vacuum, causing dust to be blown to all corners of the old homestead, rather than being sucked up neatly into a hole-free bag, as per proven scientific theory.

It's not just objects that have serious design faults, it's people. Take teenage boys. Most, it seems, are programmed to leave the toilet roll — long since divested of its contents — on the dispenser, while decorating the tank with a collection of half-finished rolls.

In our house, the latter provide hours of amusement for our frolicsome felines, Poc and Spasm — it's really quite amaz-

ing how much square footage the shredded residue from just one roll of cottony soft tissue can cover.

Then there is the brain software which impels adults to put the top on the toothpaste after use, deposit dirty laundry in the basket rather than somewhere around it, and put dishes in the empty dishwasher and not in a precariously-stacked heap in the sink.

Such natural impulses, however, seem to be mysteriously missing from craniums of the young and the restless.

This could be because young people have more exciting things to do, e.g. party 'till dawn, pierce portions of their anatomy for posterity and sleep until 5 p.m. on weekends, while adults and other dullards who no longer have a life must content themselves with keeping Canada tidy.

Next we move on to men, who, no matter what goes wrong are always to blame.

Men can spend a weekend with a group of other guys on the golf course and never find out the most basic, vital information. Ask your significant other if his golfing buddy is married, divorced, with or without children, employed or not and you will get a blank stare.

Ask about his handicap and you'll be rewarded with reams of statistics which will mean not one iota to persons such as myself, who wouldn't know a birdie from an eagle and to whom the phrase 'below par' refers to that lingering headache on the morning after the night before.

Last, but not least, there are animal companions — in my case two deranged kitties whose idea of a good time consists of hanging from the top of the dining room curtains, leaping from the floor onto my unprotected back and dissecting a newly-purchased bag of bagels which they have liberated from the top of the fridge.

No matter how annoying the foibles of people and animals, however, perfection is far harder to bear, as Joseph Heller observed in Catch 22: "The Texan turned out to be good-natured, generous and likeable. In three days no one could stand him."

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