

Stouffville Tribune

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EDITORIAL

Children don't deserve teacher strike lunacy

Enough is enough. York Mackenzie MPP Frank Klees is right, it's time to order an end to all strike action in York Region's schools.

Between the rotating strikes, a week-long lockout and working to rule, York public elementary schools have been affected by labour unrest for two months.

York public high school teachers started working to rule on the first day of school.

All York Catholic schools were on strike for the first three weeks of the year.

Last year, all schools were shut down for two weeks during a province-wide teacher protest, and York Catholic schools were out an extra week due to a legal strike.

In fact, York Region parents have had the threat of teacher strikes looming over their heads for much of the past three years.

It has to stop — now. Our children don't deserve a continuation of this lunacy.

Nowhere is the lunacy more evident than the current dispute between the public school board and its elementary teachers.

Consider this. On preparation time — supposedly the key issue in this battle — the two sides are exactly 11 minutes apart. The board is offering 120 minutes of prep time per week now, 160 minutes after Feb. 1, then 140 next year.

The addition of one professional development day next year works out to an average of 149 minutes per week — compared to the 160 demanded by the teachers. It was that 11-minute shortfall that supposedly convinced 83 per cent of the teachers — 2,251 of the 2,688 who voted Monday — to reject the board's final offer.

And it was those 11 minutes that supposedly prompted the board to shut down every school in the region for a week.

Clearly, that 11-minute gap, combined with growing animosity, is just too wide a chasm for the two sides to cross. So Klees has called on his government to solve the dispute for them.

"Immediate action by the legislature is imperative to ensure a stable learning environment for the elementary students..." he said in a letter to Education Minister Dave Johnson. We agree wholeheartedly.

Unfortunately, it appears Johnson does not. In short, Johnson is continuing to argue local boards should sort out their own labour problems.

The school boards insist they can't give the teachers what they want because of changes in provincial funding and provincial rules.

The province has taken control over education funding. The province has taken complete control over average class size.

The province has taken complete control over curriculum, giving boards very little control over what they can and can't teach.

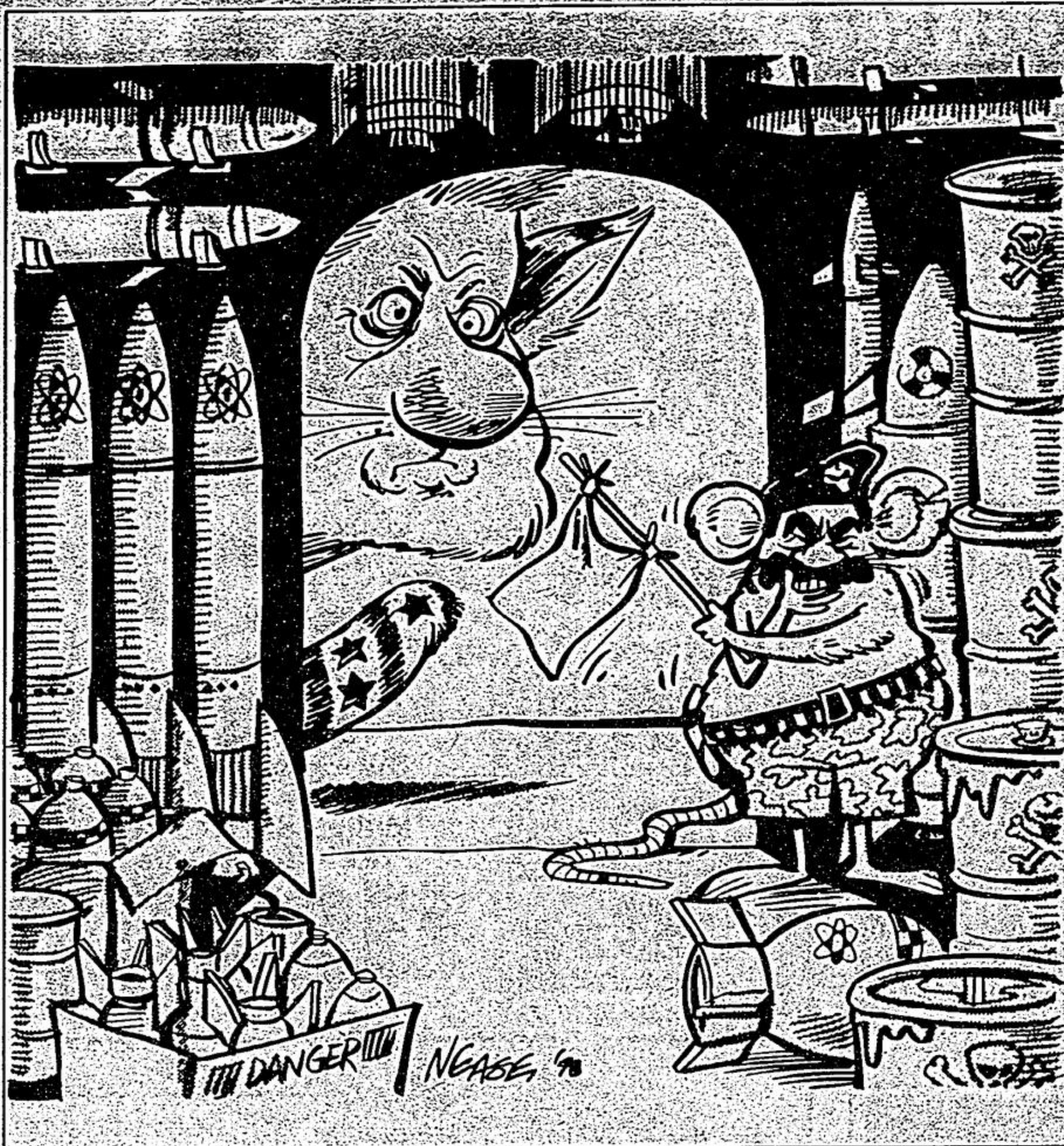
But then the province has left it up to the school boards to negotiate contracts with teacher unions, even though most of the traditional bargaining chips have been taken away. Not surprisingly, it isn't working.

Which is why it's time for the province to take the only logical next step, take complete control over bargaining — preferably with one, province-wide union representing all elementary and high school teachers.

If the province wants to take credit for reforming education, it must be prepared to do the dirty financial work, too.

Otherwise, our children will continue to be stuck in the middle of an increasingly bloody battle that neither side can end — let alone win.

OPINION



Doug Devine

Traffic lights one reason drivers so frustrated

I was out of town for exactly 10 days last month. When I returned, the Region of York had installed three new sets of traffic lights along the route I take to work — a 10-kilometre drive from Aurora to Newmarket.

No, I'm not looking for sympathy. And, no, I'm not suggesting my increasingly frustrating, but comparatively short, commute should be of any real interest to anyone.

My point is simply this: If York's traffic engineers can wreak such havoc on my brief journey to and from the office each day, is it any wonder that roads across the region have become so jammed with frustrated, stressed-out, aggressive, road-raging maniacs?

More importantly, will spending \$1.3 million on more traffic cops and camouflaged cruisers (as Chief Julian Fantino plans to do) or filling our side streets with "traffic-calming" gimmicks (as just about every local council is now doing) really solve anything?

Of course not. Blaming bad drivers for the carnage on our roads is about as narrow-focused as blaming smokers for lung cancer. You can lecture the users again and again, but until you treat the root cause of the problem, the cancer will not disappear.

The source of York Region's growing traffic cancer are the planners, politicians, engineers and developers — the people who happily welcome 30,000 new residents a year, then seem surprised to discover most of those people need to get to work every day.

In the south end of the region, commuters find collector roads riddled with four-way stop signs or other "traffic-calming" devices, regional roads clogged with traffic lights every two blocks, and highways at a standstill.

In the north end, drivers face insufficient east-west collector roads leading to winding, hilly two-lane north-south regional roads where passing is almost impossible.

We need to remove as many traffic lights as possible. If commuters have to drive a little farther or wait a little longer to get out of their subdivisions, at least they know it will be clear sailing once they hit a regional road.

Next, we need to computerize or adjust the rest of the traffic lights so they only work when and how we need them. If a light is only needed two hours in the morning, it should be flashing yellow and red the other 22 hours of the day — not stopping two dozen cars so one car can turn left.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Small town can't support luxury of a pool

I had the privilege last week of accompanying two women to the Jane Snow Aquatic Centre in North York. It is a marvelous facility of an Olympic-sized swimming pool and a therapeutic pool. We spent two hours there, during which time one patron used the pool for 30 minutes and six people used the therapeutic pool.

There were three staff members in the reception area and one supervisor, and two lifeguards on duty.

If the City of North York's population can not support the use of a pool to any great degree, will someone please explain to the taxpayers of this small municipality how we can support such a luxury?

MARION WELLS
STOUFFVILLE

Hospital board resignations should be explained

This is in regards to the mass resignation, on Nov. 6, of three top level executives at Markham Stouffville Hospital and the consequent surprising silence of hospital board.

Coming forward and explaining to the public the reason(s) behind the resignations of the president, vice president and director of planning is a duty, not a privilege.

The hospital is not a privately held or a family owned and operated company whose board can simplistically describe

such resignations as a "confidential matter between the employer and employee."

The ethics committee at the hospital is urged to discuss this matter in its upcoming meeting and recommend to the board whether such action is ethical, is within its terms of reference, and warrants board's resignation due to, what appears to be, lack of leadership.

MOUNIR SAHYOUN
UNIONVILLE

School board chairperson lacks objectivity

Like many parents in York Region, I watched with hope the local cable channel news broadcast Monday night.

I had heard parents were making a strong case for re-opening the schools while negotiations continue — 80 per cent time in school is a lot better than 0 per cent.

It was with disbelief that I heard the board chairperson announce the trustees had unanimously voted to keep the schools closed.

In response to the howls of protest from the waiting parents, Mr. Crothers could be heard to snap, "We're doing what's right for the board."

I was shocked. Mr. Crothers has obviously lost his objectivity.

As a taxpayer in his ward, I ask Mr. Crothers to resign so someone who cares about our children can settle this dispute.

S. SCOTT
MARKHAM

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