

Union wants arbitration

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sent a letter to local politicians earlier this week saying the strike "has been devastating to our businesses and the community at large that depends upon it, putting up yet another hurdle as they try to survive in the current economic downturn".

It's a reminder that it's not just individual riders affected, Mr. Klees said.

That was a point echoed by Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1587 president Ray Doyle, who added workers also want to get back to work and not sacrifice any more salary or the rapport drivers have built with riders.

But he opposes back-to-work legislation.

The local MPPs have created a lot of smoke and no fire, he said, dismissing their efforts as nothing more than an illusion for the benefit of constituents.

In addition to ending the strike, the bill also calls for making YRT an essential service, which would take away the workers' ability to walk out when labour negotiations fail.

Because the legislation would likely result in the parties going to arbitration — just what the union wants, ironically — Mr. Doyle sees it as little more than time-wasting posturing.

"Our position is, let's end this darned thing today, go to binding arbitration and get the buses up and running," he said.

The TTC was deemed an essential service following a request by Toronto council,

but it is the only Ontario transit service with that designation.

"In York Region, in my view, it's more of an essential service," Mr. Shurman said, noting the wide distances YRT covers and the number of correspondence all three MPPs have received from riders outlining their hardships.

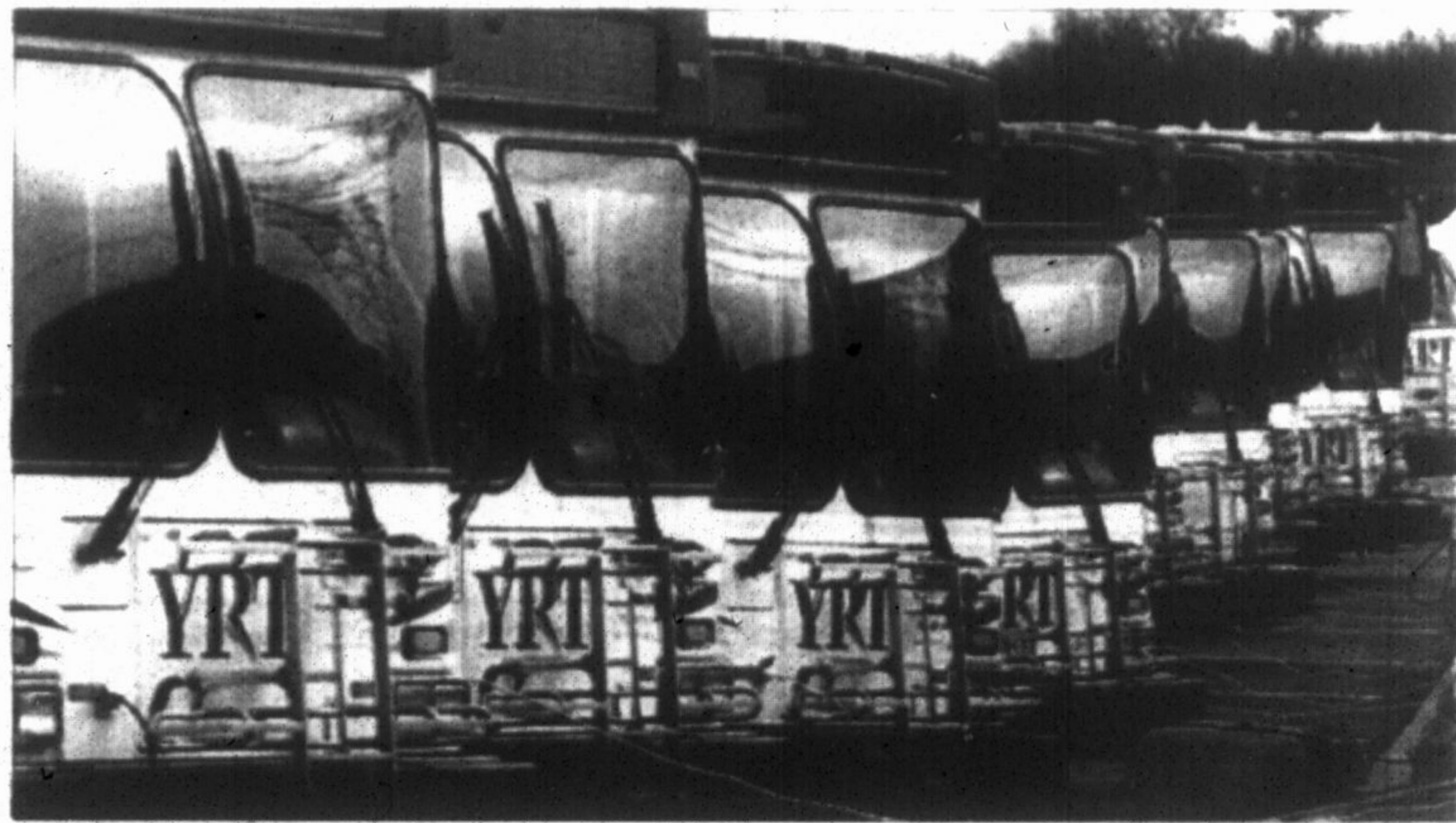
"I think the essential service designation is, in effect, a non-starter," Vaughan Liberal MPP Greg Sorbara said, noting it has only been considered following a request from a municipality.

He said he was sympathetic with the hardships transit riders face and there could be a time when Labour Minister Linda Jeffrey has to get involved, but said he would not support the bill beyond its first reading in the house and that the government's position remained the best solution would be negotiated by the parties.

Mr. Shurman acknowledged it could be "a stretch" to get the bill passed and said they are willing to compromise on the essential service aspect if it means ending the strike, which started Oct. 24.

The two opposition parties have 54 seats in the legislature while the Liberals hold 52 plus the speaker. Ms Jeffrey has already said her party would not table its own back-to-work legislation and it is unlikely the NDP would vote for such a bill, particularly since it has no local MPPs.

More than 500 YRT and Viva workers are striking against First Transit, Miller Transit and Veolia, three private contractors operating transit for York Region.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

If York's PC MPPs get their way, the provincial government will force YRT staff back to work. Go to yorkregion.com for strike updates.

One-month anniversary for transit strike

York Region's transit strike turns one month old today and no one is celebrating.

Regional politicians are bearing the brunt of complaints for perceived inaction, while urging the parties to get back to the table.

The three private contractors who run the affected York Region Transit and Viva routes — Miller Transit, First Transit

and Veolia — say they have made fair offers, only to be met with excessive wage demands from obstinate unions.

Amalgamated Transit Union Locals 1587 and 113 say they will come back to work if the companies agree to binding arbitration.

No talks are scheduled. No end is in sight.

As a result, 44,000 riders are increasingly forced to walk, miss appointments and vent their frustrations on the Internet.

TELL US

► How are you coping with the transit strike? Will you go back to public transit when the strike is over? Let us know. E-mail David Fleischer at dfleischer@yrmg.com

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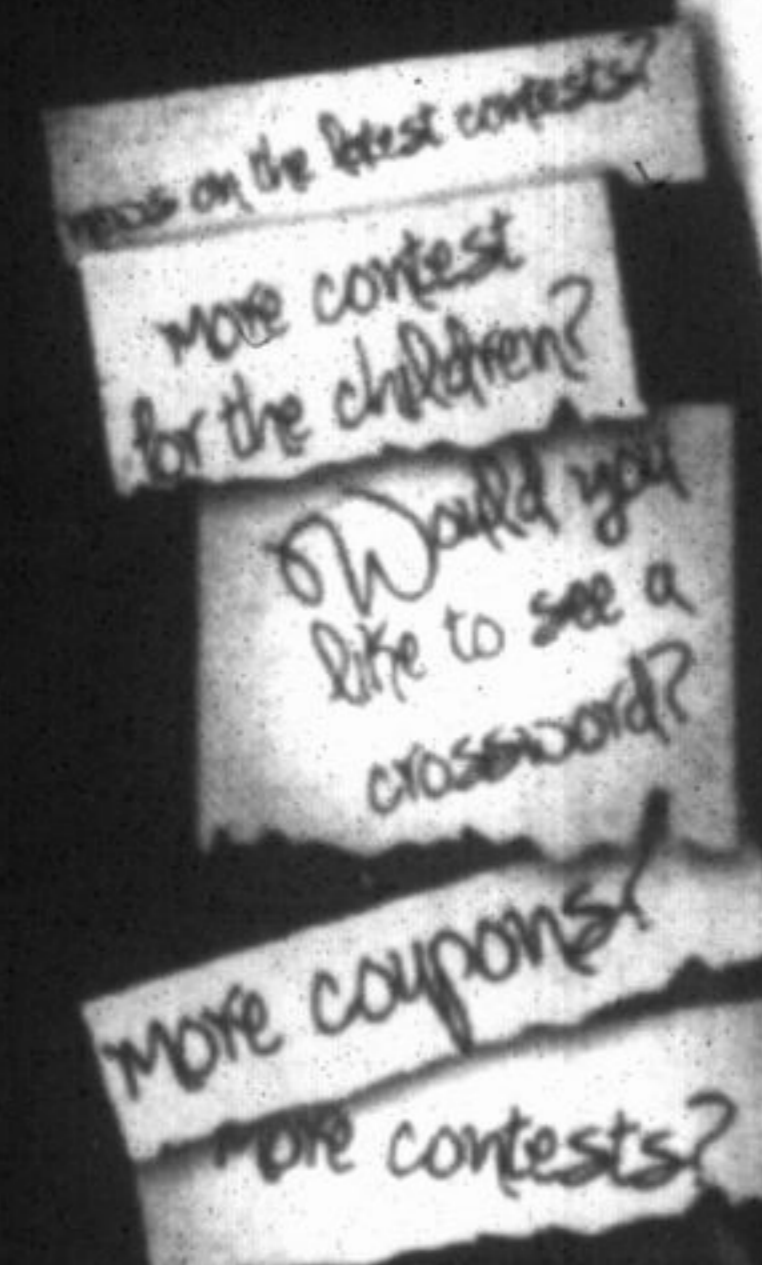
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