

Comment

The Mississauga Times

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 the Etobicoke Advertiser/Guardian, The Mirror Newspapers, The Richmond
 Hill-Thornhill Liberal, the Aurora-Newmarket Banner, the Woodbridge-
 Vaughan News, and The Bolton Enterprise.

Parents must be responsible

It's about time. A strong vote of support must go to Peel Regional Council for its decision to force parents to help pay at least a portion of the \$43 a day charge for keeping their children in juvenile group homes.

Peel taxpayers are being bled white by the cost of keeping a rising number of troubled kids in group homes around the province. They are sent there by the Peel Family Court and in most cases their stay is financed completely by the Peel Region.

What was once a small portion of the region's social services budget has now mushroomed past the \$1 million mark and threatens to continue growing. With 63 local children now under care in various group homes, officials predict that number could grow to 133 by year's end and at today's \$43 a day charge that would mean a whopping \$5,719 bill for each day, or more than \$2 million a year.

Part of rehabilitation, part of

rebuilding the family unit must be the participation of parents in the process and what better place to start than making them at least partially responsible for the financial support of their children.

Not all parents of problem kids are poor. Some are, however, and the plan calls for gearing the parental support level to the families' ability to pay. Undoubtedly there will be many that can afford to pay nothing.

Those who resist efforts to reach a voluntary support figure will be taken to small claims court and sued.

Peel is in a mood to get tough and Regional Chairman Lou Parsons promises that it will use the teeth in the legislation on parents who refuse to take a means test.

The new parent support program will probably fail to reduce the cost of group home care by anything more than a fraction but the principle of parental responsibility for their own children must be re-established.

Delays undermine justice

In the upcoming winter session of the Supreme Court of Canada, the highly-publicized case of Peter Demeter and Paul Smithers will finally be resolved.

Recently a great deal of attention has been focused on the delays involved in bringing cases to trial in the province's lower courts. In Peel, for example, a man charged with a criminal offence who is free on bail can wait a year or more before his case comes to trial. Even people who are held in jail to await trial face unconscionable delays, particularly in view of the legal principle which says they are innocent until proven guilty. The four suspects in the Brampton poker game slaying, for example, will have been held in custody for seven months if their trial goes on in March as scheduled.

One of our most fundamental legal protections is supposed to be the right to appeal the decisions of lower courts. The delays exemplified by both the Demeter and Smithers cases, however, make that protection almost meaningless.

Peter Demeter was charged with the murder of his wife in August, 1973. He was convicted of her murder in December, 1974 and launched an appeal to the Ontario Court of Appeal which was rejected. He must now wait until the end of February for a hearing before the Supreme Court, which will likely delay its decision for several more months. In other words, Peter Demeter will have waited a total of four years to learn his ultimate fate.

Paul Smithers has been more fortunate. He has been free on bail since his conviction on April 8, 1974 for the manslaughter of Barry Cobby. He was arrested at age 16 and will probably not learn the final outcome of his case before he turns 20. Again, four years of waiting without knowing when, or even if, the law will exact the penalty demanded.

If the legal appeal procedure is to have any real meaning as a protection for citizens charged with criminal offences, the system has to be improved — and the sooner the better.



Andras: Poor bookkeeping not lack of controls

The following are excerpts from a speech by treasury board president Robert Andras to the Commons. The speech was in response to the recent auditor-general's report condemning the financial and management controls of the government.

I am also pleased to report, Mr. Speaker, that the proposed legislation I tabled has been drafted in close consultation with the auditor-general, out of the glare of media attention and of political controversy. Accordingly, with the exception of minor points which he may wish to raise at the committee stage, the provisions of Bill C-20 have received the unqualified endorsement of the auditor-general.

It would be difficult to find a more eloquent rebuttal, Mr. Speaker, of the misinformed, misleading and shamelessly partisan views expressed in the past weeks on the Government's record concerning financial administration, in complete disregard of the long series of initiatives detailed in the progress report I tabled in this House.

It is difficult to estimate what the actual losses to taxpayers have been because, in most cases, some recovery of funds is possible and will indeed be attempted. But I have asked my officials to evaluate the total maximum possible loss arising from these improprieties, in the absence of any recovery; and the total amount they have computed is about \$6.6 million, of which only \$84,723 consists of losses incurred through fraud, default or mistake of any person — in effect, what are technically called defalcations.

Now, six and a half million dollars is a considerable sum of money, Mr. Speaker; and the deficiencies noted by the auditor-general which have caused these potential losses will be promptly reviewed and remedied by the treasury board, as they have been in past years. But it must be remembered that the total value of transactions conducted by the government of Canada in fiscal year 1975-76 was over \$129 billion; we collected budgetary revenues of about \$30 billion; we expended about \$34 billion under budgetary appropriations; while our non-budgetary receipts amounted to more than \$32 billion; and our non-budgetary outlays to \$33 billion. Yet, the maximum value of the losses discovered by the auditor-general represents 0.0006 per cent, or one-twenty-thousandth, of all the monies transacted during the fiscal year by all federal departments and agencies.

There is no question that, as the auditor-general has pointed out, some federal practices in financial administration are unacceptable; and the government is determined to eliminate these practices. But it is my contention, Mr. Speaker, that Parliament and the government are very much in control of the public purse and that they exercise this control through time-tested and effective institutions, systems and procedures.

Each month millions of cheques are being issued to and received by Canadians; old age pensions, family allowances, unemployment insurance payments, veteran's pensions, manpower training allowances — more than \$9 billion worth in the current fiscal year, and about 22 per cent of the total federal expenditures.

I can only conclude, Mr. Speaker, that the real problem we are facing is not that Parliament or the government have lost control of the public purse, but that some of our bookkeeping systems and practices are inadequate and that this has understandably given rise to some uncertainty about the efficiency and propriety of government operations. For example, there are about 1,800 financial officers in the public service of Canada; and the treasury board is very much in agreement with the auditor-general that this is not enough. As a result, too many financial management and control operations are entrusted to clerks and administrative officers whose professional qualifications are often insufficient. Many departments and agencies have not yet elevated their chief financial officer to the senior position that he must occupy in their management structure in order to maintain or upgrade standards of financial administration. Others have not yet allocated to financial management and control the resources they require — a situation which, as president of the treasury board, I find totally inexcusable.

Mental pollution must stop

Historians will probably record the second part of this century as the age of the communication revolution.

As a result of it, the average citizen in Canada has daily a tremendous amount of information to read, listen to, write and digest.

Dr. Linus Pauling, the Nobel prize-winning professor, recently has stressed the necessity for simplicity in communication: "We cannot understand complex problems unless we break them down to small simple problem-particles."

Educational authorities and a number of allied research institutions are constantly searching for methods whereby they may help us to speed up the process of communication.

For a long time there have been courses on speed writing. Now a number of courses are offered on speed reading; and believe it or not, many are already hooked by this fashionable "in thing".

But, what exactly is speed reading? It is apparently a method of scanning the written text; a process of separating the essential parts from the non-essentials, and trying

to pick out what is important in a message.

And our books, school books, magazines, reports, and all sorts of written material are filled with these non-essentials.

It is probably high time to start to search for and work out methods that will enable us to write down the important parts of a message and just forget about the rest before we write it down. This method, if found, will become the greatest invention since the typewriter was brought into being, because it will save us time and money at all levels.

Then, we will be able to discard speed reading with its intention of teaching us

how to overlook the rubbish that should not have been written down in the first place.

However, until the 'experts' develop some 'new' methods, there are four 'sure fire' methods for those who want to improve the efficiency and quality of their written communication practice:

- Use the paragraph method. One short paragraph for one thought.

- Consider the use of tabulation instead of lengthy description. It is a method that is more expressive than any verbatim form of communication. Tabulation makes it easy to visualize what the issue

is all about, especially when it is a comparison.

- Apply illustrations wherever possible and practical. Remember the old Chinese proverb: "One picture is worth a thousand words."

- Finally, follow, if you will my grandfather's advice: "Keep it short, stupid!" (KISS for short.)

The news media people, book writers — especially school and instruction book writers — should kick their habitual verbosity.

Publishers and editors should establish incentives

in order to keep the volume of written material to the appropriate minimum.

How about it ladies and gentlemen of the news media? You could easily reduce your paper's volume by 30 per cent. No one would even notice it. Can we get your self-controlled co-operation? Or are you going to continue what is really a form of mental pollution, and bury us all in your paper waste?

ERIC BAUER
 FOR THE COMMON
 SENSE GROUP

'Silly ticket situation getting out of hand'

I am writing to add my 'AMEN' to the letter of Eric Bauer and his Common Sense Group and to find out how to join. It is time more of us took up common cause against the silliness of the 'ticket situation' in this and other communities. It has simply got out of hand.

There was a time, not so long ago, that an ordinary citizen could get through his entire lifetime without running afoul of the law. Not any more. Nowadays you are picked up almost arbitrarily by some youngster intent on impressing his sergeant and, for nothing, subjected to the due process of the law which leaves you resentful and hateful of the whole system and citing your supposed guarantees and freedom from arbitrary arrest all the way back to

the Magna Carta. All to no avail.

The police have us conned into believing that what they are doing is saving us from the dreadful carnage they see on the roads every day. Fact is that the tickets they give out have nothing to do with this carnage. It is my impression that 99 per cent of the tickets are handed out at the one per cent of the signs that do not correspond to the road conditions.

As a case in point let me draw your attention to the 30 mph sign along the highway to the west of Port Credit. At one time this marked the boundary between Toronto Township and Port Credit. The provincial highway (50 mph) ended at this point and the road narrowed and deteriorated because Port Credit couldn't afford to

widen it. At that point was erected (appropriately) a 30 mph sign. However, when Port Credit was absorbed into Mississauga the highway was widened to correspond with the rest of the road to the west. But the sign was left unchanged. Now you had the anomaly of a beautiful wide, smooth unchanging highway with a speed limit dropping suddenly from (at that time) 50 mph to 30 mph.

Since most of us (rightly) drive according to the conditions of the road and not according to the vagaries of the signs we were caught time and time again by police eager to get a quick and easy ticket count.

Now the police have a mechanism whereby they can get traffic signs changed. For example, if the signs are too lenient at

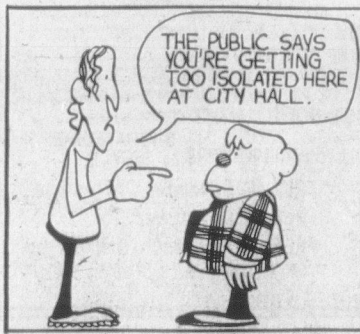
a particular spot so that accidents occur the police, through the police commission, see to it that things are tightened up. And rightly so.

But are they as eager to have the signs changed when they are too rigid for the conditions of the road? The answer, of course, is no. They just simply leave them there as convenient traps where they can get 'their count' without too much trouble.

Is it any wonder that the public is becoming resentful and even hateful at the pickiness of the police? Is it any wonder that they speak of 'the yellow peril' or talk of having 'yellow fever'? And for this situation the police have no one to blame but themselves.

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CITY SLICKERS



PILSWORTH

