



the halter



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FROM THE PRESIDENT

I wish to take this opportunity on behalf of the Head Office to congratulate our HALT Calgary municipal team. Their efforts in opposing the multi-million dollar spending proposal of the Calgary government is the first successful direct action taken by any of our municipal teams. They took a fledgling HALT team with approximately five active members and made HALT a household word in Alberta in only three weeks, gathering a total of 27,000 signatures on their petition along the way, and ending up with over 200 people working on the campaign.

The Calgary story is covered more completely elsewhere in this newsletter. It is sufficient to say that their petition campaign was successful—that HALT has given Calgary taxpayers a chance to save \$234,000,000. Wayne Kollinger and his team are an inspiration to HALT members right across the country.

Well done.

M.A. Little
President

MYERS ESCAPES

Well known financial advisor and HALT supporter, C. Vernon Myers, serving a two year term for tax evasion at Calgary's Bowden Institution, escaped to the United States while on a weekend pass July 29.

Myers' case was a clear example of the abuse of their wide ranging powers by the Department of National Revenue. He had been cleared on the tax evasion charge in court once, and the taxmen, in an unprecedented move, recharged him. Myers meanwhile had returned to his alternate home in Spokane, Washington. In the second trial he was convicted in absentia. Myers refused to attend, arguing that the Crown's procedure was double jeopardy, contrary to all principles of justice.

After his conviction, Myers ultimately returned to serve his time. But he soon realized that the situation was intolerable and escaped to the U.S. Three days later he was taping an interview for the Merv Griffith Show.

Our congratulations to Mr. Myers.

A detailed account of the Myers case will appear in the next Halter.

Calgary taxpayers revolt

HALT's 3-week petition drive astounds city hall

*Reprinted by permission from
Alberta Report, September 7, 1979*

In July it looked like nothing could stop Calgary's proposed \$235 million Civic Centre. Twice-beaten mayoralty candidate Peter Petrasuk and a citizen's group had fought vigorously against the plans. But Mayor Ross Alger argued that the scheme would not only provide much needed office space and a home for the arts, but serve as a focus of civic pride. The council vote wasn't even close; nine alderman and the mayor in favor, three opposed. But what Mayor Alger hadn't counted on was the appearance in Calgary of the kind of taxpayer revolt which brought drastic government cutbacks all over the United States last fall. At week's end it appeared virtually certain that a Calgary chapter of Human Action to Limit Taxes (HALT) had succeeded in a remarkable three-week drive to collect 20,000 signatures of Calgary electors, enough to guarantee a plebiscite on the Civic Centre.

Calgary council had faced a petitioner revolt before, that time over pay raises for mayor and alderman. But council

thwarted the move when city lawyers found the petition improperly worded. HALT's lawyers have therefore been careful of the wording. In fact Mayor Alger has already announced that if HALT gets the 20,000 the plebiscite will be called this fall.

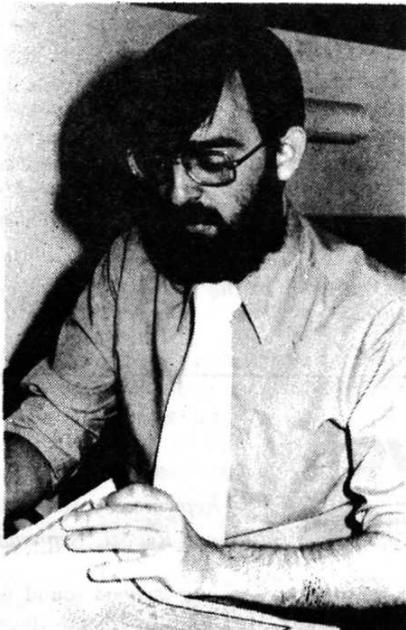
History is on the side of HALT. Since 1912 Calgarians have voted on 64 money bylaws in plebiscites, turning down all but 26. The last one approved was in 1953 for a \$1.3 million nurses' residence and training school. Although plebiscites aren't binding, council would find it hard to go ahead with the centre if the bylaw were defeated particularly the year before a civic election.

The project calls for massive redevelopment of five blocks of downtown Calgary near City Hall. The centre was not an issue in the 1977 election. Mayor Alger initiated it in 1978 as a scheme to provide civic office space replacing city space now being leased. It also

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Calgary Taxpayers Revolt (continued from page 1)

answered the much discussed needs of various cultural groups, which are now rallying in defense of the centre. Council decided in August, 1978, to acquire the land for \$20 million either through negotiation or expropriation. The planning department then produced in three volumes proposals for the site. Council hired Toronto architect Ray Moriyama and local architect Harold Hanen whose plans include a renovated city hall and annex, a million-square-foot office building, a centre for the performing arts occupying a whole block and including a music hall and two theatres, underground parking for 2,200 cars, an underground LRT station, sheltered galleries for pedestrians, and additional land for a hotel or other developments to be leased to private enterprise. The city's finance department said the project could be paid for by borrowing \$215 million, at a cost to the average residential taxpayers of \$11 a year in 1980, \$17 in 1981, \$24 in 1982, \$36 in 1983 and 1984 and \$35 in 1985, after which the amount of taxes paid to support the Civic Centre is expected



HALT'S Kollinger
Banking on a gut feeling

to drop out. This is the package that the mayor sold to council, which approved first reading of the money bylaw in July after expropriation was complete.

With such backing, the scheme in early August appeared unstoppable. But that didn't take into account HALT, a national group which represents the first major spontaneous taxpayer revolt in Canada. It began in Vancouver. Calgary and Edmonton chapters were organized in the spring. HALT's Calgary president is Wayne Kollinger, a 31-year-old draftsman who has been in Calgary only six months and draws his political inspiration from Ayn Rand, espousing an extreme form of free enterprise which would eventually see government get out of the arts, education,

pensions, transportation, postal service, welfare, medicare and business. The HALT manifesto also calls for a reduction in total income tax to 10%, the abolition of search and seizure powers of the income tax department, reduction of property taxes, elimination of sales and other taxes, and balanced budgets for government.

HALT petitioners, however, weren't asking Calgarians to endorse such radical ideas on taxation. Instead they hit a nerve with an attack on the civic centre complex. Mr. Kollinger says HALT had watched the centre debate during June and July. No group appeared ready to lead an opposition. HALT decided to put its small band of supporters to the test with a 20,000 name petition. "We had to have the courage of our convictions," explains Mr. Kollinger. HALT members were promptly castigated in the press for lacking knowledge of the project. What they did know, however, counted. Huge sums were being voted on lavish new facilities. HALT was banking on a gut feeling that Calgarians wouldn't buy such a large outlay. When faced with the inevitable questions on what the group would put up instead, Mr. Kollinger answers with a principle: It isn't right for government, he says, to assume it must grow, nor to assume facilities must be provided without consulting the taxpayers. Why should an arts centre be constructed by tax dollars? Why can't the theatre and musical groups raise their own funds? Why should the mayor assume that the city hall bureaucracy needs room to expand? Why not attempt to hold the line or cutback and give the taxpayers some relief? To a tax-irritated public, this was refreshing talk.

The HALT campaign has been neither well financed, nor professionally organized. Volunteers realized they only had three weeks so they simply started circulating petitions door to door. It started with 50 members. But news coverage prompted a flood of calls to the HALT office, Mr. Kollinger's west downtown apartment, from people volunteering to help circulate the petition. By the end of the second week organizers had 11,000 names and 150 petitioners in the field. The most successful efforts had been noon-hour tables on the Eighth Avenue Mall, which yielded 300 to 500 signatures a day. But the backbone was still the individual door to door petitioner, many of whom had never heard of HALT but spent long hours in the campaign. By last week the effort was snowballing. The Bob's hamburger chain put the petitions up. Other businesses announced the petition would be available. By last week it became clear that a group of rank amateurs had put together a successful civic movement, surprising even themselves.

But at the same time the HALT effort soon set off a counter campaign to save the centre, not only from Mayor Alger, but from the city's arts community and the *Calgary Herald* which called on the province to scrap legislation which forces municipalities to hold plebiscites. The city council took years to proceed with the centre, said the *Herald*. Now its decision is threatened by a self-styled group of "saviors of the taxpayers." The *Herald* argued that voters elect councils to make such decisions. Why should they be over-ruled if any group can stir 20,000 citizens to sign a "simply worded petition on complicated

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HALT table on Calgary's 8th Avenue Mall
About 500 people a day stopped to sign.

issues." But the rival *Albertan*, while supporting the centre in principle, argued that the plebiscite should remain as the citizen's last recourse, a reassurance to citizens that they still can fight city hall. The tabloid also allowed theatre critic John Hofsess to embark on several long articles examining the HALT campaign and the need for the centre. Mr. Hofsess publicly declared he had signed the petition. The centre, he said, was not required.

The result of the plebiscite is far from obvious. Aldermen who favored the project have been remarkably silent. Perhaps they sense a taxpayer backlash which could sweep them out of office in the 1980 elections. So what role council will play during a plebiscite campaign is difficult to predict. Aid. Brian Lee has already served notice he will support the centre 100%. He attacks HALT declaring that construction delays will cost the project dearly. For Mayor Alger an embarrassing defeat might not be enough to destroy his chance for re-election, but it would nevertheless help his chief opponent, Mr. Petrasuk. Ironically, Mr. Alger was elected on a platform of fiscal responsibility and opposition to LRT, and he is now most identified as advocate of the centre's project. This has been a remarkable conversion, observed columnist Roy Farran, former solicitor general and a former Calgary alderman. Here was a business-oriented mayor elected as a nice guy, a civic booster who would bring stability to city hall after the turmoil of the Sykes era. Yet he and council are up to their ears in multi-million dollar

projects. "I know how it happens," said Mr. Farran. "Civic pride is an easy nerve to touch, especially when you don't pay the bills yourself. The lobbyists bring beautiful brochures, display striking models in white plastic complete with toy trees and the aldermen gasp as the honeyed sales pitch unfolds. Now the Calgary council has taken the hook. It plans to spend every penny of the province's debt reduction plan on a magnificent \$230 civic square . . . So they are off and running to build a Brasilia or a new Taj Mahal in Calgary. The public is strangely acquiescent." But in the last conclusion the former solicitor general may prove to have been somewhat premature.

Correction

Last issue we informed you that your average tax burden has increased 36% since 1961. Sorry !

If that were the case, HALT would be in the forefront of those applauding the government for its fiscal restraint. However, we made an error, and, unfortunately for us and you your tax burden has actually increased 336% !! Bad show, what.

Boytinck Gets Company

Yet another Canadian has joined Walter Boytinck in refusing publicly to pay his taxes. Wayne Downey of Olds, Alberta has sent the Department of Infernal Revenue a letter informing them that he will no longer pay taxes because of the immoral purposes on which the money is spent.

BOOKS

- ECONOMICS IN ONE LESSON \$2.00
- MAN vs THE WELFARE STATE (hb.) \$5.00
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TOWARD FEE PUBLIC EDUCATION

by Robert W. Poole, Jr.

Suzi Adams is attending summer school again this year, unlike last year when it was cancelled due to Proposition 13. But this year the California fifth grader's parents are paying \$110 tuition for the five-week program. At first Suzi's father complained about the fee - until her mother pointed out that it worked out to only \$1.10 per hour, about the same as hiring a baby-sitter.

Such discoveries are being made all across California in the second summer after Proposition 13. Throughout the state tuition-charging summer programs are springing up to fill the vacuum left by the demise of the world's largest baby-sitting service-the California public schools' former free-for-all summer program.

Now that taxpayers are putting their foot down, schools and parents are facing the facts that (1) summer programs cost money, (2) only a handful of kids need academic help in the summer, and (3) the vast majority of (middle-class) families can afford a small fee for enrichment/recreational programs to keep the kids busy. Hence the general pattern is for school districts to set up small remedial academic programs (at no fee) along with tuition-based supplemental programs.

There are many different ways of arranging for the latter. The least conventional is leasing space to private, profit-making firms. American Learning Corporation is the first such firm, and it already has contracts to operate summer programs in 25 public elementary schools in 12 districts around the state. ALC's programs cover kindergarten through eighth grade and last four hours a day for five weeks. For each tuition-paying class (of 24 to 32 students) the company offers a free scholarship to a needy student.

So far ALC is the only for-profit contractor, but it is not the only private one. At least three private colleges are operating similar programs using leased public school facilities. The University of La Verne, for instance, is running five-week classes for both elementary and secondary students at 20 schools in 12 districts. Depending on the course, fees range from \$60 to \$110 for elementary and \$35 to \$65 for secondary classes. Other private colleges in the field include Chapman College and Marymount Palos Verdes College. Not to be left out, many of the California State University campuses and public community colleges are offering summer programs for elementary and secondary students-also on a fee basis.

So are a number of community and parent groups. The Pasadena Urban Coalition, for example, has leased space in the city schools for its tuition-based summer program. For every three paying students, the organization provides two half or full scholarships for needy students. Park and recreation departments are also offering "semi-academic" courses-arts and crafts, physical fitness, etc.-on a fee basis.

Last summer no school district dared charge fees itself, due to a provision of the California constitution which says that public school classes may not charge tuition. That led to

all the efforts to lease classrooms to other groups-many of which hired regular public school teachers. But this kind of ploy may no longer be needed, according to state education department chief legal counsel Thomas Griffin. Since the summer programs are supplemental, not mandated by law, schools are simply making their facilities more available to the community for a fee, as they've been doing for years-not simply by letting service clubs rent the auditorium, but also for offering adult education programs and lectures, sometimes charging fees.

Testing the limits of this approach is the South Bay Union High School District in the Los Angeles area. Under authority of the State Community Services Act (under which it has previously offered adult education, math, physical fitness, band, typing, and other supplemental subjects. It's charging \$30 per course for six weeks of two-hour daily course work-and Griffin's office thinks it's legal.

Not so happy about all this are California's teachers' unions. The California Teachers Association has sued the Glendale School District over its contract with the University of La Verne. The CTA contends that such operations do, indeed, violate the state constitution's no-tuition provision-and the district's contract with the union. CTA president, Ed Foglia has given two reasons for the union's concern: discrimination against the poor due to charging fees and lower wages for teachers-those hired by La Verne are getting only \$800/month instead of the \$1,000 the district used to pay. Foglia told the *Los Angeles Times* that "his union would rather see no summer program run out of the public schools than allowing their lease to private outfits."

Despite such reactions, tuition for summer school looks to be an idea whose time has come. And, as such, it represents a welcome breakthrough for the "user-pays" principle. For far too long taxpayers have been fed the idea that public schooling is of such huge benefit to everyone that everyone must be forced to pay-even though some people benefit from it much more than others. It's not too much to hope that once parents get used to paying for summer school, they can start being charged directly for at least a portion of other public school costs.

"What about the poor?" is the cry we are already hearing in California over the summer school fees. The answer to that is to make provisions for scholarships and other aid for the truly poor - not to tax everyone to provide subsidized education for the vast middle class. Establishing the "user pays" principle in education will go a long way towards curbing the heretofore inexorable growth of public school expenditures-and the resulting hemorrhage from taxpayers' wallets.

Robert W. Poole, Jr. is chairman of the Local Government Center, a nonprofit research organization specializing in cost-cutting ideas for local government.

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