

# Council swayed by loudest bullies

Nov. 28, 2000

I am ashamed.

I am ashamed of what I witnessed at the Nov. 15 town meeting on the proposed La Ronge halfway house, as a discussion supposedly aimed at helping council decide whether a property should be re-zoned flipped upside-down and I witnessed an underbelly of fear and bigotry that I found deeply painful to watch.

I am ashamed, too, of what I became in that mob: my cheeks flushed, my anger soaring as I listened and even, I confess, cat-called as my husband and my friends were jeered at and shouted down for even suggesting that such a facility might be of benefit to La Ronge.

However, there is another source of shame, and that is the behaviour of the mayor and council of the Town of La Ronge. I have covered council meetings for two years now, and I have had the opportunity to observe all of our largely re-elected council members at work. I have had a good working relationship with our mayor, Joe Hordyski, who has always struck me as a fair-minded individual. I even voted for him.

But the Joe Hordyski I saw chairing that public meeting was not the man I voted for. This man with the silent gavel, this man who said nothing when people were heckled and jeered at, who let fear and hostility rule

## Comment

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over common decency: surely this was not our mayor!

Instead of affirming each person's right to speak, Mayor Hordyski allowed himself to be swayed by bullies who said that council's credibility and jobs would be at risk if they supported the halfway house. "We elected council — we can kick you out," he heard — and that was the voice he listened to.

Mayor Hordyski and his council didn't bother to go to a public forum back in June, so they didn't hear the votes of support from the 40-plus people at that moderated panel discussion. When this was pointed out at the Nov. 15 meeting, Mayor Hordyski claimed that MACSI was to blame — that council thought that the halfway house was just a "concept", not a likelihood.

Even amidst the chaos, however, the mayor and his council could have redeemed themselves by saying, "We've heard what you've said; now we'll think about it and let you know." Then, they could have gone home, slept on it, prayed about it perhaps, even talked to

a few more people to confirm the community's consensus, and then sat down at their next council meeting with a settled mind to make a decision.

Perhaps the decision would have been the same. That's fine: if council felt that the opposition was too great, they may well have made the right choice. The problem I have is in how they made it.

What Hordyski decided to do was to stand up and say that he and council would take a short recess. And did he use this recess as a way to allow the crowd to calm down? No!

In the middle of this heated, confrontational meeting, he and his councillors took five minutes in private to make what will likely be one of the most defining decisions of their term.

And then, when he and council returned and they were challenged by less vocal members of the audience, did he forthrightly announce what his council had chosen? No, even here, Mayor Hordyski bent like a willow in the wind. He was challenged to allow more voices to speak — so he did.

So did he then call another recess, to allow for discussion of this new "evidence"? Nope. He and council had already "passed sentence", and there was no going back. Talk about a kangaroo court!

I am deeply ashamed.