

OPINION

Breathing a sigh of relief

It would be remiss indeed to let the occasion of the no-dump deal between Halton Hills and United Aggregates Limited (UAL) pass without comment. It is probably the best news we've had both fiscally and environmentally in many, many moons.

The deal was announced by an obviously elated Mayor Marilyn Serjeantson at a press conference last week following a week of educated rumors about the possibility. Four parties were involved including the Town, Halton Region and their protagonists, United Aggregates and Reclamation Systems Incorporated (RSI).

The mayor revealed that in return for RSI dropping plans for a dump in the mined-out section of the Acton quarry and preventing anyone else from ever developing one, the Town will not try to recoup any of the large amounts of money spent fighting the proposal. The deal also encompassed an agreement that the Town will not object to a proposed amendment to the Niagara Escarpment Act exempting UAL from the need for a development permit to quarry on the south side of 22 Sideroad (Regional Road 43).

A master plan land use study will also be prepared with UAL funds for an appropriate use for the mined-out quarry, which the Town can purchase for a nominal fee.

It would be difficult not to feel a sense of satisfaction over the deal after a decade of wrangling and legal fees, even though it must still be approved by the Consolidated Hearing Board, which has been dealing with the RSI proposal. The other parties in that hearing, POWER, the Niagara Escarpment Commission and the Ministry of Environment and Energy are not bound by the deal but the Town's legal counsel has said it is unlikely the hearing would continue.

There may be some other facets of the deal not yet revealed regarding UAL taking over the Third Line and 22 Sideroad in exchange for giving the Town and Region \$50 million in aggregate to be mined from along these road allowances. However, even in its presently known form, it makes sense for the Town and Region to make a deal with UAL and RSI because it began to look like political forces were at work trying to undo previous controls on Escarpment development.

According to UAL's executive vice-president and CEO Bill Burkart, who brokered the deal, RSI initially did not want to drop plans for landfill in the Acton quarry. He indicated that UAL, which is 50 per cent owned by St. Mary's Cement, decided their interest lies in the quarry business, not landfill, and the cement company also owns 50 per cent of RSI. Untangle that one if you can.

There's more. The other 50 per cent of RSI is owned by Armbro, whose political clout is well known.

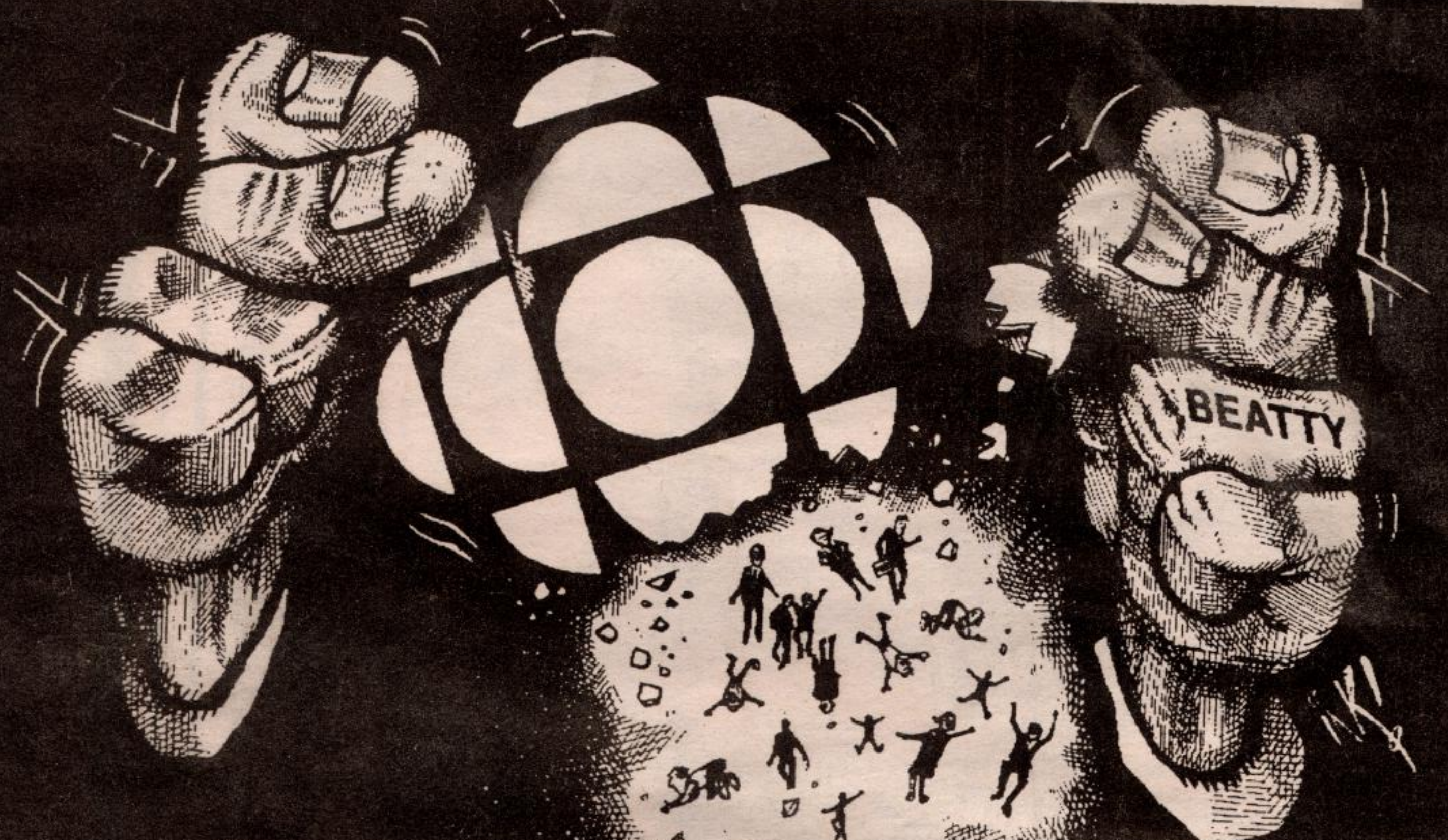
Mr. Burkart, in a public relations statement aimed at our unhappiness with company policy, said the intention of striking a deal was to turn the attitude of the company around and do something they could be proud of and support.

Naturally, we rejoice that finally RSI has given up plans for their big quarry dump but we may well ask why in Hades it took so long. We suspect it may have been prompted by events of the last few weeks, chief of which has been Rita Landry's court action alleging UAL was mining south of 22 Sideroad without a permit. Extensive work has already been done there and even a tie-up of a few months could result in meaningful losses, even though political allies were marshaling forces to amend the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act. It would allow companies with permits issued before 1975 to quarry almost indiscriminately with no further permits.

Although Halton Hills has agreed not to try and recover the bundle of cash spent fighting the RSI proposal, as the mayor states the new deal is a "win-win" situation. Garbage is out, jobs are saved and it seems UAL has adopted a new attitude towards the feelings of townspeople. The rub is that the Town had to spend so much taxpayers' money opposing a project that clearly desecrated the Escarpment and posed a potential danger to our water aquifers.

We are pleased that UAL has also recognized the importance of rehabilitating the mined out quarry. Those who live in or near the quarry site are entitled to every consideration, and perhaps compensation, for years of anxiety concerning their homes. It has been cruel and unusual punishment simply because they live next to the aggregate giant.

Coming soon...From the Network that gave you the "Road to Avonlea"...



The sequel... The "Road to U.I.C."

Your LETTERS

Councillor adds to Towntrak debate

To the Editor,
As Chairman of the Town of Halton Hills Audit Committee, I am writing in response to the letter which you published on Aug. 7, from Mr. Bill Hyde. In his letter, Mr. Hyde responded to an article which was recently published in *The Georgetown Gemini* concerning statistical information compiled by Towntrak, a firm with which Mr. Hyde is associated. At this time, I wish to offer some additional information.

First, I wish to point out that Ms. Nancy Bardecki, referred to by Mr. Hyde as the Finance Director, is a senior staff member with the Provincial Ministry of Municipal Affairs, and not an employee of the Town of Halton Hills. In taking exception to her comments, Mr. Hyde has left the impression that her comments were made to defend the Town of Halton Hills, in particular. This is clearly not the case.

Also, I wish to provide some clarification regarding Mr. Hyde's statement that the Town of Halton Hills increased Town staff salaries by 7.8 per cent per annum for the years 1988 to 1993, these increases did not result solely from pay increases being given to staff. During this

period, the number of full-time and part-time staff increased substantially to meet the increased demands resulting from a growing population. As well, the provincially legislated Pay Equity program was implemented in Halton Hills resulting in the need to increase wages for some staff by substantial sums, to achieve equity both within this municipality and among the municipalities in the area. Finally, changes in some employee benefits, most notably the introduction of the Employer Health Tax, increased the total annual salary and benefit cost for the municipality.

Finally, I agree with Mr. Hyde's statement that benchmarking and performance are important tools which should be used to measure efficiency and effectiveness in the municipal sector. In fact, it should be noted that the provincial government also agrees with Mr. Hyde, as it has included language within the new Municipal Savings and Restructuring Act. While the format of this required information has not yet been provided, it is expected that the results will be readily comparable among municipalities.

In conclusion, I can assure Mr. Hyde that the Town is always interested in finding ways to operate more efficiently and effectively. Measuring our performance against that of other similar municipalities will certainly help us to identify ways in which our efficiency and effectiveness can be improved even more.

Counc. Moya Johnson
Ward Three

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