

Opinion

Region garbage problem just won't go away

The garbage problem just won't go away.

It's this ever-present problem that Halton Regional council faced for the umpteenth time head on last Wednesday and out of the debate came three options. The first - and the one council finally adopted - was to press on in its attempts to find alternatives to landfilling garbage.

The second was to put the issue aside for a while and only support the Region's existing re-use, reduction and recycling projects.

Burlington Mayor Roly Bird advocated this option saying he was too tired of the garbage issue to consider ideas. "I need a break," the mayor told coun-

cillors. He suggested council not consider new initiatives until at least the new year.

The third option was to defer the adoption of any new proposals until the province has specified its environmental plan.

It's this option I think Regional council should have adopted.

The adopted waste management system calls for six internationally-based waste management firms to submit open-ended proposals to the Region. That means the submissions can be anything as long as they ensure certain defined material does not end up in a dump. This is fine and dandy except the real possibility exists the



Ben's Banter
By
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proposals will not reflect the province's policy on the waste issue.

The only clear point the province's Minister of Environment, Ruth Grier, made in an otherwise

vague policy announcement last week was the province is ultimately responsible for how municipalities deal with garbage. Under the previous government, municipalities had final say over garbage.

It makes no sense for the Region to start considering new waste management systems until it has an idea of what it is allowed to consider. To do so is a waste of time, not only for the Region but also for the companies making the submissions. I'd find it hard to believe the firms don't expect the Region to give serious consideration to their ideas. Under the worst possible scenario the Region could end up alienating

the very people they may need in the future to help it implement the eventual specifics of the province waste management policy.

The Region was correct in not following Mayor Bird's suggestion that the waste issue be put on the shelf for a while. Halton has made definite strides in its recycling programs but there is no time to take a break.

Provincial and municipal officials still say the greater Toronto area is facing a garbage crisis. When confronted with a crisis situation, action instead of procrastination should be the operative word. At the same time, however, the Region should not act blindly!

Free trade with Mexico has many fatal flaws

By MAUDE BARLOW

Get ready. Free trade, the sequel, is here. The United States and Mexico are about to embark on a free trade agreement that will forge the largest trading block the world has ever known. Depending on American corporate capital and technology, Canadian resources, and the abundant, cheap labour of Mexico and Central America, North American free trade is an attempt to offset the deep decline in American productivity and the poor competitive showing of the United States in comparison with the emerging economies of Europe and Japan. Canadian boosters are cheering from the sidelines as usual, content to wait and hope to be invited to the table (knowing full well that the price of admission is re-opening the Canada-U.S. deal to give over any remaining protections we retained over intellectual property, culture and subsidies), parroting their American corporate elders who sanctimoniously cloak their interest in Mexico in the promise that free trade will bring it into the North American economic orbit, and with it, badly needed jobs and eventual prosperity.

Herein, however, lies the fatal flaw in this plan. For unlike the European Community, which has drawn up an advanced social charter, the United States did not negotiate any standards to protect social programs, wages, working conditions or environmental safeguards in the agreement with Canada and is not preparing to include them in the Mexican deal either. Without

protections built right into these agreements, standards are being pulled down to the lowest common denominator, allowing the transnational corporations to play countries and their workforces off against each other. Already, workers in Canada are being warned that if they don't pull their wages and other demands down, workers in Mexico will be only too glad to take their jobs. However, nothing Canadian workers can do is likely to save our battered manufacturing sector which is moving en masse to the low wage States in the U.S. or, more recently, to Mexico. Even a cursory examination of the current situation in Mexico explains why.

Two weeks ago, a delegation of Canadians, of which I was one, travelled to Mexico to see for ourselves just how the corporations were operating, and what effect free trade would have on the population of the country. We met with human rights leaders who told us about widespread fraud in the Mexican elections of 1988, and repeated human rights violations by the current Salinas government against its political opponents. We heard about the corporate restructuring of Mexico's agricultural sector, where former farmers are now just employees on foreign owned corporate farms producing for export to the U.S., and no longer able to feed themselves.

In fact, the more Mexico shifts to an exporting nation, the more underdeveloped it is becoming as the transnationals control de-

mand, supply and prices. We learned that seventeen million Mexicans live in extreme poverty, and that over sixty per cent earn less than the minimum wage. We listened in shocked silence to tales of the environmental devastation of Mexico; that the country has lost half its forested areas, and three-quarters of its rainforests in just forty years; and there is not a body of water unpolluted, some to the point of exhaustion.

But it is the images I saw in Tijuana that will stay with me for the rest of my life, and will remain for me the embodiment of unfettered, uncontrolled corporate free trade. For all along the Mexican border, hundreds of component assembly plants, called "Maquiladoras" are being built by Fortune 500 companies to take advantage of a desperate people. Although the legal working age is eighteen, we saw factories full of teenage girls, some as young as fourteen, working at eye-damaging, numbingly repetitive work for \$3.25 a day, a wage well below what is required for even a minimal standard of living. Many corporations send their dangerous work here, such as the manufacturing of pesticides, fungicides, herbicides, and work involving close contact with dangerous chemicals, because the standards are lax or non-existent. In one plant, we all experienced head-aches and nausea from just spending an hour on the assembly line, and saw young girls working beside open vats of toxic waste with no protective face covering.

No union organizing is tolerated, and if these employees aren't happy, or they fall behind in quotas, or they become ill or pregnant, there are one million new job seekers every year in Mexico ready to take their places.

The argument that these jobs will lead to Mexican prosperity is a lie. These companies give nothing back to the country or its people. Real wages have fallen every year for eight years. No, maquiladora profits go back into the communities for sewage treatment, education, health care or toxic waste disposal. We saw state of the art, marble-tiled, air conditioned, landscaped plants sitting in the center of barrios, as bad as third world slums anywhere - no electricity, running water or sewage disposal, and where drinking water is held in discarded toxic chemical drums brought in from the U.S., West Germany and Japan. We took pictures of a lagoon of black, bubbling toxic waste created from direct dumping by a group of corporations in an industrial park, and followed it where it met up with untreated raw sewage, and ran into what was now a small river, past squatters camps, where children covered in sores sat by its bank drinking Pepsi Cola out of baby bottles, before finally emptying into the Tijuana River.

The companies are here for one reason and one reason only - there is no where else on earth where they can make the kind of profits they are earning here, and be required to give nothing back

to the country or its people. The Mexican government is being pressured to amend its constitution to allow these companies to own the land they now lease, which will give them even greater control over the economic future of the country. Corporate taxes have been dropping dramatically, and even the Mexican wealthy are transferring their money to safer pastures. They have invested more than \$50 billion out of Mexico in the last decade alone. North American free trade is a corporate bill of rights and is not at all concerned with the needs of the peoples of the countries involved.

Perhaps, for me, no image was stronger than the nightly ritual of thousands of young Mexicans trying to escape to the United States of America across a deep gully, over a high fence, under the glare of football stadium lights, while dodging helicopters and police vans. To get there, they have to traverse a river of toxic sewage, and there are entrepreneurs who walk this wasteland every night, selling plastic bags to would-be escapees to protect their feet from this poison. I asked one woman, who was homeless and who carried her two small babies in her arms why she wasn't staying to work in a maquiladora, and she laughed at me. I felt it was the first laugh she had had in a long time.

Maude Barlow is the Chairperson of the Council of Canadians, and the author of a recent book *Parcel of Rogues: How Free Trade is Failing Canada*.

Mulroney protected by cumbersome review system

OTTAWA - We'll just have to take Prime Minister Brian Mulroney at his word - that he came home from Europe with a flu bug and had to spend a day in bed.

But it wouldn't come as a shock to discover he was actually beside the bed, on his knees, giving thanks that the Canadian Tory party has never adopted the British system of replacing leaders. What a frightening prospect that would be for our unpopular prime minister.

When he thinks about the quick, almost painless - to the party - political execution of Margaret Thatcher, it must send shivers down Mr. Mulroney's spine. The British Tories decided that Maggie must go after her popularity fell to a dismal 28 per cent in the opinion polls.

At last report, Mr. Mulroney was supported by only 14 per cent of Canadians, a drop of one point from the previous month. Where it will stop, nobody knows.

Fortunately for our 51-year-old prime minister, he enjoys the protection of a very cumbersome leadership review system. And he can also take comfort from the

fact there is no obvious heir apparent. In fact, there isn't anyone who even seems interested in belling the cat on behalf of someone else.

Mounting a campaign against a serving party leader in Canada can be, as Mr. Mulroney knows better than most, a very messy business. He became one of the few to do it successfully when he pried the Tory leadership away from Joe Clark in 1983.

TOTALLY DIFFERENT

Even in this success, the prime minister required a bit of help from his predecessor. It was Mr. Clark's decision to call a leadership convention, after he was supported by two-thirds of delegates at a national convention. He could have just as easily declared that to be a resounding vote of confidence and carried on.

No doubt, Mr. Clark expected to win again, but that's another story.

Under the Conservative constitution, members of the party are given an opportunity to pass judgement on the leader only at the first national convention following an electoral defeat. At any other time, unless the leader



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voluntarily resigns, the replacement process usually involves a form of internecine warfare.

Actually, up until 1966 when John Diefenbaker was beginning to wear out his welcome as Tory leader, there wasn't any provision for reviewing leadership, even after an electoral defeat. Little wonder the Tories spilled so much blood in public.

In Britain, on the other hand, the matter can be decided by caucus, as was the case with Mrs. Thatcher. All it took was a

challenge by one MP - in this case, Michael Heseltine - and presto, all 372 Tory MPs became voting delegates at a leadership convention. They didn't even have to move their chairs.

Anyone can enter the race, as did John Major and Douglas Hurd, and the whole business is over in days. Not even time for first-class hatreds to develop.

In Canada, it's often never done. Even now, there are those in caucus who are Clark loyalists, still resenting Mr. Mulroney's arrival. And there are Mulroney loyalists who still worry about a Clark comeback.

If you dig deeply enough you can probably find an MP who still worries about a Diefenbaker resurrection.

NO HEIR

The review process must be of great comfort to someone like Brian Mulroney. He knows full well that, despite being the most unpopular prime minister since polling was invented, his detractors cannot mount an offensive against him without dealing a near mortal blow to party unity.

It's in no one's interest to do that - particularly when it's

already in dismal shape.

Things would be somewhat different if a perceived savior were on the horizon, someone with a national following who could save not only the party, but the country. Such potential candidates are few and far between these days.

One would be hard pressed to name one possible successor who could convince Canadians that he or she would gain ground in English Canada while also holding onto Quebec seats. And besides, this is no time to dump a prime minister from Quebec.

It would be different if the Tories had the British system. If, say, a challenge were mounted immediately after publication of another disastrous opinion poll, at a time when Joe Clark or Barbara McDougall or Kim Campbell was looking particularly good, it's difficult to predict what might happen in a sudden run-off.

There could even be one every month. I suspect that Mr. Mulroney, astute politician that he is, paused to give prayerful thanks for the Canadian system, even if he really did have the flu.